

The Chiastic Word

Core Principles

Luis Alberto Castro

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PREFACE [↵]

This companion book to *The Chiastic Word New Testament* reflects my understanding of the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it developed during its formative first fifty years.

As I noted in the introduction to *The Chiastic Word*, I deeply affirm the *28 Fundamental Principles* (1889) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as they were expressed in its early years, up to the [1914 SDA Yearbook](#). Yet, over time, much of this original theology has not carried forward, and the church's present teachings differ in significant ways from those early foundations. This shift has been openly acknowledged by the current church leadership, as seen in the following statement:

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's fundamental beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2 which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.”—George Knight, *Ministry Magazine*, October 1993.

In the article “[Apostate Adventism](#),” I outline the major differences between historic and contemporary Adventism. Historic Adventism stands not only in contrast to the beliefs of the present-day SDA Church—as summarized in its [28 Fundamental Beliefs \(2020\)](#)—but also in opposition to the doctrines of nearly every other orthodox Christian denomination that embraces teachings rooted in the Catholic Church (see “[Teachings of the Antichrist](#)”).

Many orthodox Christian denominations have labeled Adventists as cultic—primarily due to the claim that Ellen G. White (EGW) was a prophet and because of certain distinctive doctrines regarded as aberrant. It should be noted, however, that the pioneers of Adventism never made acceptance of EGW's prophetic gift a test of fellowship. Only starting in the 1950s, some 40 years after her death, did this expectation become a requirement. As for the so-called aberrant doctrines of the church, the ultimate standard is, of course, the Bible. “How readest thou?” (Luke 10:26 KJV). If one can provide sound, Bible-based support for one's beliefs, then what grounds remain for rejection? Truth must be judged not by church creed or tradition but by the Bible—and the Bible alone.

Here lies the challenge for you, the reader: to prayerfully consider my theological perspective, which I present without apology in the following pages.

THE AUTHOR.

McMinnville, Tennessee, 2026.

INTRODUCTION [¶]

The distinctive teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as developed during its first fifty years, rest upon three core principles:

- The nature of God
- The nature of Christ
- The sanctuary

These are not peripheral doctrines, but the structural pillars upon which the broader theological framework depends. Ellen G. White underscored their importance in her warning against the introduction of erroneous teachings:

[20LtMs, Ms 62, 1905, par. 14](#): Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the **pillars of our faith** concerning the **sanctuary**, or concerning the **personality of God** or **of Christ**, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift, without an anchor.

My approach to this book was guided by this counsel: to revisit the foundational truths of the early Adventist Church, as derived from these three core principles, and to examine their implications carefully.

Closely related to the teachings concerning the nature—or “personality”—of God and of Christ (as addressed in [God of the Bible](#) and [Christology](#)) is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit (explored in [Spirit as Essence](#)). In a similar way, the sanctuary teaching provides the theological basis for the doctrines of the [Atonement](#) and the [Plan of Salvation](#), which express its practical outworking. These themes, in turn, find experiential expression in [Steps to Christ](#), where the life of faith is presented in its personal and devotional dimensions.

The chapter on [God-centric Doctrines](#) serves as a synthesis of these themes, where I emphasize that all true doctrine must be centered on God as revealed in Scripture. The call is for a return to a theology that prioritizes God’s character, His relational nature, and His plan of salvation, rather than philosophical constructs or ecclesiastical traditions.

Pagan Beliefs. With the transition to this section, the focus of the book shifts from constructive theology to critical examination. In [Teachings of the Antichrist](#), I argue that many widely accepted Christian doctrines have their origins in Roman Catholic dogma. This dogma is challenged as unbiblical, rooted in tradition, and often lacking rational support. Central among these is the doctrine of the Trinity, which I examine in [Trinity doctrine examined](#).

This line of thought continues in [*Pagan Worship*](#), where I trace the influence of ancient religious practices on Christian worship and doctrine. Elements such as rituals, the priesthood, and theological concepts are examined for their potential pagan origins. The argument is that over time, Christianity absorbed and adapted these elements, leading to a gradual departure from its biblical roots.

In [*Apostate Adventism*](#), I apply this same line of examination to the Seventh-day Adventist Church itself. Having been raised as an Adventist, I felt it necessary to carefully evaluate whether the church has remained consistent with its early theological foundations. Particular attention is given to the adoption of the doctrine of the Trinity and other doctrinal developments that I have come to understand as departures from earlier positions. What I present is both a historical and theological journey—one that, in my view, reflects a broader pattern of drift.

The final chapter in this section, [*Daughters of Babylon*](#), extends the discussion to the broader Christian world. Drawing upon the biblical imagery of Babylon as a symbol of religious corruption, I examine the extent to which various denominations may have inherited and perpetuated teachings shaped more by tradition than by Scripture.

Resources. The *Resources* section serves as a theological appendix designed to deepen, clarify, and support the arguments presented in the main body of the work. Here, I provide focused studies on key doctrinal, historical, linguistic, and practical issues.

These chapters are intended not only to reinforce the conclusions already presented, but also to equip the reader with the tools necessary for further study. It has been important to me that the positions advanced in this book be open to careful examination. Accordingly, this section seeks to make explicit the assumptions, methods, and lines of reasoning that underlie the broader argument.

In doing so, it reinforces the central themes of the work: the primacy of Scripture, the need to evaluate all authority in its light, and the call to recover the theological clarity that characterized early Christianity and early Adventism.

Scripture Notes. The *Scripture Notes* section of the book functions as the exegetical backbone of the entire work, where I provide detailed, verse-by-verse analysis that both supports and tests the theological claims I have developed in the preceding chapters. While in the main body of the book I present a systematic argument—moving from foundational doctrines (God, Christ, salvation) to critiques of perceived doctrinal deviations (e.g., Trinitarianism, apostate developments)—the *Scripture Notes* section anchors those arguments directly in the biblical text.

The correspondence between *Scripture Notes* and the rest of the book is therefore both structural and methodological. Structurally, the earlier doctrinal and polemical sections present conclusions; the *Scripture Notes* provide the evidence. Methodologically, the book argues that theology must arise from careful exegesis rather than inherited dogma, and the *Scripture Notes* embody that principle in practice. They transform abstract theological claims into concrete biblical analysis, inviting the reader to verify, question, and engage the arguments at the textual level.

In essence, the *Scripture Notes* section is not an appendix but a necessary complement to the book's thesis. It bridges doctrine and Scripture, ensuring that the work is not merely a theological proposal but a sustained attempt to demonstrate that my conclusions emerge from the biblical text itself.

Study Guides. The study guides at the end of the book are not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive in any way, but rather to serve as a starting point for study groups wishing to work through the book together. I have provided study guides for the first four articles, which I consider to be the most important and foundational to the remainder of the book. The final study guide, "Apostate Adventism," was included because it represents my own true beginning and primary motivation for writing this book.

Conclusion. From beginning to end, *The Chiastic Word: Core Principles* represents a journey—both theological and personal. It reflects my desire to understand God more clearly, to return to Scripture as the highest authority, and to set aside anything that obscures biblical truth.

This is not just an academic exercise. It is, at its heart, a spiritual pursuit. My hope is that as you move through these pages, you will be encouraged to reexamine your own beliefs, to study Scripture more deeply, and to seek a closer, more genuine relationship with God.

In the end, I am convinced of this: truth is not found in philosophy or tradition, but in the word of God alone.

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AI Assistance

The inspiration for this book is detailed in the section “My 20-Year Journey” within the article “[*Apostate Adventism*](#).” It represents over two decades of thought and research, with a draft largely completed by the end of 2025.

The AI angle. It was in early 2026 that I began to explore AI (Artificial Intelligence), starting with ChatGPT and then Claude by Anthropic, and quickly recognized its power. Both tools proved invaluable in editing the manuscript—correcting grammar, refining punctuation, and sharpening clarity throughout. AI also substantially drafted several resource articles, including “Penal Substitution,” “Council of Nicaea,” “Witch of Endor,” and “The Rockefeller Creed,” and played a significant role in composing the Study Guides found at the end of the book.

Useful tool. Could I have written this book without AI’s assistance? Yes, certainly—I could have done it entirely on my own. But AI accelerated the process and, in the end, produced a stronger, more polished work, and for that I am grateful.

“We have nothing to fear for the future,
except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us,
and His teaching in our past history.”

—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.2—

I. Christian Doctrines

► A. God of the Bible

Theology. The term *theology* comes from the Greek words *theos* (“God”) and *logos* (“word” or “reason”). Thus, theology literally means “the study of God” or “the word concerning God”. The suffix *-ology*, taken from *logos*, appears in many English words to denote “the study of” a particular subject. It is therefore fitting to begin our study of the Bible with an understanding of the God whom the Bible reveals.

God’s self-revelation. Although God can be “perceived through the things that are made” (Romans 1:20), our knowledge of Him is most plainly revealed to us by His word, the Bible. The Christian Bible—composed of Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible, the *Tanakh*) and New Testament (the Christian biblical canon of 27 books, originally written in Koine Greek)—tells us that God is the Creator, Savior, Lawgiver and ultimate Judge of humanity.

Executive outline. The major topics covered here are the following:

TOPIC	DESCRIPTION
1. GOD AS YEHOVAH	His personal name and what it reveals
2. GOD AS ELOHIM	The Hebrew generic name and its significance
3. GOD AS THEOS	The New Testament Greek term for God
4. GOD IS LOVE	What Scripture (not philosophy) teaches
5. GOD-LIKENESS	Being transformed into His image
6. GOD WITH US	Reconciliation and restored fellowship
7. GOD WAS IN CHRIST	Christ as the mediator of all divine revelation
KEY TAKEAWAYS	

1. God as Yehovah

God’s name. The Tetragrammaton יהוה—transliterated as YHVH—occurs **6,828 times** in the ^[a]Tanakh and is the most common name for God in the Old Testament.

God’s name pronunciation. The pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is closer to “Yehovah” than any other form, with emphasis placed on the final syllable (“Ye-ho-vAh”). The following references support this view:

^[a] Occurrences in the Tanakh: 1,820 times in the Pentateuch, 3,523 times in the Prophets, and 1,485 times in the Writings

- [God's Name is NOT Yahweh](#). Publisher: Project Truth Ministries. Video duration 13:46.
- [The Historical Origins of Yahweh](#). Publisher: Nehemia Gordon. Video duration 13:21. Dr. Nehemiah Gordon explains that the term *Yahweh* has Samaritan and pagan origins.
- [Catalog of Nehemia Gordon's videos on the name of God](#).
- [The Historical Pronunciation of Vav](#). Publisher: Nehemiah's Wall. Dr. Nehemiah Gordon explains how we know the letter "vav" was historically pronounced as "vav", not "waw".

The first occurrence of Yehovah is found in Genesis 2:4. Another important reference is Exodus 3:14-15. The Tetragrammaton is believed to be an abbreviated form of, "he who was [*Hayah*]; he who is [*Hoveh*]; and he who will be [*Yihyeh*]." When the phrase is read in reverse order (or *Yihyeh-Hoveh-Hayah*), the highlighted letters yield: **Yi-Hov-ah**. Interestingly, the same meaning is found in the New Testament reference to God found in Revelation 4:8 which says, "Lord God, the Almighty, **who was and who is and who is to come**" (Rev. 1:4).

Importance of the name. As with all the names by which God has revealed Himself, the Tetragrammaton offers a particular emphasis on the overarching greatness of God in his covenant relationship with Israel. Our uncertainty of how the Tetragrammaton was originally pronounced in no way diminishes our ability to *know* the divine name; that is, to *know* God as he has revealed Himself in his name.

God is one. The God of the Bible is monotheistic—"one God"—not polytheistic ("many gods"). A practicing Jew continually proclaims the oneness of God in the Jewish prayer called the Shema, that serves as the centerpiece for his morning and evening prayers. The Shema is found in Moses' final instructions to the nation of Israel in Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: Yehovah our God, Yehovah is one.

The term "one" is *echad* in the Hebrew language which is the numerical one. Jesus affirmed this singularity of God in his dialogue with the scribe in Mark 12:28-32. In it, Jesus recites the Shema and agrees with the scribe's understanding of it when the scribe responded, "You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that **he is one, and there is no other besides him**" (Mark 12:32). The scribe did not say "*they* are one" and "there is no other besides *them*," but he said, "**he** is one" and "there is no other besides **him**."

Yehovah was unmistakably understood to be one God by both the Jewish people and Jesus himself. Other references that support the "one

God” concept in the Bible are the following texts:

- *Malachi 2:10*: Have we not all **one Father**? Has not **one God** created us?
- *1 Corinthians 8:6*: yet for us there is **one God, the Father**, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.
- *Ephesians 4:6*: **one God and Father of us all**, who is above all and through all and in all.
- *1 Timothy 2:5*: For there is **one God**, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Moreover, in the ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, this verse reads as follows, “Hear, O Israel, our father, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” This expanded version in the Aramaic language suggests the ancients understood the Shema (Deut. 6:4) to be speaking of the Father.

God the Father. This is a common title given to God, particularly in the New Testament. This term is not a proper name for God as is Yehovah in the Old Testament. However, the concept of Yehovah being “Father” is found in a few places in the Old Testament as well. For example:

- *Psalms 68:5*: Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.
- *Isaiah 63:16*: For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us; **you, O Yehovah, are our Father**, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

In the New Testament, “God the Father” is a common term. Jesus used it repeatedly and wanted his followers to address God in like manner. It is found in the Lord’s prayer (Matthew 6:9, “Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven”); and when the resurrected Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene at the tomb site and told her, “go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (John 20:17).

God as Creator. Both the Old and New Testaments declare that Yehovah (or “God”) created the world. Yet the agent of Creation was His Son, as the NT reveals (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15-17).

- *Isaiah 45:18*: For **Yehovah who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it**, who established it and did not create it a waste, who formed it to be inhabited says: “I am Yehovah. There is no other.

- *Revelation 4:11*: Worthy are you, **our Lord and God**, the Holy One, to receive the glory, the honor, and the power, **for you created all things**, and because of your desire they existed, and were created!

God as Savior. There is no savior apart from Yehovah. This is what the Old Testament teaches.

- *Isaiah 43:11*: I myself am **Yehovah**, and **apart from me there is no savior**.
- *Hosea 13:4*: Yet I am **Yehovah** your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but me, and **besides me there is no savior**.

Yet the Old Testament also tells us that Yehovah sent human “saviors” to the people of Israel.

- *Nehemiah 9:27*: Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies **you gave them saviors** who saved them from the hand of their enemies.
- *Obadiah 1:21*: **Saviors shall go up** to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.

The ultimate savior the Father would send was his Son as fully revealed to us in the New Testament.

- *1 John 4:14*: And we have seen and testify that the **Father has sent his Son** to be the **Savior of the world**.
- *Acts 5:30-31*: The God of our fathers **raised Jesus**, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and **Savior**, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.
- *Acts 13:23*: Of this man’s offspring **God has brought** to Israel a **Savior, Jesus**, as he promised.

This does not in any way diminish the role of the Son in the plan of salvation given that the Son did so willingly.

Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the **Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**.

2. God as *Elohim* [\[e\]](#)

The Hebrew word *Elohim* is generally translated as either “God” or “gods” and serves as a generic term for deity. Although the word is grammatically plural because of the “-im” ending, it is often regarded as a “uniplural” noun because it can function as either singular or plural depending on the qualifiers associated with it—such as the verbs, adjectives, or pronouns connected to it.

English also contains uniplural words. The most common example is “you,” which is grammatically plural in form (“you are,” not “you is”) yet can refer to either one person or many (a distinction formerly marked in English by “thou” for the singular and “ye” or “you all” for the plural). Another well-known uniplural example is the word “deer.” You can say, “I saw a deer cross the road,” or “I saw many deer cross the road”—the first referring to one deer, the latter to many.

Hebrew also has words that are plural in form yet singular in meaning. For example, the word “face” (*panim*) is plural in form but singular in meaning. And while English plurals indicate only *quantity*—more than one—the Hebrew plural can indicate *quality* as well as quantity, as with “blindness” (*sanverim*).

Singular usage. Two important examples of singular usage for the word *Elohim* are found in the first chapter of the Bible and read as follows:

- *Genesis 1:1*: In the beginning God created (Hebrew: *bereshit bara Elohim*) the heavens and the earth.
- *Genesis 1:26*: And God said (Hebrew: *Elohim vayomer*), let us make man in our image...

Note on Genesis 1:1. In Genesis 1:1, “*bereshit bara Elohim*,” directly translates to “In-the-beginning created God.” The verb “*bara*” is inflected in the perfect third person singular. This verb controls the meaning of the subject which is *Elohim*. If *Elohim* were intended to denote a plural meaning (“gods”) then the plural verb “*bar’u*” would have been used instead of “*bara*.” When it comes to this verse, all Bible translations (correctly) translate *Elohim* as singular (“God”).

Note on Genesis 1:26. In Genesis 1:26, *Elohim* is the subject of the *singular* verb form *vayomer* (the plural verb form is *vayomru*); therefore, *Elohim* in this verse is understood to be *singular*. And *Elohim* (**he**, not *they*) said, “let us make man.” The question then naturally arises, who is the “us” in the phrase “let **us** make man”? Who is *Elohim* (**he**) addressing? Unfortunately, the verse itself does not clarify. The “us” could have been His divine council which includes angels, as some Jewish commentators suggest. Others posit a trinity of gods, which Jewish thought would reject

outright, given their monotheistic stance. Ellen G. White believed that the “us” was the Father speaking to His Son (cf. [EW 145.1](#), “But when God said to His Son...”) which harmonizes with the New Testament concept of God creating the worlds through his Son (Hebrews 1:2). It also fits well with the narrative of Adam and Eve being created in their (the Father and Son’s) image—i.e. the creation of *two* beings in their likeness (Genesis 1:26-27). Had the creation of man been in the image of *three* beings (i.e. the Trinity), then *three* beings would have been created, not two.

Elijah on Mount Carmel. Another illustrative example of the usage of *Elohim* is found in the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel when the people repeatedly cried out, “Yehovah **hu** ha-Elohim” or “Yehovah **he** is God” (1 Kings 18:39). The “**hu**” means *Elohim* is understood to be *singular*. If the plural was intended, it would read, “Yehovah **hem** ha-Elohim” or “Yehovah *they* are God.”

The God. The word *Elohim* is often accompanied by the article “*ha-*” (as in *ha-Elohim*) which means “the God” and sometimes with a further identifier such as “the living God” (*Elohim hayyim*, e.g. Deuteronomy 5:26; Joshua 3:10). While the singular meaning most often refers to the God of Israel, it can also refer to other *singular* deities such as Dagon (the Philistine god; Judges 16:23), Chemosh (the Moabite god), Astarte (the Sidonian god), Molek (the Ammonite god) and Baal. In the case of Baal, the word Baal (*ba’alim*) is also plural in form but likewise takes a *singular* verb.

God as a “compound unity”. A “compound unity” (*aka*, “collective one” or “unified one”) is the idea that the term *Elohim* (“God”) is a *semantic* plural God while remaining a *grammatically* singular God. In other words, while the Hebrew word, *Elohim*, might literally be referring to a single deity, the semantic meaning is that it should be understood as a plurality. The Hebrew text may be saying “one” (*echad*) in a numerical sense, yet the (semantic) meaning is “many”. The example most often cited is of “one flesh” (*echad basar*) in marriage (Genesis 2:24). It is evident that “one flesh” is made up of two individuals, male and female. Thus, in this case, “one” really means “two,” hence compound unity. Other examples include:

- *Genesis 11:6*: Yehovah said, “Behold, they are **one people**, and they all have **one language**...”
- *Exodus 24:3*: ...and all the people answered with **one voice**, and said, “All the words which Yehovah has spoken will we do.”
- *Numbers 13:23*: ...**one cluster** of grapes...

- *Judges 20:1*: Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was assembled as **one man**.

In these examples (and many more), the Hebrew word *echad* (“one”) refers to many, therefore there can be compound unity in oneness. Of course, there can be “absolute oneness” with the use of the word *echad* as well. Meaning, when it says “one” it really means numerical “one.”

So, how does one determine when “one” should be understood as “many” and when it should be understood as “one”? The answer is simple: **It has nothing to do with the word “one” (*echad*). It has everything to do with the noun that the “one” modifies.** How we know when we are dealing with a collective one is by evaluating the collective noun. If the collective noun implies plurality, then it has plural meaning.

Back to the “one flesh” example of marriage. As already stated, “one flesh” is a compound unity—a *collective* one—because it is made up of two individuals, male and female. Moreover, in the course of time, a married couple will have children. This collective of parents and their children can be called “one family.” Then, as this “one family” integrates itself into society with other families they become “one community.” The collection of communities become “one nation,” which become “one kingdom of nations,” which become “one world” of “one galaxy” of “one universe.” By looking at the collective noun (i.e. one flesh, family, community, nation, kingdom, world, etc.) we know whether we are dealing with a singularity or a plurality.

Logical flaw with “compound unity.” Do you see where the logical flaw is in this “compound unity” argument? The flaw is in placing the focus on the modifier “one” rather than the noun that the “one” modifies. We know when a phrase (where “one” is used) is a compound unity because of the compound *noun*, not because of the word “one.” We know that “one family” means a collection of individuals (parents and their children) because the word “family” implies *plurality*. And so does community, nation, kingdom and so on. Others may not be so simple to determine, such as “one flesh”. In these cases, we evaluate the context. If the context suggests *plurality*, then it is compound. Again, the word “one” on its own carries no sense of *plurality*. And when the collective noun itself is ambiguous, then the context will give the sense.

And so, when the Shema (Deut. 6:4) says, “Yehovah our Elohim, Yehovah is one,” the context determines the meaning of the “one” Yehovah. In the Hebrew Bible, and to the Jewish mind itself, there is no other meaning than this, that Yehovah is a *singularity*. This is very much the meaning of Yehovah in the Book of Deuteronomy:

- *Deuteronomy 4:35*: It was shown to you so that you might know that Yehovah is God. **There is no one else besides him.**
- *Deuteronomy 4:39*: Know therefore today, and take it to heart, that **Yehovah himself is God** in heaven above and on the earth beneath. **There is no one else.**
- *Deuteronomy 5:7*: You shall have **no other gods** before me.
- *Deuteronomy 10:17*: For Yehovah your God, **he is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God**, the mighty, and the awesome, who does not respect persons or take bribes.

Elohim as “multiplicity.” There is a small but significant class of nouns which are plural in form, singular in concept and usage, but in truth express *multiplicity*. They include the following:

- *mayim* (#4325, מים), “water”
- *shamayim* (#8064, שמים), “sky” (or “heaven”)
- *panim* (#6440, פנים), “face”
- *hayyim* (#2425b, חיים), “life” (literally “the living”)

Each of these words are firmly singular (water, sky, face and life), yet the Hebrew form possesses a plural ending (-im). Why are these words plural when the concept is singular? What connects them? Some suggest that it is because they express *plurality*. But more than plurality, they are in truth expressing *multiplicity*. Water is always flowing, moving, changing. The sky (or heaven) is constantly changing—clouds moving, shapes forming, changing colors at sunrise and sunset. The human face is ever expressive, constant movement of the eyes, lips, etc. Life itself is constantly changing. Thus, we cannot capture their semantic meaning in anything but the plural.

Elohim is understood in the same way. God appears to us as accommodating or adapting to human circumstances. Like with water, sky, face and life, we are unable to capture (or conceive of) God entirely in a singular sense. God is not fixed, but involved in human history, whenever and wherever and however he chooses to be. In theological terms, this is often called *divine accommodation*.

Divine accommodation is the theological principle that **God condescends to human modes of understanding**—using human speech, imagery, institutions, and cultural forms—without compromising His divine truth or authority. A relational God responds to real human actions. If humans pray, repent, or rebel, God’s **relational stance** changes, even though his **character does not**. Adaptation is relational, not ontological.

Elohim as “duality.” While *multiplicity* is the dominant quality of the

above words (*mayim*, *shamayim*, *panim* and *hayyim*), yet *duality* (or “two-ness”) is also a notable characteristic. This is particularly evident in the Creation story. On the second day of Creation, the *mayim* (“waters”) were parted into two: the *mayim* above the expanse and the *mayim* below the expanse (Genesis 1:6-7). God then called the expanse *shamayim* (“sky”) which on the fourth day included two: evening and morning *shamayim* objects: the Sun to rule the Day and the Moon (and Stars) to rule the Night. The life created on earth on the fifth and sixth days were of two: male and female types. The *panim* (“faces”) of these creatures were created with duality features—i.e. two eyes, two ears, etc. Even many of the internal “organs” of these living creatures manifest duality—i.e. two lungs, two kidneys, etc.

Duality in Creation. Duality is evident throughout all of creation, from the inanimate to the animate. Creation often moves in complementary pairs—distinct yet unified. Thus:

- The sky is bounded by waters above and waters below
- Evening and morning together define a single day
- The sun and the moon alternate in lighting the sky by day and by night
- Two eyes provide depth perception (3D spatial awareness)
- Two ears produce spatial perception (sound localization)
- Two nostrils share a single breath
- Two hands work together as one
- Two ventricles of the heart circulate one life-giving flow of blood
- Two feet walk a single path
- Two sexes (male and female) participate in the reproduction of life
- Flowering plants reproduce through the cooperation of stamen (male) and pistil (female), resulting in seed-bearing fruit

This harmony is expressed through **dual unity**. While minor exceptions exist, duality remains the dominant pattern and perspective. It reflects the natural order of things. It reflects the image of its Creator.

The “-ayim” suffix. The Hebrew language also has a way to express duality with the suffix “-ayim” which can be thought of as a plural of two. So you have the body parts ears, eyes, hands and feet all using the “-ayim” suffix.

- **Ear** - *ozen* (#241, singular), *oznayim* (“ears”, dual).
- **Eye** - *ayin* (#5869, singular), *enayim* (“eyes”, dual).

- **Hand** - *yad* (#3027, singular), *yadayim* (“hands”, dual).
- **Foot** - *regel* (#7272, singular), *raglayim* (“feet”, dual).

Even some forms of the name, Jerusalem, have an “-ayim” suffix—i.e. *Yerushalayim* as opposed to *Yerushalaym*, without the yod, which is the most common in the *Tanakh*. The *Yerushalayim* variant could represent the two Jerusalems, one on earth and the other in heaven, or the two hills it contains: Mount Zion and Mount Moriah.

With respect to *Elohim*, the sense of *duality* can be seen in God’s purpose to “image” Himself in the creation of man. Jesus, himself, being the “express image” of God (Hebrews 1:3). This duality is first and foremost revealed to us in the relationship between the Father and the Son, followed by the Father and the human race (i.e. His adopted “sons of God”).

Relational pairs. Apart from *physical* duality discussed above, nature consistently illustrates meaning through **relational pairs**—not as rivals, but as complementary and synergistic partners in which distinction enables unity. Below are several ways nature embodies complementary, greater–lesser, source–recipient, and outer–inner relationships, with concrete examples.

1. **Complementary relationships.** Complementarity means that two distinct elements are incomplete in isolation but whole in relation. Examples:
 - **Male and female:** Distinct yet mutually necessary for generation and continuity of life.
 - **Positive and negative electric charges:** Opposites that create stability, flow, and energy when joined.
 - **Roots and leaves:** Roots absorb water and minerals; leaves convert light into energy. Each depends on the other for life.

Principle illustrated: Difference does not negate unity; it makes unity possible.

2. **Synergistic relationships (the whole exceeds the parts).** Synergy occurs when interaction produces more than mere addition. Examples:
 - **Cells forming tissues:** A tissue can perform functions no single cell can achieve alone.
 - **Bees and flowering plants:** Bees gain nourishment; plants achieve pollination. Together they sustain ecosystems.
 - **Human organs:** The heart, lungs, and brain are ineffective in isolation but life emerges through their coordination.

- **Water molecules:** Hydrogen and oxygen alone are gases; together they form water with radically new properties.

Principle illustrated: Meaning and power arise from ordered co-operation, not isolated function.

3. **Greater-lesser relationships (hierarchy without domination).** Nature exhibits gradation—greater and lesser roles—without inequality of value. Examples:

- **Brain and body:** The brain coordinates; the body enacts. Neither negates the other.
- **Heart and blood cells:** The heart drives circulation; cells carry out life's work.
- **Mountain and river:** The mountain gives rise to the river, yet the river reshapes the mountain.

Principle illustrated: Order requires hierarchy, but hierarchy exists for service, not exploitation.

4. **Source-recipient relationships (giving and receiving).** These relationships emphasize flow rather than static existence. Examples:

1. **Sun and photosynthesis:** The sun gives energy; plants receive and transform it into life.
2. **Rain and soil:** Rain descends; soil receives, holds, and distributes nourishment.
3. **Mother and unborn child:** Life flows from source to dependent recipient.

Principle illustrated: Being is relational—life flows outward from a source and inward to fulfillment.

5. **Outer-inner relationships (form and essence).** Nature consistently pairs external structure with internal reality. Examples:

- **Seed and fruit:** The outer shell protects; the inner life generates growth.
- **Skin and organs:** The outer boundary guards; inner systems sustain life.
- **Earth's crust and core:** Stability on the surface depends on unseen internal forces.
- **Tree bark and sap:** Bark protects; sap nourishes and animates.

Principle illustrated: The visible serves the invisible; the outer exists for the sake of the inner.

Integrated example: The Tree. A single tree embodies *all* these relationships simultaneously:

- Bark (outer) / sap (inner)
- Sun (source) / tree (recipient)
- Trunk (greater support) / branches (lesser extension)
- Individual cells (parts) / living organism (synergy)
- Roots and leaves (complementary)

The tree lives not by autonomy, but by alignment within a web of relationships.

Summary principle. Nature teaches that existence is not isolated but relational. Meaning emerges through:

- Complementarity, not competition
- Synergy, not self-sufficiency
- Hierarchy, not domination
- Giving and receiving, not hoarding
- Inner reality expressed through outer form

This relational “grammar” of nature is remarkably consistent—from physics to biology to ecology—and forms the foundation for how life coheres, flourishes, and endures. Such duality, or **relational pairing**, within creation is yet another way the image of its Creator is revealed.

3. God as *Theos* [\[↗\]](#)

The Greek word *theos* is the generic term for “god” and occurs 1,315 times in the New Testament. To avoid confusing the true God from the Greek gods, the writers of the NT called him *ho theos*, “the God,” to stress that he alone is the true God.

The God. The God of the NT, *ho theos*, always refers to a single member of the deity, never to a plurality of Persons. In all instances, it is speaking of the Father. Arguably, there are a handful of instances, seven in total (i.e. [John 1:1](#), [18](#); [20:28](#); [Romans 9:5](#); [Titus 2:13](#); [Hebrews 1:8](#); and [2 Peter 1:1](#)), where it could refer to the Son. However, my analysis of these verses, as detailed in the “Notes” section of the corresponding texts, gives sufficient evidence to prove that this is not the case. Thus, the testimony of the New Testament is the same as the Old Testament, that God (“*the* God”) is a single Person. Not a plurality. Not a trinity.

4. God is love [e]

Biblical view of “God is love.” The Bible (simply) teaches that “God is love” is manifest in the *plan of salvation*. As John writes,

1 John 4:8-10: He who does not love does not know God; for **God is love**. ⁹ This is how God showed his love to us: When he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Thus, “God is love” is manifested in the biblical **salvation theme**, in which the Father sent His Son into the world so that we might live through him. John states this again in his Gospel,

John 3:16: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Note that this formula of salvation involves **three entities**: The Father, His Son, and *us* (the human race)—yet only two divine Persons. Two divine Persons manifesting love, while mankind (the “*us*”) is given the freedom to respond to that love.

The spirit as the third manifestation of “God is love.” However, the salvation formula does not end at the cross. Scripture presents a third movement: the love that was demonstrated in the Son’s sacrifice must be *applied* to the believer, and this is the specific work assigned to the holy spirit. Paul makes this explicit in Romans 5:5:

Romans 5:5: “And hope does not put to shame, because the love of God has been **poured** into our hearts through *the* holy spirit which is given to us.”

Notice the structure of the verse. It is not merely that God loved us objectively at Calvary—Paul says that love is **poured into our hearts**, and identifies the means of that pouring as holy spirit. If 1 John 4:9-10 shows love *achieved* (the Son given as the atoning sacrifice), Romans 5:5 shows love *applied* (the spirit given so that the reality of that love is felt and known subjectively by the believer). The love of God does not remain a historical fact about something that happened “out there” at the cross; it becomes personal experience “in here,” in the heart—and God’s spirit is named as the means by which that transfer is accomplished.

This is reinforced by Christ's own words concerning the spirit's mission, spoken on the eve of his death:

John 14:26: "But the Paraclete, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

Here the pattern established in John 3:16 repeats itself with a shift in who or what the Father sends: just as the *Father* sent *His Son* into the world, so now the *Father* sends *His spirit* through His Son into the world. This is what Acts 2:33 tells us:

Acts 2:33: "Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he has **poured** out this that you now see and hear."

The Father's spirit is **poured** out on us *through* the Son ("he [Christ] has poured out this [the Father's spirit]"). The Son's mission was to secure salvation objectively (the atonement). Now the Son's mission *through the spirit* is to teach and remind, thereby making that salvation efficacious in the believer's ongoing life ("he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you"). As Paul tells us, "...this comes from the Lord *who is* the spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). Christ's exalted state in heaven becomes Christ's exalted function on earth as the Paraclete.

Mankind's role remains unchanged: we are still the ones invited to *receive* rather than to originate this love (1 John 4:10, "not that we loved God, but that he loved us"). But reception is not a bare intellectual assent to a historical fact; it is spirit-enabled. God's spirit makes it internal, experiential, and remembered—it is "**poured** into our hearts," it "teaches," it "brings to remembrance." Both the *when* (at the cross) and the *how* (through the spirit) are accomplished through Christ. It happened historically—and now it happens experientially, in the heart.

Trinitarian view of "God is love." However, in Trinitarian literature, an alternate understanding of the statement "God is love" is offered. Rather than reading it as a simple description of God's character, it is redefined as a *communion of love*, in which the Father is the Lover, the Son is the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit is the shared Love between the Father and the Son (cf. Augustine). Two persons, it is argued, cannot sustain love without collapsing into self-love or an exclusive, closed relationship—perfect love, it is claimed, requires a third person as the bond of unity.

However, Scripture never defines God as an internal "communion of

love” among divine Persons. Terms like *communion*, *procession*, and *shared love* do not arise from the biblical text itself but are imposed on it by later philosophical theology—chiefly Augustinian and Neoplatonic speculation. This framework blends biblical terminology with Greek metaphysical categories rather than resting on careful exegesis. It is nowhere taught in Scripture.

Augustinian Trinitarian speculation. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) is the primary source of the “bond of love” idea. In *On the Trinity*, he uses analogies (lover, beloved, and their mutual love) and mental faculties (memory, understanding, will) to conceptualize the Trinity, explicitly calling the Holy Spirit the “communion itself of the Father and the Son.” Critics note this is psychological and philosophical reasoning—modeling divine relations on human categories of mind and love—rather than direct biblical definition. Patristic theology broadly, including Augustine’s, is widely recognized as shaped by Neoplatonic categories such as *unity*, *procession*, and *emanation*; this borrowed vocabulary helped articulate concepts like the Son’s “eternal generation,” even though figures like Augustine never adopted Neoplatonism wholesale. (*References*: New Advent, [On the Trinity](#); Bible Study Tools, [Chapter II—Doctrine of the Trinity](#))

Adventist advocates on the “*communion of love*” theology. Over roughly the last decade, and especially since the publication of his books on the Trinity in 2021, Ty Gibson, director of Light Bearers, has become one of the most visible Adventist advocates of describing the Trinity in terms of an eternal “*communion of love*” (see [Adventist Record](#)). This language is not unique to Ty Gibson, but he has popularized it within Adventism more than any other contemporary speaker.

Ty Gibson’s teaching. In simple terms, Gibson’s main thesis is the following: “God is love” → love requires at least three persons → therefore God must eternally exist as a Trinity. In more detail, Gibson argues that:

- God is fundamentally relational.
- The Father eternally loves the Son.
- The Son eternally loves the Father.
- The Holy Spirit is the living communion or fellowship of that mutual love.
- Because “God is love” (1 John 4:8), love requires an eternal relationship between distinct divine persons.
- Therefore, the Trinity is not merely a doctrine about God’s nature, but the eternal reality that makes love possible.

In many of his presentations he describes the Godhead as: “An eternal society of love” or “An eternal communion of love.” The emphasis is that God’s very being consists of self-giving relationships rather than solitary existence. Although Gibson presents the concept as biblical, the underlying framework closely resembles the Trinitarian theology developed by Augustine of Hippo in *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*).

Gibson’s adaptation. Ty Gibson generally avoids repeating Augustine’s technical psychological analogies (memory, understanding, will), but he retains the relational conclusion. His teaching commonly includes ideas such as:

- love requires an “other”;
- therefore God must eternally exist as more than one person;
- the Trinity is an eternal fellowship or society of self-giving love;
- creation and redemption overflow from that eternal love.

This shifts the defense of the Trinity from primarily philosophical arguments about one essence and three persons to a relational argument centered on love.

On the “*communion of love*” theology: A philosophical construct, not a biblical doctrine. The reinterpretation of “God is love” as an eternal communion among three divine Persons—Lover, Beloved, and the Love binding them—cannot be sustained by Scripture. When John writes that “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16), he is describing God’s moral character toward His creatures, not encoding a formula for the inner life of the Godhead. Scripture never calls the Father “Lover,” the Son “Beloved object,” or the Spirit the “shared bond” between them—this schema appears nowhere in the biblical text, the apostles’ vocabulary, or the writings of Ellen G. White.

What Augustine offers in *On the Trinity* (and similar teaching by Ty Gibson) is analogy, not exegesis: a psychological model drawn from the human mind and projected onto the divine nature, leaning on Neoplatonic categories of *unity*, *procession*, and *emanation*—an intellectual world shaped more by Plotinus than by Moses or Paul. Its central premise, that “two cannot truly love, only three can,” is a philosophical axiom about the metaphysics of love, imported into theology and read back into Scripture as though it had always been there.

This is exactly what *sola Scriptura* was meant to prevent: letting inherited philosophy shape doctrine, then mining Scripture for supporting fragments. A doctrine of God’s nature built on Neoplatonic borrowing rather than plain biblical statement isn’t a deeper reading of Scripture—it’s a departure from it.

5. God-likeness [\[d\]](#)

God-likeness through a knowledge of God. In the book, Ministry of Healing, it reads:

“A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character.” —*Ellen G. White, MH 409.2*

True education—whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual—finds its grounding not merely in facts or skills, but in an experiential understanding of the character of God. Knowledge of God is not abstract information; it is relational and *transformative*. To “know God” in the biblical sense means to enter into covenant fellowship with Him, allowing his spirit to *transform* our inner self. Said simply: a knowledge of God *changes* you.

Knowledge as foundation for life and service. Proverbs 9:10 tells us, “The fear of the Yehovah is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” Wisdom begins with reverence for God, but it matures into understanding through relationship with Him. Human service and moral action can be outwardly good yet hollow if disconnected from the divine source. Only when service flows from a heart aligned with God’s purposes does it reflect his likeness. Thus, knowing God is the foundation of both character and *mission*.

Safeguard against temptation. Ellen White emphasizes that knowledge of God is “the only real safeguard against temptation.” This aligns with 2 Peter 1:3, which teaches that through knowing God, believers receive “everything we need for life and godliness.” Temptation often entices by promising satisfaction, identity, or power apart from God. But when we know God personally, our hearts recognize His sufficiency. His promises and presence anchor us, providing a defense that sheer willpower or moral discipline cannot.

Knowledge as eternal life. Jesus defines eternal life not as endless duration, but as communion with the Father and the Son: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Eternal life begins here and now as a believer grows in the knowledge of God. To live forever without this relational knowledge would be eternal emptiness, but to know God is to share in His very life, His love, His holiness, and His joy.

True glory: God’s character. The prophet Jeremiah contrasts human sources of pride—wisdom, strength, and wealth—with the one thing worth glorying in: knowing Yehovah.

Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. ²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows me—that I am Yehovah who exercises covenant-love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, for I delight in these things,” says Yehovah.

The above passage highlights God’s covenant-love (*hesed*), justice (*mišpāt*), and righteousness (*šēdāqā*). To know God is to love what He loves, to delight in what delights Him. As we grow in this knowledge, our character mirrors His—marked by mercy, justice, and integrity. The world’s measures of greatness fade, and God’s character becomes our treasure.

Transformed into His likeness. To know God truly is to be transformed into His likeness. As Paul tells us,

2 Corinthians 3:18: And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from the Lord who is the spirit.

Just as light dispels darkness, so a knowledge of God dispels sin’s distortions and restores the divine image in humanity. This is why Ellen White insists that knowledge of God alone can make us like Him in character: it is this knowledge that transforms the heart, sanctifies the will, and bears fruit in action.

6. God with us [\[d\]](#)

What was lost in the Fall of Man was direct communication and fellowship with God. This was what Christ came to restore. This reconciliation and restoration is complete when Christ dwells in us and is with us through his spirit. That is, we have fellowship with God through Christ by way of Christ’s mediatory work. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

The Plan of Salvation was designed to restore our fellowship *with* the Father and *with* His Son. The presence of the Father and His Son in our lives is the fellowship *of* the spirit ([2 Corinthians 13:14](#)). But, it is not an independent spirit. It is the spirit of the Father shared to us through His Son. This is clearly stated in Acts 2:33,

Acts 2:33: Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he [\[\[Jesus \(cf. v.32\)\]\]](#) has poured out this that you now see and hear.

This concept of “God with us” is further explained in the article, “[*Spirit as Essence*](#).”

7. God was in Christ [\[↵\]](#)

One is able to conclude from the teachings of the New Testament that all the revelations of the **divine presence** were done through Christ. When the patriarchs spoke with God, they were all, in fact, in conversation with Christ.

[*PP 366.1*](#): In all these revelations of the **divine presence** the glory of God was manifested through Christ. Not alone at the Saviour’s advent, but **through all the ages after the Fall** and the promise of redemption, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.” 2 Corinthians 5:19. . . . Since the sin of our first parents **there has been no direct communication between God and man**. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man and vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God. **All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ**. It was the Son of God that gave to our first parents the promise of redemption. It was He who revealed Himself to the patriarchs. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses understood the gospel. They looked for salvation through man’s Substitute and Surety. These holy men of old held communion with the Saviour who was to come to our world in human flesh; and some of them talked with Christ and heavenly angels face to face.

Further, Yehovah’s **divine presence** and voice on Mount Sinai was all done through Christ.

[*PP 366.2*](#): Christ was not only the leader of the Hebrews in the wilderness—the Angel in whom was the name of Jehovah, and who, veiled in the cloudy pillar, went before the host—but it was He who gave the law to Israel. [See Appendix, note 7.] Amid the awful glory of Sinai, **Christ declared in the hearing of all the people the ten precepts of His Father’s law**. It was He who gave to Moses the law engraved upon the tables of stone.

Moreover, when Yehovah communicated to the Old Testament prophets, it was all done through Christ as well.

[*PP 366.3*](#): **It was Christ that spoke to His people through the prophets**. The apostle Peter, writing to the Christian church, says that the prophets “prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ

which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.” 1 Peter 1:10, 11. **It is the voice of Christ that speaks to us through the Old Testament.** “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Revelation 19:10.

The following notes in Patriarchs and Prophets (PP) are relevant:

- [Notes on PP 761.4](#): Christ is the One through whom God has at all times revealed Himself to man. “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him.” 1 Corinthians 8:6. “This is he [Moses], that was in the church in the wilderness with the Angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.” Acts 7:38. This Angel was the **Angel of God’s presence** (Isaiah 63:9), the Angel in whom was the name of the great Jehovah (Exodus 23:20-23). **The expression can refer to no other than the Son of God.**
- [Notes on PP 761.5](#): Again: Christ is called the Word of God. John 1:1-3. He is so called because God gave His revelations to man in all ages through Christ. It was His Spirit that inspired the prophets. 1 Peter 1:10, 11. He was revealed to them as the **Angel of Jehovah**, the Captain of the Lord’s host, Michael the Archangel.

Key takeaways [\[e\]](#)

The following are the key takeaways from this article:

1. **Theology defined.** Theology literally means the study or understanding of God, grounded in God's self-revelation.
2. **God is known through revelation.** While creation points to God, Scripture is the clearest and authoritative source of knowing Him.
3. **The Bible reveals God's roles.** God is presented as Creator, Savior, Lawgiver, and Judge of humanity.
4. **God's primary Old Testament name is Yehovah.** The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) is God's covenant name, emphasizing His eternal, self-existent nature.
5. **Meaning of Yehovah.** The divine name conveys God as the One who was, is, and will be.
6. **"Yahweh" carries Samaritan and pagan associations.** According to Nehemia Gordon's research, the form "Yahweh" has historical origins in Samaritan and pagan usage rather than in authentic Hebrew tradition.
7. **Biblical monotheism.** Scripture consistently affirms that God is one—numerically and personally singular.
8. **The Shema affirms God's oneness.** "Yehovah is one" (Deut. 6:4) expresses absolute monotheism, affirmed by Jesus (Mk. 12:28-32).
9. **God is identified as the Father.** Texts such as Malachi 2:10, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6, and 1 Timothy 2:5 consistently identify the one God as the Father.
10. **Ancient Aramaic tradition identified the Shema with the Father.** The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan renders Deuteronomy 6:4 as "Hear, O Israel, our father, the Lord our God, the Lord is one," showing the ancients read the Shema as referring to the Father.
11. **Creation originates from the Father through the Son.** Both Testaments declare Yehovah the Creator (Isaiah 45:18; Revelation 4:11), while the New Testament reveals the Son as the agent of creation (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15–17).
12. **God alone is Savior.** Isaiah 43:11 and Hosea 13:4 declare that apart from Yehovah there is no savior, establishing salvation as originating in God alone.
13. **Jesus is the ultimate Savior sent by God.** Passages such as 1 John 4:14, Acts 5:30–31, and Acts 13:23 present Jesus as the Savior whom the Father sent, exalted, and gave to Israel and the world.

14. **The Son gave himself willingly.** Galatians 2:20 shows that being “sent” in no way diminishes the Son’s role, for he “loved me and gave himself for me” of his own free will.
15. **Elohim is grammatically plural but often singular in meaning.** The Hebrew term functions as singular when referring to the God of Israel.
16. **Grammar confirms God’s singularity.** Singular verbs used with Elohim show it refers to one God, not many, not a trinity.
17. **“Let us make man” (Genesis 1:26) is the Father addressing His Son.** Since Elohim takes the singular verb *vayomer*, the “us” is best understood—per Hebrews 1:2 and Ellen G. White (Early Writings 145.1)—as the Father speaking to His Son, not a trinity.
18. **Two beings were created in “their” image.** The creation of two beings, Adam and Eve, harmonizes with the image of two divine Persons—Father and Son—whereas an image of three would imply the creation of three.
19. **Biblical usage rejects polytheism.** Elohim is consistently understood as one God in Israel’s faith.
20. **“Compound unity” depends on context, not the word “one”.** Plurality arises from the noun described, not from *echad* (“one”) itself.
21. **The Shema’s context demands a singular Yehovah.** Deuteronomy repeatedly insists “there is no one else besides him” (4:35, 39; 5:7; 10:17), so the “one” of the Shema cannot be read as a compound plurality.
22. **Some plural Hebrew nouns express multiplicity.** Words like water, life, and face reflect dynamic, complex realities.
23. **Elohim reflects divine accommodation.** God adapts His relational stance to human prayer, repentance, or rebellion without any change to His character or essential being.
24. **Creation displays pervasive duality.** Nature reveals complementary pairs that function as unified wholes.
25. **Duality reflects God’s image.** Complementary relationships mirror divine relational order.
26. **Relational structure defines reality.** Meaning arises through cooperation, hierarchy, and mutual dependence.
27. **God as Theos in the New Testament.** The Greek “*ho theos*” consistently refers to the Father as the one God—never a plurality of Persons.

28. **The seven disputed texts do not overturn the rule.** Careful analysis of John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; and 2 Peter 1:1 shows these do not apply *ho theos* to the Son, so both Testaments testify that God is a single Person.
29. **“God is love” is biblically defined through salvation.** God’s love is shown in sending His Son, involving two divine Persons and humanity as the recipient of that love.
30. **The spirit applies the love.** Romans 5:5 shows that the love demonstrated at the cross is subjectively applied to believers through the holy spirit *poured* into their hearts.
31. **Christ pours out the spirit.** Acts 2:33 and John 14:26 describe the Father’s spirit being sent to believers through the exalted Christ, continuing his teaching and reminding ministry on earth.
32. **Trinitarian “communion of love” view.** An alternative reading treats “God is love” as describing an eternal internal communion in which the Father is Lover, the Son is Beloved, and the Spirit is their shared Love.
33. **Augustine’s origin of the idea.** The author traces the “*communion of love*” concept to Augustine’s *On the Trinity*, which draws on psychological analogies and Neoplatonic philosophy rather than direct exegesis.
34. **Ty Gibson’s popularization.** Adventist author Ty Gibson has promoted the “eternal communion of love” framework within Adventism since around 2021, arguing love requires at least three eternal divine persons.
35. **Critique of the communion-of-love teaching.** The author contends this reinterpretation is a philosophical construct imported into Scripture rather than a doctrine drawn directly from the biblical text.
36. **Knowing God transforms character.** True knowledge of God produces moral and spiritual likeness.
37. **Knowledge of God is foundational to education and service** All true wisdom and service flow from understanding God’s character.
38. **Knowing God safeguards against temptation.** Relationship with God anchors the believer against deception.
39. **Eternal life is relational knowledge.** Eternal life begins now through knowing the Father and the Son.

40. **God's true glory is His character.** God delights in covenant-love, justice, and righteousness.
41. **Believers are transformed into God's image.** Ongoing knowledge of God restores His likeness in humanity.
42. **Christ came to restore the fellowship lost at the Fall.** What sin severed—direct communion with God—Christ restores, so that reconciliation is complete when Christ dwells in and with us through his spirit.
43. **Christ restores “God with us”.** Fellowship with God is restored through Christ's mediatorial work.
44. **The spirit is God's shared presence through the Son.** God's presence is relationally mediated, not independent of the Father and Son.
45. **All divine revelation comes through Christ.** God has always revealed Himself through His Son.
46. **Christ spoke to the patriarchs and prophets.** Old Testament encounters with God were mediated by Christ.
47. **Christ himself proclaimed the Law at Sinai.** It was Christ, the angel in whom was the name of Yehovah, who declared the Ten Commandments at Sinai and gave Moses the tables of stone (PP 366.2).
48. **The voice of the Old Testament prophets was Christ's.** The “spirit of Christ” testified through the prophets (1 Peter 1:10–11), for “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10; PP 366.3).
49. **God was in Christ reconciling the world.** Salvation history centers on Christ as the mediator of divine presence.

► B. Christology

Christology, “the study of Christ,” is a branch of theology that concerns Jesus. It is a study or analysis of the nature or being of Jesus (ontological Christology), the analysis of the works of Jesus (functional Christology) and the analysis of the “salvific” standpoints of Jesus (soteriological Christology).

Executive outline. The major topics covered here are the following:

- The nature of Jesus (ontological Christology)
- [The works of Jesus \(functional Christology\)](#)
- [Salvific perspective \(soteriological Christology\)](#)
- [Why Jesus died](#)
- [Agency concept](#)
- [Christ’s divinity](#)
- [Key takeaways](#)

The nature of Jesus (ontological Christology)

From the second to fifth centuries, the human and divine nature of Christ (ontological Christology) was a major focus of debates in the early church and at the first seven ecumenical councils. Most major Christian denominations adopted the Chalcedonian position formulated in those councils, which is the hypostatic union of the *two* natures of Christ, one human and one divine, “united with neither confusion nor division”. The other position taken by many branches of the Oriental Orthodox Churches was that of *miaphysitism*, that holds Jesus is fully divine and fully human, in *one* “nature” (*physis*). Opposed to these two views is *adoptionism* which teaches that Jesus was a mere man, who was “adopted” by God either at his baptism, his resurrection, or his ascension. It denies Jesus’ preexistence as God’s only begotten Son. *Adoptionism* is a minority view with little to no biblical support and so we give it no consideration. Neither do we hold to the Chalcedonian position nor *miaphysitism* for reasons stated below.

Nature of sin. It would be helpful to define some terms:

- ***Sinful.*** This is the *sinful* human nature of “the flesh” often mentioned in the Bible. It is a *tendency* toward sin. It does not refer to the act of sinning itself. So, while a person may have a *tendency* toward sin, it does not mean he has yielded to it. The temptation to sin is not the act itself. Once cherished in the heart and

acted upon, then it is sin. To the Jewish mind, sinning was the act. To Jesus, sinning begins in the heart.

- ***Sinless***. A “fearless” person is incapable of feeling fear. In the same way, a *sinless* person is incapable of sinning. Certainly God fits this description. He does not sin and cannot sin. Adam, before the Fall, had a *sinless* nature in that he had no *propensity* to sin.
- ***Sinfulness***. The term “-ness” defines a *state of being*. This is far beyond a *tendency* toward; it must involve the actual practice of sinning.
- ***Sinlessness***. Again, “-ness” defines a *state of being*. It is one who is in a state of not committing sin, whether he has a *sinful* nature or not.

Given the above terms, we will now define the life Jesus lived on earth. The position taken here is that he was born with a *sinful* human nature. Yet he never sinned, and so he was ever in a state of *sinlessness*. That is to say, his *sinful* (“fleshly”) human nature allowed him to be tempted, but he never yielded to it. This is how EGW describes it:

[1SM 256.1](#): **In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.** He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Matthew 8:17). He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was **in all points tempted like as we are**. And yet **He knew no sin**. He was the Lamb “without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect **sinlessness** of the human nature of Christ.

When you read through EGW’s writings, you will note that she is careful in the use of the above terms. She consistently applies the term *sinlessness* to the human nature of Christ, but not the term *sinless*.

In the case of man, he is both born *sinful* and is in a state of *sinfulness*, but he can attain a state of *sinlessness* through God’s help. This is how EGW describes man’s potential:

[ST July 23, 1902, par. 14](#): Those who believe on Christ and obey His commandments are not under bondage to God’s law; for to those who believe and obey, His law is not a law of bondage, but of liberty. Everyone who believes on Christ, everyone who relies on the keeping power of a risen Savior that has suffered the penalty pronounced upon the transgressor, everyone who resists temptation and in the midst of evil copies the pattern given in the Christ-life, will through

faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ **become a partaker of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments, will reach the **condition of sinlessness** in which Adam lived before his transgression.

Virgin birth. The virgin birth was possible because God created a woman to be able to carry a baby to term that is not her own (i.e. a surrogate mother). In the case of Mary, the mother of Jesus, she was "found to be with child by holy spirit" (Matthew 1:18). Even though Mary was betrothed to Joseph, they had not yet come together physically. (The Jewish custom was that there was a waiting period before the actual marriage and consummation.) This made Mary's pregnancy a unique, surrogate, supernatural creation event.

Jesus' *sinful sinlessness*. Jesus was born with a *sinful* ("fleshly") human nature which could be tempted, but he was ever in a state of *sinlessness*—i.e. never committing sin or choosing to sin. Thus, Jesus had no disposition, or inclination, or *propensity* to sin. Meaning that he was not "under the power of sin," and so was not driven to sin. However, this is not the case with fallen man. The Bible states that every man is "under sin".

Romans 3:9-10: For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are **under sin**,¹⁰ as it is written, "None are righteous, no not one;"

In other Bible versions, the phrase "under sin" is translated as "controlled by sin," "under the power of sin," or "under the dominion of sin." Yet Jesus was not under the power or dominion of sin. How can this be, if we have just stated that he possessed a *sinful* human nature? How could he have a *sinful* human nature and yet not be "under the power of sin"? Is such a condition possible? The answer is yes—absolutely! This is precisely what it means to be "born again" (or, "born from above").

Neither pre- nor post-Adamic nature. Jesus had neither a pre-Adamic (*sinless* nature) nor a post-Adamic ("under the power of sin") nature, but a "born again" nature. That is, Jesus was given a nature like the one we can have when we are "born again" (or, "born from above"). It is called a "divine nature." Jesus, like all Christian believers, was a "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)—*from the very beginning*. This makes sense, since Jesus was to be our example in all things, why not in this critical area?

Then, Jesus' life was *not* a battle with his *sinful* nature, but a battle to *maintain* his "born again" or divine nature. If this was the case, then his life *could* be an example to those of us who are born again. He lived

a life we can live, if we become believers and receive this new birth—this divine nature—from above (John 3:7, NRSV). Here’s a relevant quote from EGW:

[ISM 226.2](#): In His humanity **He was a partaker of the divine nature**. In His incarnation He gained in a new sense the title of the Son of God. Said the angel to Mary, ‘The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God’ (Luke 1:35). **While the Son of a human being, He became the Son of God in a new sense.** Thus He stood in our world—the Son of God, yet allied by birth to the human race.

Although Jesus was born from an imperfect (surrogate) mother, in truth he was a special creation, just as Adam was a special creation. In the case of Adam and Eve, they had no propensity to sin. They were perfect, innocent “babes”. They knew no sin and had no inclination to practice sin. They were not tempted to lie, steal or kill, because that was not their nature. To do so would have been abhorrent to them. Until Adam and Eve chose to disobey, and then their *spiritual* nature changed.

In the case of Jesus, however, temptations to sin were real. He had the *capacity* to sin, because he was born “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3). But he also had the *capacity* to say “No” because he had a divine nature (John 3:5-6; Romans 8:14; 2 Peter 1:3). Jesus’ temptations to sin were as real to him as they are to us, but just as real was his capacity to resist them. He did not resist these temptations through reasoning with the devil, but through declarations from the word of God, which were abiding truths in his heart. In other words, Jesus was anchored in the truths of the Bible and his faith in his Father and this is how he repelled temptations to sin.

Everything Jesus did was with the same power and ability available to us. His righteous, victorious life required Jesus to be dependent on his Father’s word and will throughout his life. In truth, Jesus’ greatest temptations were to distrust his Father’s word and purpose for his life. To the very end, Jesus remained loyal to his Father, even unto death. That is, Jesus manifested the greatest form of faith in God that any person can experience—to face eternal extinction, if need be, in order to remain loyal to his Father’s will for his life—as he stated in Gethsemane, “nevertheless not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42).

The test given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was whether they would choose to remain loyal to God’s will or suffer death through disobedience (Gen. 2:17, “in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die”). The same test was given to Jesus—not to forbid him from eating

the fruit of a tree, but to be willing to suffer and then die on a cross so that mankind could be saved. Obviously, Jesus' test of faith in God was far greater than Adam's, but it was the same in type. And, this same test (in type) is given to every member of the human family.

[ST June 17, 1897, par. 8](#): **Had he not been fully human, Christ could not have been our substitute.** He could not have worked out in humanity that perfection of character which it is the privilege of all to reach. He was the light and the life of the world. He came to this earth to work in behalf of men, that they might no longer be under the control of Satanic agencies. But while bearing human nature, he was dependent upon the Omnipotent for his life. **In his humanity, he laid hold of the divinity of God; and this every member of the human family has the privilege of doing. Christ did nothing that human nature may not do if it partakes of the divine nature.**

Jesus took on that which was not his by right (i.e. our "sinful" nature), so that we might take on that which was not ours by right (i.e. the "divine" nature). By accepting Christ's divine nature man can overcome like Christ overcame and obtain "that perfection of character which it is the privilege of all to reach."

What Christ had, we can possess. In the battle over temptations to sin, Christ had character qualities we can possess:

1. **No Inclination.** "The truly converted man has *no inclination* to think or talk of the faults of others. His lips are sanctified, and as God's witness he testifies that the grace of Christ has transformed his heart." {[RH November 24, 1904, Art. A, par. 12](#)}
2. **No Propensity.** "We need not retain one sinful *propensity*" {[Mar 225.7](#)}
3. **No Tendency.** "As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated *tendencies* to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good." {[Mar 225.8](#)}
4. **No Corruption.** "Those who would be conquerors must engage in conflict with unseen agencies; inward *corruption* must be overcome, and every thought must be brought into subjection to Christ." {[CT 237.3](#)}

"100% God; 100% man." It makes no rational sense to declare someone to be 100% of one thing and 100% of something else. Does that make him a 200% man? The idea is just silly. Yet many theologians describe Jesus in precisely these terms: 100% God while at the same time 100% man.

Besides being logically problematic, this language is not biblical.

Nowhere in Scripture is Jesus described as “fully God and fully man,” or by any equivalent expression. This terminology is also absent from the writings of Ellen G. White. She never used phrases such as “fully God,” “fully divine,” or “one hundred percent God (or divine)” in reference to Jesus or to anyone else.

(It should be noted that a handful of Bible passages are commonly cited by theologians as proof that Jesus is 100% God. These passages are examined in detail in the Scripture Notes section of this book (see [*Trinitarian verses*](#)). The two most frequently cited texts are [John 8:58](#) and [Hebrews 1:8](#).)

That Jesus had a human nature and a divine nature: Yes, and so do we, *if we are born again*. We too can retain a human nature while at the same time be “born again” with a divine nature. Effectively, Christians have two natures, as Jesus had two natures. The difference with Jesus is that he never let his human nature override or overrule his divine nature. When it comes to two natures, think in terms of heavenly-minded vs. earthly-minded; or spiritual vs. fleshly; or wisdom vs. foolishness, etc. There is no mystery with regard to Jesus having two natures, because that is our condition as well, *if we are born again*.

This state (and battle) we have with two natures does not continue in the resurrection of the body, because in the resurrection the sinful nature we have of the first Adam will *not* be restored to us, but only the divine nature of the second Adam (of Christ). That is, in the resurrection, in our new glorified bodies, **only the divine nature given to us and divine character developed by us will continue**.

Jesus’ death. Given that Jesus had a nature like that of a “born again” believer where he could have sinned (i.e. the temptations to sin were real), what would have happened to him if he *had* indeed sinned? In other words, what was the risk to Jesus for *not* living a perfect life?

First, Jesus’ divine nature was not like the divine nature *given* to “born again” believers, but was *inherent* in Jesus. Here is how EGW describes it:

[ST May 10, 1899, par.11](#): Though Christ humbled Himself to become man, the Godhead *[[archaic for “divinity”]]* was still His own. His Deity could not be lost while He stood faithful and true to His loyalty. Surrounded with sorrow, suffering, and moral pollution, despised and rejected by the people to whom had been entrusted the oracles of heaven, Jesus could yet speak of Himself as the Son of man in heaven. He was ready to take once more His divine glory when His work on earth was done.

Note that, “**while** He stood faithful and true,” his deity could not be

lost. Had Jesus died (as he did) **while** remaining faithful and true, he would not, and could not lose his deity. But the question at hand is this: What if he *had* become unfaithful and sinned, what then? Would he then have lost his deity? The answer has to be an obvious, “yes”; otherwise, his Incarnation would *not* have been a risk and the test would have meant nothing. Again, EGW,

YI July 20, 1899, par. 3: At an **infinite cost**, and by a process mysterious to angels as well as to men, Christ assumed humanity.

That is to say, by means of his Incarnation, the Son of God placed the retention of his deity on a conditional basis. There was a cost involved, and that cost was infinite. Again, EGW,

GCB December 1, 1895, par.23: Look upon that wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that **Christ risked all**; “tempted like as we are,” **he staked even his own eternal existence** upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption.

The test was real, and its consequences were infinite and eternal in either direction. Had Jesus failed, he would have ceased to exist—forever. However, because he did not fail, Jesus lives and is able to offer eternal life to all who believe. To be clear, Christ’s deity would have been lost had Jesus sinned. Indeed, “**Christ risked all**”.

The works of Jesus (functional Christology) [\[4\]](#)

Regarding the works of Jesus (functional Christology), *The Desire of Ages* seems to hold two strands together, at least as understood in modern discussion. How one weighs those strands determines whether one lands closer to a subordinationist or a Trinitarian reading of Ellen G. White’s theology.

The dependence (subordinationist) strand. A great deal of *Desire of Ages* stresses that Christ, having taken humanity, carried out his earthly ministry in conscious dependence on the Father rather than through an independent exercise of divine prerogative. The wilderness temptation is the clearest statement of this. Ellen White frames Satan’s challenge to turn stones into bread as an invitation to use divine power on his own initiative, and she says Christ deliberately refused that path: his victory had to be won the way a human being’s victory must be won—by faith and reliance on God, not by falling back on his own inherent power. Her point is explicit: Christ set aside the independent use of his power for our sake, so that his obedience could function as our example.

She carries the same emphasis into Gethsemane, portraying Christ’s

agony as a real human dread of separation from the Father, met by prayer and submission rather than by any unilateral exercise of divine strength. Throughout the book she repeatedly has Jesus echo John 5:19 and 5:30—that the Son does nothing of himself, only what he sees the Father doing—and treats this as an accurate description of how the incarnate Christ actually operated, not merely a diplomatic turn of phrase.

The inherent-power strand. Set against this stands the Lazarus chapter, which contains the single most-quoted Christological line in the book: that in Christ was life, “**original, unborrowed, underived**” (DA 530.3). The statement comes in the context of Christ’s claim to have power to lay down his life and to take it up again, and Ellen White is explicit that this life is not granted or sustained by another, as is the case with created beings—it belongs to Christ as it belongs to the Father. This is the statement most often cited to rule out any picture of Jesus as merely performing the works of God, which is why DA 530.3 warrants closer analysis below.

Analysis of DA 530.3. On its face, the phrase seems to settle the question decisively: life in Christ, “**original, unborrowed, underived**,” sounds like a claim to full, self-existent deity, unqualified by any hint of derivation from the Father. But a phrase this weighty deserves more than a glance. Before digging deeper, here is the summary of the analysis:

The decisive move is that Ellen White applies this same phrase—“**original, unborrowed, underived**”—to the life believers receive as a conferred gift (ISM 296.2; ST, June 17, 1897). Since that life is plainly received rather than self-existent, the phrase cannot, by itself, be asserting aseity wherever it appears. It describes a quality of life—complete and non-contingent once possessed—rather than a claim about ultimate origin.

A deeper look. What exactly is Ellen White describing when she uses the word “life” here—the eternal, pre-incarnate existence of the Word, or something narrower, tied to the specific moment at Lazarus’s tomb? Does the context she herself supplies support the sweeping conclusion so often drawn from it, or complicate it? Before the text can bear the theological weight so many have placed on it, we need to look closely at what it actually says, and where. DA 530.3 is quoted in full below, with emphasis supplied.

DA 530.3: Still seeking to give a true direction to her faith, Jesus declared, “I am the resurrection, and the life.” **In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.** “He that hath the Son hath life.” 1 John 5:12. The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life. “He that believeth in Me,” said Jesus, “though he were dead, yet shall

he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?” Christ here looks forward to the time of His second coming. Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead. By His word and His works He declared Himself the Author of the resurrection. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and **asserted His right and power to give eternal life.**

Having set the statement before us in full, the question is no longer what Ellen White wrote but what she meant by it—and that meaning comes into focus once “life, original, unborrowed, underived” is placed alongside her other statements on the same theme.

Ellen White states plainly that “Christ was invested with **the right to give immortality**” ([1SM 302.2](#)). The same idea appears in 1SM 296.2:

[1SM 296.2](#): This life, **original, unborrowed, underived** is not inherent in man. **He can possess it only through Christ.** He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift.

Notably, this statement occurs in the context of the raising of Lazarus, but its logic is not confined to that single episode. It reflects a pattern Ellen White traces throughout the book as a whole: life flowing from the Father, through the Son, and out to all creation, in a continuous circuit of giving and returning. DA 21.2 states this pattern plainly:

[DA 21.2](#): All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: **through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all;** through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.

While DA 530.3 affirms that “in Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived,” this same life—originating from the Father—**is extended to all who believe in Christ** as their personal Savior, as 1SM 296.2 makes clear at greater length:

[1SM 296.2](#): “In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). It is not physical life that is here specified, **but immortality, the life which is exclusively the property of God.** The Word, who was with God, and who was God, had this life. Physical life is something which each individual receives. It is not eternal or immortal; **for**

God, the Life-giver, takes it again. Man has no control over his life. But the life of Christ was unborrowed. No one can take this life from Him. “I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18), He said. **In Him was life, original, unborrowed, underived. This life is not inherent in man. He can possess it only through Christ. He cannot earn it; it is given him as a free gift** if he will believe in Christ as his personal Saviour. “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). This is the open fountain of life for the world. (Emphasis supplied)

As already noted, “**Christ was invested with the right to give immortality**” ([*ISM 302.2*](#)). Compare this with John 5:21, “For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will,” and John 5:26, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.” According to Ellen White, it was the Father who invested—or endowed—Christ “with the right to give immortality.” This immortality is “exclusively the property of God,” yet the believer “can possess it only through Christ . . . as a free gift” ([*ISM 296.2*](#)).

Therefore, in the context of the raising of Lazarus—where the DA 530.3 quotation is found—Jesus was not speaking of his pre-incarnate life, but of his power to give life to Lazarus at that very moment, and, by extension, his power to give eternal life, or immortality. Notice John 11:23–26:

John 11:23-26: Jesus said to her, “Your brother [[Lazarus]] will rise again.” ²⁴ Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, yet shall he live; ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus was not merely telling Martha that her brother would rise again; at that very moment he extended the concept to include eternal life—immortality. This life, “original, unborrowed, underived,” we too can receive by faith in Christ. Thus, apart from the power to bestow it, this quality of life is identical whether it is *ingenerate*, as in the case of the Father; *inherited*, as in the case of the begotten Son; or *conferred* as a conditional, permanent gift on God’s children.

Consider the following statement from Ellen White in support of this point:

[*ST June 17, 1897, par. 14:*](#) If man will cooperate with God by returning willingly to his loyalty, and obeying the commandments, God will

receive him as a son. Through the provision Christ has made by taking the punishment due to man, we may be reinstated in God's favor, being made partakers of the divine nature. If we repent of our transgression, and receive Christ as the Life-giver, our personal Saviour, we become one with him, and our will is brought into harmony with the divine will. **We become partakers of the life of Christ, which is eternal. We derive immortality from God by receiving the life of Christ** for in Christ dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. This life is the mystical union and cooperation of the divine with the human.

This same hope—of a life that will one day measure fully with the life of God—finds its most vivid expression in Ellen White's description of the redeemed at the close of the great controversy:

23LtMs, Ms 92, 1908, par. 40: What a song that will be when the ransomed of the Lord meet at the gate of the holy city, which is thrown back on its glittering hinges, and the nations that have kept His word—His commandments—enter <into the city, the crown of the overcomer is placed upon their heads,> and the golden harps are placed in their hands! All heaven is filled with rich music, and with songs of praise to the Lamb. Saved, everlastingly saved, in the kingdom of glory! **To have a life that measures with the life of God—that is the reward.** Just think of it! “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” [John 3:16.]

Conclusion. The tension between the dependence strand and the inherent-power strand in *The Desire of Ages* dissolves considerably once DA 530.3 is read in its own context rather than as an isolated proof-text. The phrase “**original, unborrowed, underived**” is not, on inspection, a technical statement about Christ's pre-incarnate ontological status offered in competition with the Gethsemane and wilderness picture of constant filial dependence. It occurs specifically in connection with Christ's power to raise Lazarus and, by extension, his authority to grant resurrection and immortality to believers.

The decisive move is that Ellen White applies the identical phrase—“**original, unborrowed, underived**”—to the life believers receive as a conferred gift (ISM 296.2). Since that life is unmistakably received, not self-existent, the phrase itself cannot be doing the work of asserting *aseity* (self-existence) in the strict Trinitarian sense wherever it appears. What it describes is a quality of life—complete, non-contingent once possessed, not requiring ongoing replenishment from an external source—rather than a claim about the ultimate origin of that life. On this reading, the same quality of life can be *ingenerate* in the Father, *given* to the Son (John

5:26, “the Father has granted the Son also to have life in himself”), and *conferred* on the redeemed, without collapsing the distinctions between them.

What is unique to Christ, then, is not merely possessing this life but being invested with the right to bestow it on others (ISM 302.2)—an investiture that comes, notably, from the Father. This is the same grammar of derived authority running through the dependence strand: the Son does nothing of himself, receives all things from the Father, and here specifically receives the prerogative to give life. **The inherent-power strand and the dependence strand turn out to be describing the same structure from two angles**—Christ’s life and authority are exalted, complete, and self-sustaining in their exercise, yet their source and investiture remain the Father’s gift to the Son.

This reading softens DA 530.3’s evidentiary weight as a stand-alone proof of ontological equality or self-existence, since the same descriptive language is shown elsewhere to be compatible with derived life. It does not resolve the subordinationist/Trinitarian question outright, but it does show that the inherent-power texts, properly contextualized, are not straightforwardly in tension with a functionally subordinationist Christology. Both strands can be read as expressions of a Son whose life, power, and authority are real and complete, but consistently granted rather than autonomously possessed.

Salvific perspective (soteriological Christology) [\[d\]](#)

In Christianity, *soteriology* is the study of salvation. It is closely related to *Christology*, which examines the role and significance of Christ as Savior. Salvation—also referred to as deliverance or redemption—is the act of rescuing human beings from sin and its consequences, which include death and separation from God. This entry treats salvation briefly; see the article “[Atonement](#)” for a fuller discussion.

Salvation is freely offered to us by God’s grace through Jesus Christ, whom God presented as a “**mercy seat**” (Greek: *hilastērion*) for our sins (Romans 3:25). The meaning of the term “mercy seat” will be briefly explored below, with a more detailed discussion provided in the *Scripture Notes* section on [Romans 3:25](#).

“mercy seat.” The term “mercy seat” corresponds to the Greek word *hilastērion* (G2435). This term is used twice in the New Testament (Rom. 3:25 and Heb. 9:5). In Hebrews 9:5 the term clearly refers to the *physical* mercy seat within the tabernacle. However, in Romans 3:25, the mercy seat is understood in a *metaphorical* sense, where it refers to Jesus.

Given this understanding, Jesus is both the locus and the means of

atonement, evoking the mercy seat in which the blood was applied (in the Day of Atonement ceremony), resulting in the removal of sin and the public vindication of God's righteousness. That is, Christ was the *true* "mercy seat" of which the sanctuary service in the Day of Atonement was pointing to. This truth was "unveiled" in Christ so that God could demonstrate His righteousness—i.e. His right to show mercy.

God at work. Romans 3:25 tells us that **God, not Jesus**, shows mercy and "in his patient forbearance, released former sins." The following paraphrase of Romans 3:25 may help to clarify:

Romans 3:25-26 (paraphrased): **God gave Jesus** as a way to forgive people's sins through their faith in him. **God can forgive** them because the covenant blood of Jesus **released** them of their sins. God gave Jesus to show that he always does what is right and fair. He was right in the past when he was patient and did not punish people for their sins. And in our own time he still does what is right. **God worked all this out** in a way that allows him to judge people fairly and still make right any person who has faith in Jesus.

Understand that **God is obligated to judge the wicked**, since the wicked have violated his principles of life as codified in His law. God declared that **disobedience to His law of life results in death**, and God will not change His edict because God will not change His principles of life, liberty and freedom. The wicked are destined to face the "wrath of God" because of their entrenched disobedience to His principles. God will by no means clear the guilty. See Exodus 34:7; Romans 1:18; 12:19; Hebrews 10:30-31. When speaking of "law" it is not just the moral laws declared in the Books of Moses and expounded upon by Jesus himself, but also includes the laws of nature that God instituted at Creation.

Justice and mercy. The issue is not with the judgment of the wicked, but **the issue is with God forgiving the repentant**. That is, how can a God of justice also be a God of mercy and forgiveness? It is **Satan** who declares that justice is inconsistent with mercy and that a God of justice cannot also be a God of mercy and forgiveness.

[DA 761.4](#): In the opening of the great controversy, **Satan had declared** that the law of God could not be obeyed, that justice was inconsistent with mercy, and that, **should the law be broken, it would be impossible for the sinner to be pardoned**. Every sin must meet its punishment, urged Satan; and if God should remit the punishment of sin, He would not be a God of truth and justice. When men broke the law of God, and defied His will, Satan exulted. It was proved, he declared, that the law could not be obeyed; **man could not be forgiven**. Because he, after his rebellion, had been banished from

heaven, Satan claimed that the human race must be forever shut out from God's favor. **God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner.**

Yet **God is both just and merciful.** This could only be made possible through Christ. Christ is the means by which God can forgive sins. Christ is the means by which God can show mercy. God forgives freely on the basis of faith, not sacrifice or good works. The death of Jesus was to justify God for doing so. God is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9), because it was made possible through Christ.

Typology of the mercy seat. The sacrificial system detailed in the Old Testament describes how sin is dealt with by God and how the sinner is ultimately released from the condemnation of the law. It had to do with the services on the Day of Atonement in which full atonement was made for sins.

- [PP 357.5](#): **The blood of Christ**, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, **was not to cancel the sin**; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement; so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but **it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.**
- [PP 355.5](#): Important truths concerning the atonement were taught the people by this yearly service. In the sin offerings presented during the year, a substitute had been accepted in the sinner's stead; but **the blood of the victim had not made full atonement for the sin. It had only provided a means by which the sin was transferred to the sanctuary.** By the offering of blood, the sinner acknowledged the authority of the law, confessed the guilt of his transgression, and expressed his faith in Him who was to take away the sin of the world; but he was not entirely released from the condemnation of the law. **On the Day of Atonement the high priest, having taken an offering for the congregation, went into the most holy place with the blood and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat, above the tables of the law.** Thus the claims of the law, which demanded the life of the sinner, were satisfied. Then in his character of mediator the priest took the sins upon himself, and, leaving the sanctuary, he bore with him the burden of Israel's guilt. At the door of the tabernacle he laid his hands upon the head of the scapegoat and confessed over him **"all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat."** And as the goat bearing these sins was sent away, they were, with

him, regarded as forever separated from the people. Such was the service performed “unto the example and shadow of heavenly things.” Hebrews 8:5.

Throughout the year, the sins of the people were *transferred* by the offering of blood sacrifices to the sanctuary. Then, on the Day of Atonement the sanctuary was “cleansed” by a service that again *transferred* the sins of the people to the high priest and then to a “scapegoat” which was then released into the wilderness to die. This symbolism will meet its fulfillment at the end of time with the destruction of Satan. That is, Satan is the scapegoat represented in this service. **It is upon Satan that the guilt is ultimately placed and it is Satan who will ultimately pay the penalty for the sins of the saved.**

PP 358.2: Since Satan is the originator of sin, the direct instigator of all the sins that caused the death of the Son of God, justice demands that Satan shall suffer the final punishment. Christ’s work for the redemption of men and the purification of the universe from sin will be closed **by the removal of sin from the heavenly sanctuary and the placing of these sins upon Satan, who will bear the final penalty.** So in the typical service, the yearly round of ministration closed with the purification of the sanctuary, and the confessing of the sins on the head of the scapegoat.

This transference of guilt—described as “the placing of these sins upon Satan”—will occur at the conclusion of Christ’s ministry in heaven as our High Priest. At the end of this symbolic service, represented by the Day of Atonement, Christ will lay aside his priestly robes and assume his kingly attire as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will then return to the earth for the second time to gather his people and take them home.

Robe of righteousness. The mercy seat (Hebrew: *kapporeth*, the cover of the ark of the covenant) represented two kinds of cover. The first cover extends mercy in a probationary sense. That is, man is given time to repent and his sinfulness is not immediately judged.

GC 36.1: It is **the restraining power of God** that prevents mankind from passing fully under the control of Satan. The disobedient and unthankful have great reason for gratitude for **God’s mercy and long-suffering** in holding in check the cruel, malignant power of the evil one. But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed.

The second cover is described as a **robe of righteousness**.

COL 311.3: Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God’s presence. **This covering, the**

robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul. “I counsel thee,” He says, “to buy of Me ... white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear.” Revelation 3:18.

The problem with human sinfulness lies in man’s inability to change himself. Only God can transform the human heart, and He does so when the sinner willingly submits to Him (see Psalm 51:10; Acts 15:8–9; Heb. 10:16; 2 Cor. 3:17–18; 2 Cor. 4:6–7; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 3:16–19).

God accomplishes this transformation through His Son and on the basis of His Son’s work. Through faith in God’s Son—by receiving him into the heart and mind—man is empowered by God to live a new life, that is, the life of His Son. (See Galatians 2:20.)

Why Jesus died ^[d]

The New Testament presents the death of Jesus not as a tragic accident but as the climactic, divinely intended act within God’s redemptive plan. Scripture portrays the cross through multiple theological lenses—covenantal, sacrificial, representative, victorious, revelatory, and eschatological. These perspectives are not competing theories; rather, they are complementary dimensions of a single saving event.

The discussion below is organized into major theological categories, with each reason developed and integrated into the broader biblical narrative. This material is adapted from [*Atonement and Reconciliation*](#) by Kevin George (Appendix A).

I. CHRIST AS THE NEW ADAM AND REPRESENTATIVE OF HUMANITY

1. **To take Adam’s place as a faithful man** (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22, 45–49; Phil. 2:8–11). Jesus’ death fulfills the role of the Last Adam. Where Adam failed in obedience and brought death, Christ obeyed unto death and brought life. Paul frames this in covenantal and ontological terms: humanity’s destiny is bound to its representative head. By submitting fully to God’s will, even to death on a cross, Jesus reverses Adamic disobedience and inaugurates a new humanity marked by faithfulness, righteousness, and resurrection life.

This representative obedience is not merely moral but cosmic: Christ’s humiliation and exaltation establish him as Lord over all creation. His death, therefore, is essential to the restoration of humanity’s vocation.

II. JUSTIFIED AND RECONCILED TO GOD

2. **To set us right by faith** (cf. Gal. 2:21; 2 Cor. 5:14–15). Justification

(i.e. “being righted” or “being rightened”) by faith flows directly from the cross. If righteousness could come through law-keeping, Christ’s death would be unnecessary. Instead, Jesus’ faithful self-giving establishes the ground upon which believers are declared righteous and liberated to live for him who died and was raised.

3. **To reconcile us to God** (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Eph. 2:13–16; Rom. 5:6–10; Col. 1:19–22). The cross addresses humanity’s alienation from God. Sin produces enmity, guilt, and separation; Christ’s death removes these barriers. Paul describes reconciliation as God’s own initiative, accomplished through the cross, not merely announced by it. The hostility between God and humanity—and between Jew and Gentile—is decisively dealt with in Christ’s crucified body.

Reconciliation is both relational and ontological: believers are brought into peace with God and reconstituted as a new creation.

III. ATONEMENT, SIN, AND MORAL TRANSFORMATION

4. **To stop sin** (cf. Matt. 26:27–28; Mark 10:45; Rom. 6:6–14; 1 Pet. 2:24; Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:14; Rev. 1:5). Christ’s death deals decisively with sin’s guilt, power, and defilement. As a ransom and sacrificial offering, Jesus bears sins in his body so that believers might die to sin and live to righteousness. The cross not only enables God to forgive sin but also to break its dominion, and enable ethical transformation.
5. **To triumph over the power of sin** (cf. Rom. 6:10–11). Because Christ died to sin once for all, those who are united to him participate in that victory. The cross establishes a new mode of existence: believers are no longer enslaved to sin but alive to God. It provides not only forgiveness of sins, but also empowerment to overcome sin.

IV. COVENANT, LAW, AND PRIESTHOOD

6. **To supersede the Mosaic law with a blood covenant** (cf. Eph. 2:13–17; Gal. 3:13). Jesus’ death inaugurates the new covenant promised in Scripture. By becoming a curse for us, Christ exhausts the law’s condemning power and establishes peace. The Mosaic law is not abolished arbitrarily but fulfilled and transcended through the self-giving obedience of Christ.
7. **To become our High Priest** (cf. Heb. 10:19–22). Jesus’ death qualifies him as the definitive High Priest. Unlike the Levitical system, his sacrifice is once-for-all, granting believers direct access to God. The torn veil is both literal and symbolic: Christ’s body becomes the new and living way into God’s presence.

V. VICTORY OVER EVIL, DEATH, AND THE POWERS

8. **To defeat the powers of evil** (cf. Col. 2:15). The cross is paradoxically a scene of triumph. By submitting to death, Christ disarms the spiritual powers that wield accusation and fear. What appears as defeat is revealed as victory.
9. **To defeat death** (cf. Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:26; 2 Tim. 1:10). Death, the final enemy, is rendered powerless through Christ's death and resurrection. Death no longer has dominion because Christ passed through it and emerged victorious.
10. **To crush the serpent's head** (cf. Gen. 3:15). The cross fulfills the *protoevangelium*. Jesus' death is the mortal wound inflicted upon the serpent. Though the Messiah is bruised, evil is decisively judged and doomed.

VI. RESURRECTION AND NEW CREATION

11. **To become the firstborn from the dead** (cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18). Christ's death leads inexorably to resurrection. As the firstborn, Jesus establishes the pattern and guarantee of the resurrection of God's people.
12. **To bring resurrection** (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–22). The cross cannot be separated from resurrection. Jesus' death plants the seed of new creation; his resurrection is the firstfruits of a renewed humanity.

VII. REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE AND MORAL EXAMPLE

13. **To express God's love** (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). The cross is the supreme revelation of divine love. God does not love humanity abstractly but concretely, giving his Son while we were still sinners. Love is defined by self-giving sacrifice.
14. **To be our Example** (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:4–10). Jesus' death models humility, obedience, and self-sacrificial love. While the cross is far more than an example, it is never less. Believers are called to embody the cruciform life shaped by Christ's self-emptying love.

VIII. MISSION AND DRAWING HUMANITY TO GOD

15. **To draw others to himself** (cf. John 12:32–33). The lifted-up Christ draws all people to himself. The cross becomes the focal point of God's mission, revealing both judgment and mercy, and inviting the world into reconciliation.

Conclusion. The death of Jesus is the theological center of the Christian faith, integrating themes of covenant, sacrifice, victory, love, and new creation. Each purpose listed above illuminates a distinct facet of the

cross, yet all converge in the singular act by which God restores creation through the faithful obedience of the Son. The cross is thus not merely the means of salvation but the revelation of who God is and what it means to be human in Christ.

Several themes (law, sin, powers, death) are not abolished abstractly but are exhausted, fulfilled, and transformed through Christ's obedient death. The cross functions as the hinge-point of creation, covenant, and eschatology—Adam → Israel → Messiah → New Creation—rather than merely a solution to individual guilt.

Agency concept [\[e\]](#)

Representative authority. In the ancient Jewish context, the concept of agency (Hebrew: *shaliach*) was well established. A *shaliach* functioned as a legally authorized representative who acted fully on behalf of another. In many cases, the agent's actions were treated as if they were performed by the sender himself. This principle is often summarized in rabbinic thought as: "*The agent of a person is as the person himself.*"

This concept becomes especially relevant when examining the actions of Jesus in the Gospels. Many of his words and deeds can be understood within this framework of representative authority—acting on behalf of God rather than as God Himself.

Authority to forgive sins. A key passage often discussed in this regard is the healing of the paralytic.



In Mark 2:1–12 (cf. Matthew 9:3 and Luke 5:21), Jesus tells a paralyzed

man, “Your sins are forgiven.” The scribes internally object, saying, “Why does this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7).

It is important to observe that this statement is not presented as a teaching of Jesus, but as a *challenge* raised by his opponents. The narrative does not explicitly affirm their theological assumption; rather, it sets up a confrontation.

Instead of correcting or affirming their premise directly, Jesus responds by demonstrating authority: “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” (Mark 2:10). The key term here is *authority*. Authority, by definition, is something that can be granted or delegated. The passage, therefore, emphasizes function rather than ontology—what Jesus is authorized to do, not what he is by nature.

Prophetic and priestly parallels. This idea is not without precedent in the Hebrew Scriptures. Prophets and priests frequently declared God’s forgiveness without being considered divine themselves.

For example, in 2 Samuel 12:13, the prophet Nathan tells David: “The Lord has taken away your sin.” Nathan does not forgive David independently; rather, he announces God’s forgiveness as His authorized representative. Similarly, under the Mosaic Law, priests played a formal role in declaring individuals clean or forgiven after prescribed sacrifices (e.g., Leviticus 4–5). Their declarations were authoritative, yet clearly derived from God.

These examples demonstrate that declaring forgiveness was already part of a recognized framework of delegated authority.

The disciples’ authority to forgive. The concept of delegated authority becomes even clearer in the teachings of Jesus himself. In the Gospel of John 20:23, Jesus tells his disciples: “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*”

If the act of forgiving sins inherently proves deity, then this statement would imply that the disciples themselves are divine. However, such a conclusion is not drawn within the New Testament. Instead, the more consistent interpretation is that forgiveness is being exercised through *delegated authority*.

This aligns naturally with the agency framework: the disciples act as authorized representatives of Christ, who himself acts as the authorized representative of God.

The miracle: validation of authority, not ontology. The healing of the paralytic serves a specific purpose within the narrative. Jesus explicitly states that the miracle is performed: “so that you may know that the Son

of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10).

The miracle functions as *evidence* of authority. It validates Jesus’ role and commission, not his metaphysical identity. The focus remains on authorization rather than essence.

Authority given by God. This interpretation is reinforced by how the crowd responds. In Matthew 9:8, after witnessing the event, the people: “*glorified God, who had given such authority to men.*” Notably, the crowd does not conclude that Jesus is God. Instead, they recognize that God has *granted* this authority to a human being. Their reaction reflects a natural understanding within a Jewish framework of agency.

Broader biblical pattern of delegated authority. The theme of delegated authority appears throughout the New Testament:

- In Matthew 28:18, Jesus says: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been *given* to me.”
- In John 5:26–27, Jesus states that the Father “has *granted* the Son to have life in himself” and “has given him authority to execute judgment.”
- In Acts 2:22, Peter describes Jesus as: “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him.”

These passages consistently present Jesus’ authority as something received from God, not as something inherently possessed independently.

The core theological question. The debate ultimately hinges on how one interprets the nature of Jesus’ authority:

- A *Trinitarian* perspective argues: Only God can forgive sins by nature; therefore, Jesus forgiving sins implies that he is God.
- A *nontrinitarian* perspective responds: God alone is the ultimate *source* of forgiveness, but He can—and does—delegate the authority to declare or enact that forgiveness through His appointed agents.

Within the framework of Jewish agency, the latter interpretation provides a historically grounded explanation for how Jesus can exercise divine prerogatives without being ontologically identical with God.

Christ's divinity [\[e\]](#)

There are at least six dominant views on the divinity of Christ as follows:

1. **Trinitarian.** Jesus is God in “Being” yet distinct in “Person”. While Jesus is God—like the Father and the Holy Spirit—he also functions as a *metaphorical* Son—not literally a Son, but acting like one. Also, while there are three Gods, they are one in “Substance” (*homoousia*). This is all discussed in detail in the article, “[Trinity doctrine examined](#).”
2. **Tri-theistic.** Jesus is one of three *distinct* Gods: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the Mormon view, discussed at the end of the article, “[Daughters of Babylon](#).” Effectively, tri-theism is a *poly-theistic* view of God.
3. **Modalist.** One God in three *modes* through time. Jesus was the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the New Testament, and is now the Holy Spirit.
4. **Unitarian.** Jesus was a 100% human being, who was filled with divine inspiration, a prophet with a special mission from God. Some varying views see Jesus as a demi-god (a being between God and humanity), others as the created archangel, Michael, becoming a man.
5. **Greco-Roman.** Jesus is a deified hero (a “god-man”) like Hercules, Achilles, and Perseus.
6. **Arian.** Jesus is the *literal* begotten Son of God, subordinate to the Father. (Already discussed in “ontological Christology” earlier.)

Among these perspectives, the Trinitarian position on the divinity of Christ remains the dominant view within Christendom. However, as discussed in the article, “[Trinity doctrine examined](#),” this position is rejected in favor of the Arian interpretation. The following discussion therefore proceeds from the Arian standpoint.

Biblical evidence. There are a handful of instances in the Bible where Jesus could be interpreted to mean “God”. They include (all quoted from *The Chiastic Word* translation):

- [John 1:1](#): In the beginning was the word and the word was of God and the word was divine.
- [John 1:18](#): No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.
- [John 20:28](#): In response Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

- [Romans 9:5](#): To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, came the Christ. (God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.)
- [Titus 2:13](#): as we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of our great God and Savior's glory—Jesus Christ,
- [Hebrews 1:8](#): but of the Son: "Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever; the scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness.
- [2 Peter 1:1](#): Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith as precious as ours because of the righteousness *shown by* our God and *our* Savior Jesus Christ:
- [1 John 5:20](#): And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true [*by being*] in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

My commentary on these verses, which can be accessed through the provided links, argues that they do not refer to Jesus as "God," but should be interpreted differently on a case-by-case basis.

"God the Son." The term **"God the Son"** does not appear anywhere in the Bible and is never used by any biblical writer, including Jesus himself. Instead, Jesus most often referred to himself as the **"Son of Man"** (over 80 times in the NT) and, was referred to by others as the **"Son of God"** (e.g. Matthew 14:33; 16:16; Luke 22:70; John 1:49; 11:27).

- **"Son of God."** This phrase appears in both the Old and New Testaments. It affirms both relationship and revelation of Jesus being the Son of the Father.
- **"God the Son."** This phrase does not appear verbatim in the Bible, but was developed centuries later by the church to express the doctrine of the Trinity.

The term "God the Son" presupposes a Trinitarian framework in which it refers to the second Person of the Trinity. As such, it functions as a doctrinal title affirming the Trinitarian belief in Jesus' full deity and co-eternity with the Father. However, it is a theological formulation of the human mind and is not a title found explicitly in Scripture.

HOWEVER, as already stated, the term **"Son of God"** is a biblical expression, appearing many times throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The phrase **"Son of God"** carries different shades of meaning depending on context. In the Old Testament, "son of God" could refer to Israel as a nation (Ex. 4:22), or the Davidic king (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7).

In the New Testament, it is a Messianic title, affirming that Jesus is the begotten Son of God—the Father’s appointed representative, the Messiah, and heir of all things.

The Messiah. The term “The Messiah” in reference to Christ means “the anointed one,” is a title for a divinely appointed savior who was prophesied in the Old Testament to be a prophet, priest, and king. Christians believe Jesus of Nazareth is this promised Messiah, who was **anointed by God** to be the ultimate savior and king, to redeem humanity from sin through his death and resurrection.

Anointed by God. To be anointed meant to be chosen by God for a specific role or task. The Persian king, Cyrus, was anointed by God for the role of restoring God’s people to their land (Isaiah 45:1). Aaron and his descendants were anointed to serve God as priests (Exodus 28:41; 30:30). King Saul was anointed by God to be Israel’s first king. David and his descendants were selected and designated—i.e. anointed by God (through human agents)—to be king. This is the essence of what Christ, The Messiah, means: To be the God chosen, the God designated, the God equipped *human* prophet, priest or king. To believe that Jesus is the Christ, means to believe that Jesus is a human being anointed by God.

By definition, the Christ—the Messiah—cannot be God, because it is God who anointed him. The Christ cannot be God, because the New Testament tells us that the Christ was put to death by crucifixion, and God cannot die. Jesus is **the Christ of God**, never the Christ who is God.

- *Luke 9:20:* He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “**The Christ of God.**”
- *Revelation 11:15b:* “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord **and of his Christ**, and he will reign forever and ever.

The Father’s testimony. How do we know that Jesus was not *merely* a man anointed by God as others were in the Old Testament? The answer lies in the Father’s own testimony. Scripture records this testimony in several places—most prominently at Jesus’ baptism and at the Transfiguration—when a voice from heaven declares, “This is my beloved Son.” The Father further bore witness through the miraculous works Jesus performed and, ultimately, through his resurrection from the dead. Here are the Scripture references:

1. The Father’s testimony at Jesus’ baptism.

- *Matthew 3:16-17:* After being baptized...a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

- *Mark 1:10-11*: Immediately as he was coming up from the water...a voice came from heaven: "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."
- *Luke 3:21-22*: Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus had also been baptized...a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased."
- *John 1:32-34*: And John testified, saying, "I saw the spirit descending from heaven in the form a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes in holy spirit.' ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

2. The Father's testimony at the Transfiguration.

- *Matthew 17:5*: ...and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to him!"
- *Mark 9:7*: ...and a voice came from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him!"
- *Luke 9:35*: Then a voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him!"
- *2 Peter 1:17-18*: For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice came to him from the Majestic Glory: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." ¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

3. The Father's testimony through Jesus' miraculous works.

- *John 5:36-37*: But I have a testimony greater than John's. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, testify that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You have neither heard his voice at any time nor seen his form.
- *John 10:37-38*: If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me. ³⁸ But if I do them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him."
- *Acts 2:22*: Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know.

4. The Father's testimony in the Resurrection.

- *Romans 1:3-4*: concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh ⁴ and who was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,
- *Acts 2:32-33*: This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³ Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he has poured out this that you now see and hear.
- *1 Thessalonians 1:10*: and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

The apostle John draws his first letter to a close (in 1 John 5) by presenting the ultimate ground of Christian faith—the divine testimony about Jesus Christ. Human testimony can persuade, but the testimony of God is decisive. God Himself bears witness that eternal life is found only in His Son. Belief in this testimony is not merely intellectual assent but participation in divine life itself. To reject it is to deny God's truthfulness; to receive it is to possess life. These verses summarize the heart of the gospel: life comes through faith in the Son of God.

1 John 5:9-12: If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified about his Son. ¹⁰ He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has testified concerning his Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

The verse, “For God so loved the world that **He gave** His only begotten Son” (John 3:16), testifies that the Father had an only begotten Son **to give**; and that, being of God—of His own divine substance—he was truly divine.

Divinity cannot die. Yet **divinity**, by definition, cannot die. The question of how Christ—being divine—could die on the cross, despite the assertion that “divinity cannot die,” was discussed earlier in the section titled “*The nature of Jesus (ontological Christology)*.” Here again, the predominant orthodox view of Christ's *hypostatic union* is set aside in favor of the Arian perspective.

Essential attributes of God (or: a fully divine Person). According to the Bible and Christian theology, the following are commonly understood to be essential attributes of God:

1. **Perfect knowledge (*omniscience*)**—knowing all truths.
2. **Perfect goodness**—possessing perfect moral character, which includes both impeccability and immunity to temptation (“God cannot be tempted,” James 1:13).
3. **Omnipotence**—possessing the highest and greatest kind of power.
4. **Ultimate Creator**—the source of all things. Revelation 4:11 states: “For you created all things, and by your will they came into existence and were created.”
5. **Necessary existence**—God’s non-existence is impossible. This implies that God is uncreated and eternal.
6. **Aseity**—*literally* “from oneself”; the quality of existing independently and without dependence on any external cause. God is the ultimate cause (or first cause) of all things. “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist” (1 Corinthians 8:6).
7. **Immortality**—incapable, by nature, of losing divine life.
8. **Eternity**—having always existed, existing now, and always existing in the future—“who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8).
9. **Omnipresent**—through his spirit, God is present everywhere.
10. **Worthy of worship**—since all created beings owe their existence to Him.
11. **Ultimate authority**—not being under the authority of any other being.

From the above list, it should be evident that the Father possesses all of these attributes. The Arian perspective, however, holds that the Son possesses many—but not all—of these divine attributes. Since the Son is viewed as God’s ultimate “agent,” he could not be the ultimate Creator or possess ultimate authority in the same sense as the Father.

Regarding “perfect goodness,” Arians also point to passages stating that Christ was “made perfect” (Hebrews 5:9) and that “although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). As discussed earlier in this article, Jesus’ temptations were understood to be genuine. Therefore, Jesus was not essentially or intrinsically “perfectly good” in the same sense as the Father, since he experienced *real* temptation during his earthly life, whereas God Himself cannot be tempted with evil (cf. James 1:13). This helps explain Jesus’ own testimony that “There is none good but one, that is, God” in Mark 10:18, KJV (cf. Matt. 19:17; Luke 18:19).

Key takeaways [\[e\]](#)

The following are the key takeaways from this article:

1. **Three branches of Christology.** Christology is analyzed through three lenses—ontological (Christ’s nature), functional (Christ’s works), and soteriological (Christ’s saving role).
2. **Rejection of Chalcedon, miaphysitism, and adoptionism.** The article rejects the Chalcedonian hypostatic union, Oriental Orthodox miaphysitism, and adoptionism as inadequate accounts of Christ’s nature.
3. **Sin terminology defined.** The article distinguishes “sinful,” “sinless,” “sinfulness,” and “sinlessness” as a framework for describing Christ’s relationship to sin.
4. **Jesus had a sinful nature but lived sinlessly.** Jesus is described as being born with a fallen, tempted human nature yet never yielding to sin, remaining in a continual state of sinlessness.
5. **Virgin birth as a surrogate creation event.** Mary’s pregnancy is presented as a unique, supernatural “surrogate” creation rather than a natural biological process.
6. **Jesus had a “born again” divine nature from birth.** Rather than a pre-Adamic sinless nature or a post-Adamic sin-dominated nature, Jesus is said to have possessed from birth the same “born again” (or “born from above”) divine nature available to believers.
7. **Believers can share Christ’s victory over sin.** The article argues believers can partake of the same character qualities Christ had—no inclination, propensity, tendency, or corruption toward sin.
8. **Critique of “100% God, 100% man” language.** The common formulation that Jesus is “100% God and 100% man” is rejected as logically incoherent and absent from both Scripture and EGW writings.
9. **Two natures shared by Christ and believers.** Christ’s possession of both a human and divine nature is presented as the same condition any “born again” believer experiences, with Christ’s distinction being that he never let the human nature override the divine.
10. **Christ’s death carried a genuine risk to his existence.** The article argues Christ’s deity was conditional on his faithfulness, so had he sinned, he would have lost his divinity and ceased to exist forever.
11. **DA 530.3 tied to the Lazarus miracle.** The famous phrase “life, original, unborrowed, underived” is argued to refer specifically to Christ’s power to raise Lazarus and grant resurrection, not to an abstract claim of pre-incarnate self-existence.

12. **Same “unborrowed” language applied to believers.** Because Ellen White also describes believers’ *conferred* life as “original, unborrowed, underived,” the article concludes the phrase cannot by itself prove Christ’s independent self-existence.
13. **Christ’s authority to give life is derived from the Father.** The article resolves the two Desire of Ages strands by concluding Christ’s power and authority, though complete and real, were granted to him by the Father rather than autonomously possessed.
14. **Salvation offered through Christ as the “mercy seat”.** Salvation is described as God’s free gift through Jesus, whom Romans 3:25 presents as the *hilastērion*, or “mercy seat,” for sin.
15. **Justice and mercy reconciled in Christ.** The article frames Christ’s atoning work as the means by which God can be both perfectly just and perfectly merciful, countering Satan’s claim that the two are incompatible.
16. **Day of Atonement typology and the scapegoat.** The Old Testament sanctuary service is presented as a type in which sin is ultimately transferred to Satan, symbolized by the scapegoat, at the close of Christ’s heavenly ministry.
17. **Robe of righteousness distinguished from probationary mercy.** The article distinguishes God’s temporary, probationary forbearance toward sinners from the permanent “robe of righteousness” Christ provides to the repentant.
18. **Fifteen reasons Jesus died.** The article catalogs fifteen theological purposes for Christ’s death, organized under themes such as representative obedience, justification, atonement, covenant, victory over evil, resurrection, and divine love.
19. **The cross as the hinge-point of biblical history.** Christ’s death is presented as uniting the themes of covenant, sacrifice, victory, and new creation across the arc of Adam, Israel, Messiah, and new creation.
20. **The Jewish concept of agency (*shaliach*).** The article introduces the rabbinic principle that an authorized representative’s actions are legally treated as the sender’s own, as a framework for interpreting Jesus’ words and deeds.
21. **Jesus’ authority to forgive sins as delegated, not inherent.** The healing of the paralytic is interpreted as demonstrating Jesus’ delegated authority to forgive sins rather than proving his ontological deity.
22. **Old Testament precedent for declaring forgiveness.** Figures like

the prophet Nathan and the Levitical priests declared God's forgiveness as authorized representatives without themselves being considered divine.

23. **Disciples also received authority to forgive sins.** Jesus' statement in John 20:23 giving his disciples authority to forgive sins is used to argue that forgiving sins does not, by itself, prove divinity.
24. **The miracle validated authority, not divine ontology.** According to the article, the crowd's response in Matthew 9:8—glorifying God for giving "such authority to men"—shows the miracle was understood as evidence of delegated authority, not proof Jesus was God.
25. **Six major views on Christ's divinity.** The article surveys six positions on Christ's divinity: Trinitarian, Tri-theistic, Modalist, Unitarian, Greco-Roman, and Arian.
26. **The article adopts the Arian (subordinationist) view.** Rejecting the Trinitarian position as dominant but mistaken, the article proceeds from an Arian understanding of Christ as subordinate to the Father.
27. **"God the Son" is not a biblical phrase.** The article notes that "God the Son" never appears in Scripture, while "Son of God" is a recurring, biblically grounded title with messianic significance.
28. **Messiah understood as one anointed by God, not God himself.** Because the Messiah is defined as one anointed and appointed by God, the article argues Christ cannot logically be identified as God, since God cannot die or anoint himself.
29. **The Father's testimony validates the Son.** The article surveys the Father's repeated testimony to Jesus at his baptism, the Transfiguration, through his miracles, and in the resurrection as the basis for recognizing him as the Son of God.
30. **List of eleven essential attributes of God.** The article outlines eleven attributes traditionally ascribed to God—such as omniscience, omnipotence, aseity, and necessary existence—as a basis for comparing the Father and the Son.
31. **The Son possesses many, but not all, divine attributes.** Under the Arian view presented, the Son shares many of the Father's attributes but not ultimate authority or aseity, since he functions as God's appointed agent.
32. **Christ's temptation used as evidence against inherent perfect goodness.** The article cites Hebrews' statements that Christ was "made perfect" through suffering and genuinely tempted as evidence he was not intrinsically "perfectly good" in the same sense as the Father.

► C. Atonement

Atonement is the covenantal and relational work by which God addresses sin in order to restore humanity to fellowship with Himself. This work is accomplished through Jesus Christ in both his once-for-all sacrificial death on the cross and his continuing high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. In Seventh-day Adventist theology, atonement is understood as a comprehensive process that includes forgiveness, moral renewal, and final vindication (judgment).

Drawing on the typology of the Day of Atonement, Christ's present ministry involves an investigative judgment and a work of cleansing—not only of the heavenly sanctuary (Godward) but also of His people (manward)—bringing sin to its final resolution. Thus, atonement extends beyond pardon to include the complete eradication of sin and the full restoration of God's image in humanity. Ultimately, it results in a people who live in harmony with God and reflect His character before the universe.

The Adventist doctrine of atonement stands in contrast to the doctrine of **Penal Substitutionary Atonement** (PSA), as developed in Reformed Protestant theology. PSA interprets atonement primarily in legal and punitive terms, emphasizing the satisfaction of divine justice through the payment of sin's penalty. A critical evaluation of this doctrine is presented in the separate resource article "[*Penal Substitution*](#)," where it is argued to be both anti-atonement and unbiblical.

It is also essential to situate atonement within the broader biblical framework of **covenant**. In Scripture, atonement is not an isolated mechanism but functions within the relational context established by God's covenants with His people. This connection is explored in detail in the resource article "[*The Two Covenants*](#)," which provides important theological context for understanding how atonement operates within the unfolding narrative of redemption.

Atonement and reconciliation. The terms *atonement* and *reconciliation* are closely related but not identical. They describe two complementary aspects of the same saving work of Christ. **Atonement** addresses the *problem*—sin, guilt, and divine justice—while **reconciliation** describes the *result*: restored relationship, peace with God, and covenant renewal. The relationship between the two may be summarized as **cause and effect** (atonement → reconciliation).

Executive summary. The topics covered in this article are:

- What does “atonement” address?
- Linguistic development of “atonement”
- [Atonement in the Bible](#)
- [Atonement as “covering” typology](#)
- [Christ died “for” our sins](#)
- [Atonement in Romans](#)
- [Faith only \(*sola fide*\)](#)
- [The 1888 Message: Righteousness by Faith](#)
- [Dual Atonement in Adventism](#)
- [The Law and the Atonement](#)
- [Key takeaways](#)

What does “atonement” address? [\[¶\]](#)

At its core, a biblical theology of atonement addresses a single, integrative question: *Why* did Jesus have to die, and *how* does God, in a manner that is faithful to His covenant, just in His judgment, and gracious in His mercy, restore the broken relationship between Himself and humanity through the death of His Son?

Derivative questions. This central question unfolds into several closely related and derivative *sub-questions*:

1. **What is the fundamental problem that requires atonement?**
It is not just “individual guilt” but enslavement to powers (sin, death, exile).
2. **How can a holy God dwell with a sinful people without ceasing to be holy?** What are the means of reconciliation God provided that did not lower his holiness?
3. **What does God require to remain righteous while forgiving?**
That is, how can justice and mercy meet without contradiction.
4. **How do sacrifice, blood, and death actually “work”?** Not merely *that* sacrifices forgive, but **why**.
5. **Who ultimately performs the atonement?** Is it solely God-given, or does man play a part?
6. **How does Jesus’s death make sense within Israel’s story?**
What story is the cross the culmination of?

7. **What kind of people does atonement create?** Importantly, biblical theology refuses to stop at forgiveness, since:

- a. reconciled people become reconcilers
- b. cleansed people become holy dwellings
- c. justified people live out justice

So the question becomes: **What sort of life is now possible because atonement has occurred?**

In one sentence. A biblical theology of atonement ultimately tries to answer:

How God, in faithfulness to his covenant and holiness, overcomes sin, impurity, exile, and death in order to dwell with his people—fulfilled in the work of Christ as the decisive act of reconciliation.

Linguistic development of “atonement” [\[e\]](#)

The linguistic origin: “at-one-ment”. The English word “atonement” is not a direct borrowing from Greek or Latin. Instead, it is a native English construction, formed from the phrase: “**at one**” + **-ment**. Its basic sense is therefore “**the state of being at one**,” that is, reconciliation, harmony, or restored unity. This is important because it shows that *atonement originally described a relational outcome*, not a legal transaction or a penal mechanism.

John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384). John Wycliffe’s **Middle English Bible** (late 14th century) predates the word *atonement* in its later technical sense, but he laid the **conceptual groundwork**. Wycliffe commonly translated Latin terms like *reconciliatio* using English phrases such as: “*to make accord*,” “*to be made one*,” and “*peace made betwixt God and man*”. Although Wycliffe did not consistently use the noun **atonement**, his translation philosophy emphasized: reconciliation, restored fellowship, and unity between God and humanity. These ideas later crystallized linguistically into the single word *atonement*.

William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536). William Tyndale is generally credited with **introducing the English word “atonement”** into biblical theology. In his English translation of the New Testament (1526), Tyndale used **atonement** to translate the Greek word: *katallagē*—meaning *reconciliation*. Example: Romans 5:11 (Tyndale, 1526), “We also joy in God by the means of our Lord Jesus Christ, **by whom we have received the atonement.**” This is crucial: Later English versions (e.g., KJV, ESV, NIV) translate *katallagē* as “**reconciliation**”. Tyndale chose “**atonement**” to express *being made at one with God*.

Tyndale explicitly defined the word himself: “Atonement is that thou shouldest be **at one** with God.” For Tyndale, atonement meant: (a) the **ending of enmity**; (b) the **restoration of relationship**; and (c) **peace between God and humanity**. It did **not** primarily mean: (a) payment of a legal debt; (b) transfer of punishment; or (c) satisfaction of divine wrath by penal exchange.

Shift in meaning after Tyndale. Over time—especially in post-Reformation scholastic theology—the word **atonement** was increasingly used as a **technical umbrella term** covering: satisfaction, substitution, penal categories, and propitiation. Ironically, this later usage **moves away from Tyndale’s original sense**. By the time of the KJV (1611): *Atonement* appears only once in the NT (Romans 5:11). The OT usage (e.g., Leviticus) translates Hebrew *kaphar*, which more literally means *covering* or *purg-ing*. Thus, one English word began to carry **multiple theological frame-works**, some of which were not present in its original coinage.

Summary comparison

Figure	Contribution	Meaning emphasized
Wycliffe	Conceptual ground-work	Peace, accord, reconciliation
Tyndale	Coined “atonement”	“At-one-ment”—restored unity
Later theology	Systematization	Penal, legal, satisfaction models

Why this matters theologically. This historical background is significant because:

- The **original English term** points toward **relational reconciliation**.
- Penal and transactional meanings are **later theological overlays**.
- This helps explain why some theologians argue that **“atonement ≠ penal substitution”**, even if penal substitution is one interpretive model of Christ’s saving work.

Atonement in the Bible [\[e\]](#)

Atonement vs. forgiveness. In the Bible, *atonement* and *forgiveness* are not the same thing. The end result of **atonement** is *reconciliation*—the restoration of *at-one-ness* (fellowship and relationship) with God. It refers to the means by which the breach in the relationship between God and humanity is addressed and healed.

Forgiveness is an essential component of atonement leading to reconciliation, but it is not synonymous with it. Forgiveness is connected to turning away from sin, a response the Bible calls *repentance*. It also involves *confession*, as expressed in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us.” Reconciliation *follows* repentance and forgiveness, though in lived experience these realities may occur simultaneously when a person seeks both forgiveness and restoration.

Atonement in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, *sacrifices* were made as part of the atonement process with God. In this sacrificial system: (a) atonement occurs at the **altar**, (b) it is **ritual and covenantal**, and (c) it restores **access to God’s presence**.

In no biblical passage are sacrifices described as a *payment*^[a] for sin. Nor does Scripture portray the suffering or death of the animal as the atoning act itself, or depict the animal—either literally or symbolically—as absorbing God’s wrath against sin. Likewise, the blood of the sacrifice was not applied to the individual seeking atonement. Rather, the ^[b]**blood was applied** to the **altar** only (e.g., burnt, peace, and trespass offerings—Lev. 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2) and, in certain rituals, to the **veil or the holy places** within the tabernacle (e.g., sin offerings and Day of Atonement—Lev. 4:3-12; 4:13-21; ch.16).

On the Day of Atonement, accumulated impurity was symbolically addressed through two complementary rites: sacrificial blood was used to cleanse the sanctuary, while the **scapegoat**^[c] bore the confessed sins of the people and was sent away into the wilderness. In this way, the tabernacle—and, by extension, the community dwelling in God’s presence—was ritually purified rather than sin being “paid for” through penal substitution.

These rituals were intended to signify the restoration of a covenantal relationship between God and His people. The Hebrew concept of “**covenant**” (*berit*) is closely associated with the idea of “cutting,” an act that brings forth blood. In sacrificial contexts, the animal was cut, and its blood—representing life—was used in rites of atonement, understood as reconciliation, not retribution.

[a] **Atonement as purification, not payment:** Leviticus consistently frames atonement (*kipper*) in terms of cleansing sacred space from impurity (Lev. 16:16–19), not satisfying a retributive penalty.

[b] **Blood applied to sacred objects, not sinners:** The problem addressed is contamination of God’s dwelling, not the transfer of punishment to a substitute.

[c] **Scapegoat ritual:** Sin is *removed*, not punished, reinforcing an expulsion/cleansing model rather than a wrath-absorption model.

In the ancient Near Eastern world, a **covenant** was a solemn, life-binding commitment, often sealed with blood. The implicit meaning was that if one party violated the covenant, they would incur the covenant’s life-for-life consequence. This is why such agreements are sometimes described as “blood covenants.” Accordingly, the sacrificial system was *not* concerned with **paying a debt** or **exacting punishment**, but with maintaining fidelity to a covenantal vow and restoring a broken relationship.

Expiation vs. propitiation. In biblical theology, **expiation** refers to the removal, cancellation, or annulment of sin, rather than the appeasement of God’s anger. It answers the question: *What is done with sin itself?*
Basic definition: Expiation = *the dealing with sin so that it is taken away, cleansed, or nullified.*

This contrasts with **propitiation**, which focuses on appeasing divine wrath. Propitiation is doing something to appease, placate, or satisfy an offended party. Here is the key distinction between expiation and propitiation:

Differences between <i>expiation</i> and <i>propitiation</i>	
Expiation	Propitiation
Removes sin	Appeases wrath
Cleanses guilt	Satisfies punishment
Restores relationship	Resolves legal penalty
Sin-centered	Wrath-centered
Emphasizes healing	Emphasizes retribution

Many scholars argue that biblical **atonement** language is primarily **expiatory**, especially in the Old Testament, and that propitiation is a later interpretive overlay, particularly in Reformed/PSA theology.

In an **expiatory** framework: (a) forgiveness is **real and meaningful**; (b) God forgives by **removing sin**, not by punishing it elsewhere; and (c) mercy is not rendered redundant. This avoids the critique: *If punishment is already exacted, forgiveness becomes a legal fiction.* **Expiation** allows forgiveness to be: **relational, restorative, and covenantal.**

Atonement is not propitiation (or appeasement). Within discussions of atonement, **propitiation** is often understood as an action performed to or for God in order to appease Him and avert the outpouring of His wrath. However, pressing this claim too far raises several difficulties. **Not a single biblical passage** describing atonement explicitly links the atonement process with appeasing God’s wrath. Nor were Israel’s priests sacrificial agents whose role was to placate an angry deity.

This is not to deny that God's patience and mercy have limits, or that He may ultimately allow His wrath to be expressed. Rather, the point is that **Scripture never commands, nor even hints, that atoning sacrifices were required to appease or propitiate God's wrath.** Indeed, the concept of propitiation in this sense more closely resembles pagan religious practices, in which elaborate sacrifices were offered to appease volatile or capricious gods.

By contrast, Yehovah repeatedly distinguishes Himself from such deities. His exercise of wrath is portrayed in Scripture as a last resort, not as His normal or habitual disposition.

Sacrifices do not propitiate (appease) God. What, then, truly pleases—or “propitiates”—the one true God of the Bible? Not payments, and not sacrifices, but faith and **obedience**. As Scripture declares:

1 Samuel 15:22: Has Yehovah as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of Yehovah? **Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,** And to heed than the fat of rams.

Where sin is involved, the biblical atonement process presupposes prior repentance—a turning away from sin—and culminates in restoration of relationship (cf. Psalm 51:10–19). Propitiation, understood as offering a sacrifice on an altar in order to directly appease an angry God, is not explicitly taught in the biblical texts. Rather, such a notion must be assumed and then read into the text by the interpreter.

Atonement as renewed faithfulness. The entire act of a sin offering was understood by the offerer as a commitment to God—a commitment that necessarily included a **resolve to cease sinning**. In this sense, the individual was considered purified: purified from the intention to continue in sin and forgiven for sins already committed.

Atonement, therefore, was *not* about receiving a “clean slate” or a blank ledger. Rather, it was an act of personal dedication and renewed faithfulness within the covenantal relationship with God. Restoration of that relationship presupposed that the offense had ceased, since only on this basis could the relationship be reestablished and sustained. A genuine, ongoing relationship requires not only the overlooking of past failures but also a sincere commitment to strive against repeating them. This commitment is what results in the cleansing of sinful and offensive behavior.

A helpful analogy may be found in the renewal of marriage vows after a period of estrangement. In such a case, no blood is involved, yet the renewal of vows serves as an official recommitment to the marriage

covenant after offenses have damaged the relationship. This act of renewal often includes some form of ceremony, not to erase the past, but to meaningfully affirm restored commitment and fidelity.

Blood sacrifice. When blood was used as part of the atonement ceremony (as opposed to flour; cf. Lev. 5:11–13), the killing, suffering, and death of the sacrificial victim played no role of intrinsic or meaningful significance in the atonement itself. The point of the ceremony was a relational commitment sealed in blood—not a payment to compensate God for wrongdoing, nor the torturing or killing of a victim as a form of substitutionary, vicarious retribution.

The common explanation of Old Testament sin offerings often gives the impression that, before extending forgiveness, God required the death of a sacrificial animal and the sight of blood upon the altar. However, this explanation does not reflect how an Israelite would have understood the act of presenting a sin offering, nor—more importantly—does it reflect what God Himself intended by the ritual.

Atonement in the New Testament. The New Testament does **not** use a single word equivalent to “atonement.” Instead, it uses a **cluster of relational terms**.

1. ***katallagē***—reconciliation. **Romans 5:10–11**, “We were **reconciled** to God through the death of his Son.” Meaning: (a) restoration of relationship, or (b) exchange of hostility for peace. *Emphasis: relational repair*, not legal transaction.
2. ***hilaskomai* / *hilasmos* / *hilastērion***. Often translated “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice.” **Luke 18:13**, “God, **be merciful** to me, a sinner.” The verb literally means: (a) *to show mercy*; (b) *to deal graciously with sin*. In **Romans 3:25**, God presented Christ as *hilastērion*. This term refers to: The **mercy seat** (Ark of the Covenant). The **place where cleansing and forgiveness occur**. *Emphasis: God provides the means of mercy*, not appeasement by human payment.
3. ***aphiēmi***—forgiveness. Meaning: (a) *to release, let go*; (b) *to cancel a debt*. **Matthew 26:28**, “This is my blood of the covenant, poured out **for the forgiveness of sins**.” *Emphasis: release*, not punishment.

How OT and NT fit together. The New Testament does not replace Old Testament atonement; it fulfills and deepens it.

Testament	Core idea of atonement
Old Testament	Removal of sin/impurity to restore covenant fellowship
New Testament	Reconciliation, mercy, forgiveness, and restored relationship

What atonement is *not* biblically defined as. Biblically, atonement is *not defined* as: (a) a legal penalty being transferred; (b) God needing to be persuaded to forgive; or (c) a commercial transaction. Those ideas arise later in theological reflection, not directly from biblical vocabulary.

Unified biblical definition. Atonement (biblically defined) is:

The gracious action by which God removes sin and its effects in order to restore broken relationship with Himself.

Sacrifice serves this goal; it is not the goal itself.

Christ the mediator and propitiator (*reconciler*). Reconciliation is one of the central themes of the New Testament—perhaps even the central theme—since it is the very reason God sent His only begotten Son: that through Him we might be reconciled to God. The doctrine of atonement is not meant to be technical or obscure; it is the simple truth that God provided His Son as a mediator and a **propitiator** (not a propitiation) in order to restore a broken relationship. Sin is the fundamental problem, and God’s Son exposed both the reality of sin and the way of escape from it.

Atonement as “covering” typology [\[d\]](#)

The Old Testament’s “covering” imagery forms one of the most important conceptual and linguistic foundations for the doctrine of **atonement**. The connection is both **etymological** and **theological**, and it develops progressively across the biblical narrative.

“Atonement” as covering. The primary Hebrew verb for atonement is *kāpar*, which fundamentally means:

- *to cover*
- *to conceal*
- *to wipe away / purge (by means of covering)*

From this comes *kippēr* (to make atonement) and *kappōret* (the “mercy seat”). So at its root, **atonement is a “covering” that deals with sin in a way that allows God to dwell with His people without consuming them in judgment.** But the key theological question is: *What*

kind of covering is this? Is it concealment, removal, substitution, or transformation? The Old Testament uses **multiple “covering types”** that together build a composite picture.

1. Covering garments of light (pre-Fall). As per Ellen G. White, Adam and Eve were originally clothed with garments of light. The covering was from God and symbolized their innocence.

- [*8Lts, Ms 9, 1893, par. 22*](#): But Adam and Eve fell, and the **garment of light** no longer covered them.
- [*RH November 15, 1898, par. 10*](#): Adam and Eve both ate of the fruit, and obtained a knowledge which, had they obeyed God, they would never have had,—an experience in disobedience and disloyalty to God,—the knowledge that they were naked. **The garment of innocence, a covering from God, which surrounded them**, departed; and they supplied the place of this heavenly garment by sewing together fig-leaves for aprons.

2. Covering of skins (post-Fall). After the Fall, Adam and Eve were ashamed and hid from the presence of God. They sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness, but this covering was insufficient—their recognition of their nakedness represented their need for atonement. After confronting them, God made garments of skins for them: “And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

Many assume this act represents the first animal sacrifice, performed by God Himself to provide these garments. Such an interpretation implies that God killed an animal, skinned it, prepared the hide, cut it into pieces, and fashioned it into clothing—as though He were unable simply to speak the garments into existence.

Sacrifice patterned after the sanctuary. According to Ellen G. White, however, it was not God who performed the first sacrifice—or any sacrifice—but Adam. In this view, **Adam himself carried out the first death.**

[*PP 68.1*](#): To Adam, the offering of the **first sacrifice** was a most painful ceremony. **His hand must be raised to take life**, which only God could give. **It was the first time he had ever witnessed death**, and he knew that had he been obedient to God, there would have been no death of man or beast. **As he slew the innocent victim**, he trembled at the thought that his sin must shed the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. This scene gave him a deeper and more vivid sense of the greatness of his transgression, which nothing but the death of God’s dear Son could expiate.

This fits the **pattern of the sanctuary services** in which the participant—the sinner—was required to perform the deed himself. When a sinner brought a sacrificial animal to the door of the sanctuary courtyard, a priest handed him a knife and a basin. **The sinner laid his hands on the animal's head, confessed his sins and then slew the animal by cutting its throat.** The priest then performed the steps that followed. All this prefigured the **death of Christ**, which came about **not by the hand of God, but by the hand of man**—we caused the death of Christ (Acts 2:36).

The typological significance of skin coverings is threefold:

- They replaced *human-made* coverings of fig leaves. **Atonement connection:** Sin creates exposure (guilt and shame) that man seeks to cover (through human effort), but only God can remedy.
- They required the death of an *innocent animal by the hand of man*. **Atonement connection:** This points to Christ as the Lamb of God whom man put to death. “Let all the house of Israel therefore know certainly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus **whom you crucified**” (Acts 2:36).
- They were intended by God to cover *human shame and nakedness*. **Atonement connection:** Establishes that atonement is divine initiative, not human achievement.

Skin coverings symbolic of righteousness. The coverings God made for the first couple was symbolic of Christ one day providing the robe of his own righteousness.

- *Isaiah 61:10*: I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; **For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness**, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
- [*12LtMs, Ms 145, 1897, par. 5*](#): The Lord Jesus Christ had prepared a covering, **the robe of His own righteousness**, that He will put on every repenting, believing soul who by faith will receive it. Said John, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” [John 1:29.] Sin is the transgression of the law. Christ died to make it possible for every man to have his sins taken away.

3. The Ark: Pitch as “covering.” Genesis 6:14, “cover it inside and out with pitch.” The term “pitch” is in Hebrew *kāpar*, which is the same root word as “atonement.” Covering the ark with pitch meant the boat could repel water and not sink. Those who were inside the ark were safe from the destruction of the flood waters without.

4. The Blood of the Passover Lamb. In the Exodus account (Exodus 12), each household of Israel was commanded to slaughter a spotless lamb, apply its blood to the doorposts and lintel, and remain inside under that blood. The key statement is: “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13).

The blood functioned as a **visible covering** or marker that **shielded the household from judgment**—the death of the firstborn. Thus, judgment “passes over” because death has already occurred in the lamb. The New Testament explicitly connects this event to Jesus: “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Likewise, believers are “redeemed... with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18–19).

It is important to note that the blood had to be applied to the door in the Exodus account. In typological language, Christ’s sacrifice must likewise be “applied” to the door of our hearts through faith and union with him. In this way, God delivers His people from slavery— “I will deliver you from slavery” (Exodus 6:6)—and redeems them— “I will redeem you” (ibid.).

This typology points to our faith and hope in God, who delivers us from the bondage of sin and brings about new birth—being “born from above”—through the word of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:21–23).

5. Covering of the veil. The veil that separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle was also used as a covering for the Ark of the Covenant whenever it was transported. It was before the veil that the blood of sacrifice was sprinkled. Upon the veil were embroidered angelic figures. It was before the veil that the golden altar stood on which incense was burned. The Old Testament referred to this veil as “the veil of the covering” or “the covering veil” (Exodus 35:12; 39:34; 40:21; and Numbers 4:5).

Christ coming in the flesh is often described as Christ’s divinity being “veiled” in humanity. Thus, the inner veil of the Tabernacle represented Christ’s flesh (or humanity). It was Christ’s humanity, his life and death, that became our covering. After Jesus’ death on the cross, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). This symbolized the discontinuance of the sacrificial system because a better offering had been made with better promises (Heb. 8:6; 10:12).

6. Covering of the mercy seat. The mercy seat (*kappōret*) was the gold lid covering the Ark of the Covenant, and it stood at the center of the ritual performed on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). The Septuagint renders the term as *hilasterion*, “thing that atones,” and it was here, between

the cherubim above the ark, that God's presence was revealed to Israel.

The physical arrangement of the ark carries its own theology. Inside rested the law—the Ten Commandments—representing God's character and His unbending justice; the law demands obedience and condemns sin. Yet the mercy seat covered the law, symbolizing that God's mercy is extended without setting justice aside. In this way the mercy seat became the meeting point of two realities that might otherwise seem opposed: **Justice**, embodied in the law beneath, **and Mercy**, embodied in the covering above.

On the Day of Atonement, **blood was sprinkled** on and before the mercy seat—first the blood of a bull for the priest and his household, then the blood of a goat for the people. This blood was applied to the east (front) side of the mercy seat, and sprinkled seven times before it (Lev. 16:14–15). Scripture is explicit about why: the blood made atonement “for the Holy Place... because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel” (Lev. 16:16). *This detail matters:* The ritual cleansed the sanctuary itself, not merely the people—sin is portrayed as a contaminant that defiles God's dwelling place among His people.

EGW on this ritual. Ellen G. White reads this ritual in a particular way. For her, the **blood represents the life of the sacrifice**, and when it is placed on the mercy seat, it **satisfies the claims of the law, securing both forgiveness and cleansing**. In her framework, the mercy seat is the actual place where atonement is effected, because it is there that the law's claims are met through sacrificial blood, opening the way for God to exercise mercy.

A distinctive feature of her theology is that the Day of Atonement points to something more than forgiveness alone—it points to **final cleansing**. Throughout the year, she explains, sins were symbolically transferred to the sanctuary; then, on the Day of Atonement, those sins were **removed altogether**. The mercy seat plays its part in this process by receiving the blood that **legally removes guilt**, so that it stands connected both to forgiveness and to the cleansing of the sanctuary record. From here EGW draws a direct line to Christ's heavenly ministry: the earthly sanctuary is a **type**, Christ ministers in the **heavenly sanctuary**, and the mercy seat corresponds to the place where Christ presents his blood before the Father. The Day of Atonement, on this reading, prefigures the **final phase of Christ's atoning work**, and the mercy seat represents the place where his sacrifice is **applied before God**.

Harmony of justice and mercy. This leads to what is perhaps EGW's central theological point: the mercy seat demonstrates that God does not set aside His law in order to forgive sin. Instead, He upholds the law while

extending mercy through the merits of Christ. At the mercy seat, the law is not abolished; its penalty is met through the life and death of Christ; and God is therefore able to be both just and merciful at once.

Cleansing rather than payment. The immediate context of Leviticus 16 emphasizes **cleansing** (Hebrew *taher*), the purging of impurity, and the restoration of sacred space—not a transactional payment of penalty. The mercy seat, then, is the place where impurity is removed and the covenant relationship restored: reconciliation with God rather than legal settlement. **Sin is dealt with, and God remains present among His people**—“God with us.”

7. Coverings of the high priest. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest wore two sets of garments—golden and (white) linen. During the service, on the occasions when he entered the Most Holy Place, the high priest changed into his linen garments, and then changed back to his golden garments upon exiting. The linen garments consisted of white trousers (akin to boxer shorts), white coat, white sash (akin to a belt) and a white turban.

Leviticus 16:4: He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.

On ordinary days, the high priest wore “garments of glory and beauty” (Exodus 28)—gold, blue, purple, jewels, and the ephod. But on the Day of Atonement he removed these glorious garments and wore simple white linen (Lev. 16:4). The spiritual meaning is:

- **Humiliation precedes atonement**
- Atonement is not achieved through visible glory, rank, or external splendor
- The mediator must come in **lowliness and purity**

This anticipated the self-emptying of Christ (cf. Phil. 2:6–8), where he laid his glory aside, and accomplished atonement through humility, and not display. The linen garments were plain, white, and without ornamentation. They represented perfect righteousness and purity. Atonement required a mediator who was morally clean.

During the ritual, as he wears these (white) linen garments, he enters the Most Holy Place, sprinkles the blood, handles the sin offerings, and sends away the scapegoat. After completing the central sin offerings (Lev. 16:23–24), he goes back into the Tent of Meeting, removes the linen garments, leaves them there, bathes again, and puts on his regular (glorious) garments to resume his high-priestly work to fully finish the service.

8. Covering of the cloud of incense. On the Day of Atonement, when the high priest went beyond the veil into the Most Holy Place, a cloud of incense was burned and served as a veil over the presence of God (i.e. the Shekinah Glory), so that, “the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat...that he die not” (Lev. 16:13).

In Scripture, incense is consistently associated with prayer and mediation:

- Psalm 141:2 — “Let my prayer be set before thee as incense”
- Revelation 8:3–4 — incense + prayers of the saints before God

But on the Day of Atonement, it is *not the people’s incense*—it is the high priest’s incense, brought in before any blood is applied. The incense represents **the perfect righteousness and intercession of Christ**, without which: (a) no sinner could survive God’s presence, and (b) no atonement could be accepted. This teaches that atonement is not effective merely because of sacrifice (blood), but because of who presents it and how it is presented.

Notice the order in Leviticus 16: (1) Incense is brought in and a cloud fills the Most Holy Place, (2) THEN the blood is sprinkled. This is crucial. The incense is **prior** to the application of blood. Therefore, the **intercession (incense)** makes the **atonement (blood)** acceptable, and in Christ the **Person of Christ** makes the **work of Christ** effective.

In New Testament theology, Christ is both **the sacrifice** (blood) and **the intercessor** (incense). His righteousness covers believers and mediates their approach to God. Thus, atonement is not only forgiveness but being safely brought into God’s presence. Without this “cloud of incense,” even the earthly high priest would perish.

Christ died “for” our sins [\[e\]](#)

In **all** the statements in the New Testament of Christ dying “for us” or “for our sins,” the Greek words used are the prepositions: **dia** (Greek, δία), **hyper** (Greek, ὑπέρ), and **peri** (Greek, περί). All can be translated into English with the word “for,” but they do not mean the same thing in Greek. Each contributes a distinct *nuance* to New Testament statements about Christ’s death in relation to sin.

1. **dia** (δία). Basic meaning: With the **genitive**: *through, by means of*; With the **accusative**: *because of, on account of*. When used with sin and Christ’s death, **dia** + **accusative** emphasizes the **cause or reason** for the action. An example related to Christ’s death is Romans 4:25, “Who was handed over **because of our trespasses**”. (You will note that most versions use “for” instead

of “because” when translating *dia* in this verse.) Here: *dia* + accusative. Meaning: Christ’s death occurred **on account of** or **because of** human sin. *Nuance*: *dia* explains *why* Christ died—**our sins were the reason**.

2. **hyper** (ὑπέρ). Basic meaning: *for, on behalf of, for the sake of*. Often carries a **representative or benefactive** sense. In some contexts, can imply **substitution**, though the preposition itself does not demand it. This is the **most common word** used for “Christ died for our sins.” Key examples include 1 Corinthians 15:3 (“Christ dies **for our sins**”) and Galatians 1:4 (“Who gave himself **for our sins**”). *Nuance*: *hyper* emphasizes **benefit and representation**—Christ died **for our sake, on our behalf**.
3. **peri** (περί). Basic meaning: *concerning, about, with reference to*. In sacrificial contexts, it became a **technical expression** meaning “for sins”. This usage is deeply rooted in **Levitical sin-offering language**. The key example is 1 Peter 3:18 (“Christ suffered once **for sins**”). This phrasing echoes Old Testament sacrifices offered “concerning sins”. *Nuance*: *peri* frames Christ’s death as a **sin-offering**—addressing the **problem of sin itself**.

Summary comparison

Greek	Core idea	Emphasis in Christ’s death
<i>dia</i>	because of	The cause of his death (our sins)
<i>hyper</i>	on behalf of	The benefit/representation for sinners
<i>peri</i>	concerning	The sacrificial dealing with sin

It is evident that the New Testament uses multiple prepositions intentionally. Together, they **form a rich and complementary picture of the atoning work of Christ** rather than a single, flattened meaning of “for.” Unfortunately, most Bible versions don’t pick up these nuances and simply use “for” in the translation, which is much more ambiguous. This enables the teacher and reader to assume things about the text that were never intended.

WHAT “SUBSTITUTION” WOULD REQUIRE GRAMMATICALLY

Clear **substitution** is normally expressed in Greek by: **anti** (Greek, ἀντί) = *instead of, in place of*. If a preposition *requires* substitution, it must **encode replacement inherently**, not merely allow it contextually. A good example to better understand the use of *anti* is Matthew 5:38.

Matthew 5:38: You have heard that it was said, “An eye **for** [*anti*] an eye and a tooth **for** [*anti*] a tooth.”

Both of the words translated as “for” in Matthew 5:38 is the Greek word “*anti*”. If literally translated it would read, “An eye **in place of** an eye,” or “An eye **instead of** an eye.”

HOWEVER, the word “*anti*” is **never** used even once in any statement of Christ dying “for us” or “for our sins”. As already stated, the actual Greek words used are *dia*, *hyper*, and *peri*.

With the word *dia*, it expresses **cause**, not agency or representation. It answers *why* something happened, not *who took whose place*. No substitution is grammatically possible or implied. Christ is not said to die *instead of* sins or sinners, but **because of** sins. Any substitutionary theology must come from **contextual synthesis**, not from *dia* itself.

In the case of *hyper*, it is **regularly used in contexts where substitution is impossible** (e.g. John 17:9; 2 Cor. 8:24; Phil. 1:7). The term *hyper* indicates **representation or benefit**. It does **not encode exchange**. It can *coexist* with substitution if the context adds it, but does not create it. Scholarly consensus at the lexical level: (a) the BDAG lexicon: “*for the sake of, in the interest of*”; (b) never defined as “instead of”. *Verdict: hyper* does not require substitution grammatically. It permits substitution only if supplied by context, not by the preposition itself.

The core meaning of *peri*, is: *concerning, with reference to*. In the Septuagint, *peri* is used thousands of times for: “**sin offerings**,” sacrifices made *with reference to sin*. Grammatical force: *peri* does **not** indicate direction toward persons. It frames the action as **dealing with the problem of sin**. It is **topic-oriented**, not person-oriented. *Important distinction*: A sin offering may involve substitution theologically, but: *peri* itself only signals reference. It never grammatically encodes *replacement*. *Verdict*: (a) **no substitution grammatically**; and (b) *peri* marks Christ’s death as *sin-directed*, not *person-exchanged*.

Conclusion on grammatical precision. None of the New Testament prepositions used for “Christ dying for sins”—*dia*, *hyper*, and *peri*—require substitution grammatically. If substitution is affirmed, it must be argued from: broader theological context, sacrificial typology. or narrative logic, but not from the grammar of these prepositions alone.

Atonement in Romans [\[e\]](#)

Romans atonement passages. The book of Romans is the primary source used to construct and defend the framework of Penal Substitutionary Atonement. Much of this framework, however, depends on assigning specialized theological meanings to common terms, as well as on strategic word and phrase rearrangements, additions, and translational ambiguities. The passages most often cited in support of this doctrine include:

1. [Romans 1:17](#)
2. [Romans 3:24](#)
3. [Romans 3:25-26](#)
4. [Romans 4:3](#)

These verses are discussed in detail in the “*Scripture Notes*” section on [Romans](#) of this book. A summary of the above passages is given below.

1. On [Romans 1:17](#). The text reads,

Romans 1:17: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed—from being **out of faith into faith**, as it is written, “The righteous will live **based on faith**.” [HAB. 2:4]

Careful attention to the Greek prepositions of the phrase “out of faith into faith” (*ek pisteos eis pistin*) is crucial:

- *ek* (“out of / from”) denotes **source or origin**
- *eis* (“into / unto”) denotes **movement or transition**

Thus, the phrase describes not a static condition but a **movement from outside faith into a life grounded in faith**. The concluding citation from Habakkuk 2:4—“the righteous shall live by faith”—is better understood as “The righteous will live **out from faith**.” Faith is not merely entry, but **ongoing source and sustaining power**.

Key insight on Romans 1:17. Righteousness is not merely an imputed status, but a **lived expression of faith**, manifest in conduct, obedience, and character. This aligns with broader New Testament teaching (e.g., Acts 10:35; 1 John 3:3–9), where **faith produces transformation**.

2. On [Romans 3:24](#)—justification as “being set right.” Romans 3:24 reads, “being freely **set right** by his grace through the **release from sin** that is accomplished by Christ Jesus.”

The term “**set right**” (*dikaïoumenoi*) is a **verb**, not merely a legal label. It means to **set right, correct, restore**. Thus, justification is not merely being declared righteous, but **being made right in reality**.

The term “**release from sin**” (*apolytrosis*), which is typically translated as “redemption,” is traditionally interpreted as a **payment**, but more fundamentally means: **release, liberation, freedom**. Paul clarifies this in Romans 6:17–18: Believers are **set free from sin** and become servants of righteousness.

Key insight on Romans 3:24. Redemption is not a commercial transaction, but **liberation from sin’s power**. This avoids theological problems associated with literal payment models (e.g., questions about to whom

payment is made) and preserves the integrity of divine justice.

3. On Romans 3:25-26—Christ as the “mercy seat” (*hilasterion*) and the demonstration of righteousness. Romans 3:25 reads,

Romans 3:25: whom God put forward as the *true* “**mercy seat**” [*hilasterion*] where *covenant* blood is received through faith, in order to **demonstrate his righteousness**. This unveiling shows how God, in his patient forbearance, **released former sins**.

The Greek term *hilasterion* most naturally refers to the **mercy seat** (*kapporet*) of the Ark (cf. Exodus 25; Leviticus 16), not “propitiation” in the sense of appeasing wrath, as is found in many modern translations. Thus, Christ is the **place and means of atonement**, and the **public unveiling** of what was once hidden in the temple.

Regarding the term “**to demonstrate**” (*endeixis*), God’s righteousness is not merely declared but **demonstrated**. It is made visible and observable, and it is expressed through transformed lives.

Regarding the term “**released former sins**” (*paresis*), which is typically translated as “passed over former sins,” is better understood as **release or letting go of sins**, and flowing from God’s **patient forbearance**.

Covenant vs. transaction. Christ’s blood signifies **covenant relationship**, not payment. Faith is **relational trust**, not belief in a transaction.

Key insight on Romans 3:25-26. God is shown to be righteous by: setting people right, restoring them into covenant relationship, and demonstrating righteousness through lived transformation.

Key concepts on Romans 3:25-26

a. **The nature of righteousness.** Across Romans 3:25–26 and related texts, righteousness (*dikaiosyne*) is a **way of life**, and a **path that can be walked** (cf. 2 Peter 2:21). It is not a purely legal status, or a transferred or external attribute. Rather, it is **embodied obedience aligned with God’s will**.

b. Theological framework: **Transformation over forensic declaration**. This reading of Romans emphasizes:

1. **Demonstration vs. declaration.** Not merely a legal verdict, but **visible righteousness in lived experience**.
2. **Release vs. penal satisfaction.** Sin is addressed through **liberation and transformation**, not through transferred punishment.
3. **Covenant vs. transaction.** Salvation is relational and participatory, not commercial or contractual.

4. **Restoration as the goal.** Justification serves **reconciliation**. The aim is **restored relationship with God**.

4. **On [Romans 4:3](#)**—Abraham’s faith and the meaning of “*logizomai*.” The verse reads,

Romans 4:3: For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham **placed his trust** in God, and that trust oriented [*logizomai*] his life **toward right-doing**.”

The Greek term *logizomai* is commonly translated: counted, credited, or imputed. But more fundamentally it means: to consider, reason, or conclude. This term (*logizomai*) is discussed in detail in the “*Scriptures Notes*” section under [Romans 4:3](#).

Also, where this verse typically reads, “Abraham **believed** God,” is translated here as “Abraham **places his trust** in God.” The term “**believed**” (*episteusen*) precedes and explains the result. The term typically translated, “**as righteousness**” or “**for righteousness**,” (*eis dikaiosynen*) is here translated as “**toward right-doing**,” which implies movement *toward* a state. The interpretive conclusion is that Abraham’s faith: did not trigger a legal credit, but **oriented his life into right-doing** (Or, *into righteousness*).

Faith is: active, directional, transformative; and the cause of righteous living.

Conclusion. In Romans, Paul’s theology of salvation is best understood as **covenantal and transformative rather than purely forensic**. God’s righteousness is:

- **Revealed** as people enter into faith (Rom. 1:17)
- **Experienced** as they are set right by grace (Rom. 3:24)
- **Demonstrated** in transformed lives (Rom. 3:25–26)
- And **modeled** in Abraham’s faith-driven life (Rom. 4:3)

Ultimately, the righteous will *live out* from faith—not merely “declared” righteous, but **made and lived as righteous through a dynamic, ongoing relationship with God**.

Faith only (*sola fide*) [\[e\]](#)

Salvation is of God. Salvation is the work of God for man, not a work of man to appease God. It was God who made clothing of skins to cover Adam's nakedness. It is God through Christ who forgives sins and makes man righteous.

Ephesians 2:8-10: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we would walk in them.

What is faith? Every relationship is built on trust (or *faith*). Biblical faith includes believing that God exists and that He is wholly trustworthy, so much so that a Christian builds his life on Him and His Word. A Christian trusts in God, no matter what his physical circumstances may be or how he feels.

Faith is not merely a belief in God, since "the devils also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). That is, faith is not merely *intellectual*. Also, faith is not loyalty and devotion to God and keeping His commandments, since the scribes and Pharisees also practiced this form of religion and still rejected the Son of God and had him killed. That is, faith is not merely *behavioral*.

Rather, faith is *relational*. That is, God is a living and abiding presence in the life of the believer. The Christian longs to commune with God through prayer. The Christian longs to be cleansed of sin and guilt. He longs to be given a new heart, with pure thoughts and desires. He longs to be strengthened in will and purpose to do the works of God.

A Christian yields his will to God's will. God does not free him against his will, but the person chooses to be on God's side and say, "Yes, I desire to do Thy will, O my God," and then and only then, when he freely chooses, is he given God's power. It should be noted that a man's *emotions* may not be in agreement with his decision. Indeed, a man's emotions (his passions) may rage against the decision to serve God. But it is the force of the will that matters. The will of man is the rudder that steers the ship. The ship may strain against the change in direction, but it will inevitably adjust. So, a man's emotions will inevitably align with his change of purpose.

Faith only. It is not faith and good works that results in salvation, but faith that results in salvation and good works. The formula is:

Faith → *Salvation* + *Good works*

not,

Faith + Good works → Salvation

That is, the act of believing and receiving (i.e. *faith*) is saving and life changing. This is the Protestant view—*sola fide*. The Catholic (and Eastern Orthodox) view is that a person must *both* believe and behave (i.e. perform “good works”) in order to be saved. Protestants emphasize the work of God that saves, while Catholics emphasize the work of man (in meritorious behavior) that leads to salvation. Protestants emphasize the glory of God (*solī Deo gloria*), while Catholics the glory of man (in meritorious works). One, the Protestant view, has assurance of salvation from the very beginning; while the other, the Catholic view, must wait until judgment day (when his meritorious acts are weighed in the balance of God’s justice).

Perseverance. Catholics teach that justification is a process by which we become righteous by God’s grace, but is not finished until we persevere to the end of our lives. Thus, we are justified by *faith and obedience* in which one must persevere to the end. We must, as Paul says, finish the race (2 Tim. 4:7). According to Catholics, we do not work our way to heaven “because we are totally dependent upon the gift of faith and the grace of Christ, but our **obedience is required**”^[a]. Note the explicit importance of “good works” in Catholic theology:

- “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” —Council of Trent (1547): DS 1528.
- “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.” —Council of Trent, “Canons concerning justification,” Canon 9.
- “If anyone says that justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God **through good works**, but that those works are merely fruits and signs of justification obtained, not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.” —Council of Trent, “Canons concerning justification,” Canon 24.

In contrast, Protestants believe in the perseverance of *faith alone*. That is, one’s perseverance in believing and trusting in God is unshaken to the very end. As Job said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15).

Protestant faith is *relational*, while Catholic faith is *behavioral*. To

^[a] CatholicFaithAndReason.org/justification-how-are-we-saved.html

Protestants, it is receiving Jesus that saves, while to Catholics, it is the result of receiving Jesus *and* the practice of good works that saves. Again, to Protestants, one is saved at the beginning (and enters into God's rest from the very beginning); while to Catholics, one is saved at the end (and is uncertain of entering into God's rest until the judgment).

Indeed, you fail at a true understanding of faith in God, if you lean on your own efforts to be saved. It is "not of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:10). The focus is then, not on behavior, but on relationship. By being in fellowship, in a loving relationship, with the Father and Son, you are equipped to live a life of fruitfulness. You become a good tree bearing good fruit.

The 1888 Message: Righteousness by Faith [\[e\]](#)

The 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session was a meeting of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in October 1888. It is regarded as a landmark event in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In it, A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner presented a renewed emphasis on "righteousness by faith," teaching that salvation comes through faith in Christ rather than through law-keeping. Their message, supported by Ellen G. White, challenged prevailing legalistic tendencies in the church.

The following is my attempt at summarizing the "righteousness by faith" message presented by Jones and Waggoner.

Faith makes one a right doer. The terms "just" and "righteous" are synonyms in the Old Testament (Hebrew, *ṣādiq*). The famous verse, "the **just** shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4, KJV), can also read, "the **righteous** will live by faith" (Hab. 2:4, WEB). The English equivalent that captures the meaning of both words is the expression, "right doer".

[COL 312.2](#) (EGW): **Righteousness is right doing**, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine.

The term "justification" is the action (or process) of being changed (or made) into a right doer (a righteous person). Paul says it in two different ways with the same end result, as follows,

- *Romans 5:16*: For on the one hand, judgment came from one transgression resulting unto condemnation, but on the other hand, the *free* gift came after many transgressions **resulting unto being set right**.
- *Romans 5:19*: For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many **will be made**

[to be] **righteous**.

Justification is *manifest*. Justification by (or *through*) faith is to receive and live the righteousness of Christ. This becomes evident (is revealed, is made *manifest*) in the individual by his obedience to (or *walking in the way of*) God's commandments which are based on love, truth and freedom—love in the sense of love to God and man; truth that is absent lies and deception; and freedom to make decisions without coercion.

Righteousness is *imputed*. Righteousness is right doing. It is *imputed* to the obedient and only the obedient. The term “impute” means to ascribe, assign, attribute, or credit. It is to lay something to the account of a person. A person is credited as being righteous by virtue of the fact that he manifests right doing. (What is being rejected in this definition is the belief that justification is a mere *declaration* that a person is a right doer.)

- *1 John 3:7, 9*: Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who does right is righteous**, even as he is righteous. . . No one born of God commits sin, for his seed abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God.
- [*ARSH October 10, 1899, page 653.9 \(A.T. Jones\)*](#): Let it be borne in mind and upon the heart forever by every soul, that **justification (being made righteous)** by faith of Jesus Christ, means, in itself, in every sentiment of it, the **total abandonment of sins**, and the destruction of the body of sin in order that **henceforth we should not serve sin**. Otherwise I build again in works what I destroyed by faith: and “if I built again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.” Faith will never justify sin. The two are eternal opposites; for “whatsoever is NOT of faith is sin.” And in Christ Jesus nothing avails but faith, which worketh by love that keeps the commandments of God.
- [*CHR 51.1 \(E.J Waggoner\)*](#): **To justify means to make righteous or to show one to be righteous**. Now it is evident that perfect obedience to a perfectly righteous law would constitute one a righteous person. It was God's design that such **obedience should be rendered to the law by all His creatures**, and in this way the law was ordained unto life. Romans 7:10.

Forgiveness of sin. Forgiveness of sin is more than a legal transaction. It is more than making an entry in a ledger in heaven. It is a real, radical change of the heart of a person. Yes, forgiveness clears guilt, but while guilt is taken away, the house is not left empty; it is filled with something better, it is filled with new desires, new thoughts and motives. It is filled with Christ's righteousness; to live as Christ lived.

[CHR 65.3 \(E.J Waggoner\)](#): [After quoting Zechariah 3:1-5] Notice in the above account that the taking away of the filthy garments is the same as causing the iniquity to pass from the person. And so we find that when Christ covers us with the robe of His own righteousness, **He does not furnish a cloak for sin but takes the sin away.** And this shows that the **forgiveness of sins** is something **more than a mere form**, something **more than a mere entry in the books of record in heaven**, to the effect that the sin has been canceled. The forgiveness of sins is a reality; it is something tangible, something that vitally affects the individual. **It actually clears him from guilt**, and if he is cleared from guilt, **is justified, made righteous**, he has certainly undergone **a radical change**.

One is not saved *in* sin, but saved *from* sin.

[ARSH October 10, 1899, page 653 \(A. T. Jones\)](#): The Lord Jesus did not come into the world to minister to sin, **but altogether to save from sin**. Sin is the transgression of the law of Ten Commandments; and as the Lord Jesus came **to save men from sin**, in the nature of the case he came **to save men from the transgression of that law**.

Does a justified person continue *in* sin? God forbid.

- [ARSH October 10, 1899, page 653.8 \(A. T. Jones\)](#): Therefore “if, **while we seek to be justified by Christ**, we ourselves also **are found sinners**,” transgressors of the law of Ten Commandments, **does Christ sanction that?**— “**God forbid.**” **Does he justify men** in order that they may be **free to transgress the law?**— “**God forbid.**” Does he save men from sin in order that they may continue in sin? — “God forbid.” Do we believe in Jesus in order that we may continue to be sinners? — “God forbid.” Do we “seek to be justified [made righteous] by Christ” in order that we may continue to sin? — “God forbid.” And let all the people forever say Amen.
- [ST March 20, 1893, pars. 2-4 \(EGW\)](#): **No one can** believe with the heart unto righteousness, and **obtain justification by faith, while continuing** the practice of those things which the word of God forbids, or while neglecting any known duty. . . **Every sin must be renounced** as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. **It is by continual surrender of the will**, by continual obedience, **that the blessing of justification is retained.** . . Those who are justified by faith must have a heart to keep the way of the Lord. It is an

evidence that a **man is not justified by faith when his works do not correspond to his profession.**

Not just a declaration, but a reality. A patient suffering cancer is not free of cancer by the doctor merely *declaring* him to be free of cancer. He must *actually* (in reality, in truth) be free of cancer for the declaration to make any sense. In the same way, to be declared righteous means that one is truly a right doer; and, by the grace of God, this is possible through Christ living in the life of the believer.

Faith that works. In EGW's own words:

[ISM 366.1](#): But while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, **no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties.** God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.

Faith in Christ results in a change of heart. The believer is "born again" and is given a new heart, new thoughts, new motives. He no longer lives a life of wickedness but of obedience to God's principles as revealed in His word. The believer cannot remain justified "while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties." It is not a "once-saved-always-saved" theology, but one in which a believer can lose his salvation by determined disobedience.

[11LtMs, Lt 83, 1896, par. 33](#): The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and practice. **Justification by faith in Christ will be made manifest in transformation of character.** This is the sign to the world of the truth of the doctrines we profess. The daily evidence that we are a living church is seen in the fact that we are practicing the word. A living testimony goes forth to the world in consistent Christian action.

The faith of the believer must prevail to the end; he must run the race of faith and cross the finish line. This life of faith is made evident by the continual yielding of his life to the will of God, "for God is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

[19LtMs, Ms 116, 1904, par. 24](#): The Majesty of heaven revealed before the world a sinless character, that His salvation might be revealed in the lives of His disciples, bearing witness to the world, to angels, and to men of the grace and glory that will be revealed to all who will deny self and take up the cross of Christ. **Through His grace, they are justified, made righteous.** And every soul to whom

Christ has imparted His righteousness is under solemn obligation to practice that righteousness. **The imputed righteousness of Christ will become implanted righteousness**, if they will continually follow in His steps.

Dual Atonement in Adventism [\[e\]](#)

Dual Atonement is a Seventh-day Adventist doctrinal framework describing Christ's saving work as unfolding in two inseparable phases—emphasizing both what was accomplished at the cross and what continues in heaven.

1. **The completed sacrifice (at the cross).** Adventists affirm that the death of Christ on the cross was once-for-all, complete, and sufficient as a sacrifice for sin. Through his death, Jesus provided full provision for forgiveness, and victory over sin and death.

This corresponds to the typology of the daily sacrificial aspect of atonement in the Old Testament. The **daily sacrifice** was the offering of two lambs in the Sanctuary (or Temple) on a daily basis throughout the year (Numbers 28:1-8). They were sacrificed “between the evenings”: one in the morning (around 9:00 am) and the other in the afternoon (around 3:00 pm), in keeping with the Hebrew reckoning of the day beginning at evening. The daily sacrifice foreshadowed how Jesus would be nailed to the cross in the morning and die in the afternoon, at about the same time the lambs were slain.

2. **The ongoing heavenly ministry (high priestly work).** Distinctively, Adventists also emphasize Christ's continuing ministry in the heavenly sanctuary as described in the letter to the Hebrews, drawing especially on the typology of the **Day of Atonement** (*Yom Kippur*).

The Day of Atonement was a sacrificial service performed **once a year** on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar (Lev. 23:27-28). It was the culmination of the daily sacrifices (or atonements) made throughout the year. The Day of Atonement represented the **final atonement** (or final judgment) after which the sanctuary, the priesthood and the people were *cleansed* (Lev, 16:30, 33). In the Hebrew language, the Day of Atonement is really the Day of “Atonements” (*kippurim*, plural). This is noted and explained in detail in [John Calvin's Commentary on Leviticus 23:27](#).

In this Day of Atonement phase, Christ:

- Applies the benefits of his sacrifice to believers (forgiveness, victory over sin)
- Ministers as high priest (intercession, mediation)

- Conducts the “investigative judgment” (a pre-Advent review of believers’ lives)

Theological emphasis. Dual atonement reflects a broader Adventist concern that atonement is not a legal transaction but a **restorative process**—bringing about actual *reconciliation*, *transformation*, and *ultimately the eradication of sin* from both individuals and the universe.

Necessary atonements. In the sacrificial system there were two *necessary* atonements. The first was the *daily* or continual sacrifice typified in the Passover festival observed in the spring. The second was the *yearly* Day of Atonement festival observed in the fall. In the letter to the Hebrews, Hebrews 8:3 speaks to the *first* and Hebrews 9:23 speaks to the *second*, as follows:

- *Hebrews 8:3*: For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is **necessary** for this priest also to have something to offer.
- *Hebrews 9:23*: Thus it was **necessary** for the copies of the heavenly things to be **purified** with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

The first was *necessary* for forgiveness (Leviticus 4) and the second was *necessary* for cleansing (Leviticus 16). The cleansing was that of the sanctuary, the priesthood and the people. The cleansing of the sanctuary itself involved the cleansing of the Most Holy and Holy Places and the cleansing of the Altar of the Court.

Receiving the atonement of reconciliation (Leviticus 4) was not complete without the cleansing work of Leviticus 16. As 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [*first atonement*] our sins and to cleanse us [*second atonement*] from all unrighteousness.” As Leviticus 16 tells us, yet a second act of atonement was required. Again, the first was not complete without the second.

- *Leviticus 16:16*: Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, **because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins**. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleanness.
- *Leviticus 16:30*: For on this day **shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before Yehovah from all your sins**.

EGW expressed this dual atonement concept in the following quotes. She describes this second atonement as the “final atonement” for sin.

- [*PP 357.5*](#): The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the law, **was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement**; so in the type the blood of the sin offering removed the sin from the penitent, but it rested in the sanctuary until the Day of Atonement.
- [*GC 489.1*](#): The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary **above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross**. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven.
- [*25LiMs, Ms 69, 1912, par. 47*](#): When Christ, the mediator, burst the bands of the tomb, and ascended on high to minister for man, He first entered the holy place, where, by virtue of His own sacrifice, He made an offering for the sins of men. With intercession and pleadings He presented before God the prayers and repentance and faith of His people, purified by the incense of His own merits. **He next entered the most holy place to make an atonement for the sins of the people and cleanse the sanctuary. His work as high priest completes the divine plan of redemption by making the final atonement for sin.**

Questioning dual atonement. The questioning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's traditional "dual atonement" framework developed gradually rather than in a single moment. A brief historical sketch looks like this:

1. **Early Adventist consensus (mid-late 19th century).** Early Adventists articulated a two-phase understanding of Christ's atoning ministry: sacrificial atonement at the cross, then final atonement in the heavenly sanctuary (linked to the investigative judgment which began in 1844). Writers like Ellen G. White reinforced this framework.

2. **Evangelical engagement and reassessment (1940s–1950s).** A major turning point came through dialogue with evangelical scholars such as Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse. These discussions led to the publication of *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (1957). The book emphasized that Christ's atonement was **completed at the cross**, aligning more closely with mainstream Protestant language. This did not abandon the sanctuary doctrine, but it **reframed** the heavenly phase as an *application* of a finished atonement rather than a second, distinct atoning act. Here is the relevant quote from *Questions on Doctrine*:

[*Questions on Doctrine, p. 354-355*](#): When, therefore, one hears an Adventist say, or reads in Adventist literature—even in the writings

of Ellen G. White—that Christ is making atonement now, it should be understood that we mean simply that Christ is now making *application* of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement He made on the cross.

3. Internal tension and polarization (1960s–1980s). After *Questions on Doctrine*, Adventism experienced growing internal debate: **Traditionalists** maintained the historic “dual-phase” language, fearing that Christ’s final atoning work was being minimized. **Reform-minded theologians** increasingly adopted “single atonement” language, stressing the sufficiency and finality of the cross. Figures like Desmond Ford intensified the debate. In the late 1970s–1980s, Ford argued that the atonement was **fully completed at the cross**, and that the investigative judgment (as traditionally understood) lacked strong biblical support. This culminated in the Glacier View Conference (1980), where Ford’s views were rejected by church leadership—but the issues remained.

4. Ongoing scholarly development (late 20th century–present). Since the 1980s, Adventist scholarship has continued to wrestle with the issue. Many theologians now prefer “completed atonement” at the cross + “ongoing ministry” in heaven, avoiding the phrase “dual atonement.” Others defend a more traditional sanctuary-centered formulation, though often with refined language. In practice, much of Adventist preaching today sounds closer to **Protestant “single atonement” emphasis**, while still officially affirming the heavenly ministry of Christ. The result is not a complete doctrinal replacement, but an ongoing reinterpretation of how the atonement is described and applied within Adventist theology.

Table of differences. The table below summarizes *some* of the differences between these divergent atonement theologies.

Theme	Single atonement	Dual atonement
Sanctuary typology	Affirms the “daily” sacrifice only	Affirms both the “daily” and “yearly” (Day of Atonement) sacrifices
Christ’s finished work	Finished at the cross	Started at the cross, but finished when Christ fulfills all his roles as Prophet, Priest and King
God’s law	Faith in Christ is the sole ticket to heaven. Away with God’s law; it was nailed to the cross.	Faith in Christ is a change of heart (“born again”) experience which results in holy living. A believer is not truly “justified” if he continues to break God’s law.
Personal salvation	Completed when one believes (“once-saved-always-saved”)	Perseverance of faith. Salvation can be lost through determined unbelief

The way of salvation	Easy to be saved. Just pray the “sinner’s prayer” and you’re all set.	Easy to be lost. Sin is enchanting, always inviting. A believer can choose to break faith at any time. God does not force anyone to remain with Him.
Trials and tribulations	Comes from the devil. God promises us prosperity in this life (the prosperity gospel).	God ordains the “testing” of our faith (James 1:3; Heb. 12:1–13). Christians should expect trials and wants and needs in this life.
Christ’s life	The Perfect Life for us to receive. No need to copy it.	The Perfect Life for us to copy. He is our Perfect Example for us to reflect (“in the image of”)
Repentance	Declare ourselves as sinners.	Declare ourselves as sinners and repudiate sin (“turn away”)
Victory over sin	Not achievable and not important. Christ paid it all.	Achievable and an evidence that we are “born again.” He who is born of God does not continue in sin.

The Law and the Atonement [\[e\]](#)

God’s law—a transcript of God’s character. In Adventist theology, the Law of God—the Ten Commandments given at Sinai—is not merely a legal code but a revelation of God’s own character, and as such it stands as a central component in the plan of salvation. Its true meaning emerges only when understood in relation to the purpose of the atonement: the restoration of human beings into the image of God (cf. Genesis 1:26–27).

Adventists hold that the Law reflects God’s own nature and government, a government founded on *love, truth, and freedom*—the very principles Satan rejected and sought to overthrow. Because God’s government is moral and relational rather than merely administrative, the Law expresses how love functions in practice (cf. Romans 13:10). It is not arbitrary but **the blueprint of divine character** itself, so that to live in harmony with the Law is to live in harmony with God.

Christ’s work. This is why the Law cannot be separated from the atoning work of Christ. His death demonstrates two truths at once: **the immutability of the Law**, which could not simply be set aside, and the **self-sacrificing love of God** in meeting its just claims (cf. Romans 3:25–26). Salvation, then, does not abolish the Law but upholds it, even as it offers forgiveness to those who have broken it.

The Law written in the heart (*transformation*). Yet salvation, in Adventist thought, involves more than pardon—it involves *transformation*. Through the new covenant promise, God writes His Law upon the heart (cf. Jeremiah 31:33), a work accomplished by the spirit, so that obedience

becomes internal and relational rather than merely external. This is the sense in which right-doing (*righteousness*) comes through trust (*faith*) in God's ability (*grace*) to set right (*justify*) the believer and bring about a change of heart, a *new birth* into a *new man*.

Image of God. The ultimate goal of this transformation is the restoration of God's image in humanity, and the Law serves that goal in several ways at once: as a **standard** of what restored humanity looks like, as a **guide** for daily living, and as the **means through which love finds expression in action**. Character development, understood this way, is not legalistic striving but cooperation with divine grace. As believers abide in Christ, they increasingly reflect the Law's own principles of love, truth, and freedom—the very attributes of God's character (cf. Galatians 5:22–23).

Cosmic context. Adventists set this whole account within the larger narrative of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan, for the Law itself becomes a point of cosmic dispute. Satan claims that God's Law is restrictive and unjust; God answers that claim not merely with argument but with redeemed lives, demonstrating that His Law is rooted in love, truth, and freedom. Transformed human character thus becomes the evidence, played out in history, that God's way is righteous.

Further reading. Further discussion of this subject can be found in the article "*God-centric Doctrines*," under the section titled "[*God's law*](#)."

Key takeaways [\[e\]](#)

The following are the key takeaways from this article:

1. **Definition of atonement.** Atonement is the process by which God addresses sin in order to restore the broken relationship between Himself and humanity.
2. **Atonement as a comprehensive process.** In Seventh-day Adventist theology, atonement is understood not as a single event but as a process that includes forgiveness, moral renewal, and final vindication in judgment.
3. **Contrast with penal substitution.** Adventist atonement theology stands in contrast to Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA), which interprets atonement primarily in legal and punitive terms.
4. **Relational emphasis.** Biblically, atonement centers on reconciliation and restored fellowship rather than merely legal resolution.
5. **Covenantal context.** Atonement operates within the framework of God's covenant relationship with His people.
6. **Atonement vs. reconciliation.** Atonement addresses the problem of sin, while reconciliation describes the restored relationship that results.
7. **Central theological question.** Atonement seeks to explain how God remains just, holy, and merciful while restoring humanity through Christ.
8. **Beyond individual guilt.** The need for atonement includes not only guilt but also bondage to sin, death, and exile.
9. **Justice and mercy united.** Atonement demonstrates how divine justice and mercy operate together without contradiction.
10. **Transformational goal.** Atonement produces a changed people who live in righteousness, not merely forgiven individuals.
11. **Meaning of "atonement".** The term originally meant "at-one-ment," emphasizing unity and restored harmony with God.
12. **Tyndale's contribution.** William Tyndale coined "atonement" to describe reconciliation, not penal payment.
13. **Shift in theology.** Later theological developments introduced legal and penal meanings not inherent in the original term.
14. **Atonement vs. forgiveness.** Forgiveness is part of atonement, but atonement ultimately results in full reconciliation.
15. **Old Testament system.** Atonement in the Old Testament functioned

through covenantal rituals that restored access to God's presence.

16. **Not a payment model.** Scripture does not describe sacrifices as payments or as satisfying a retributive penalty.
17. **Sanctuary cleansing.** Sacrificial blood was applied to sacred spaces to cleanse impurity rather than transferred to individuals.
18. **Scapegoat function.** The scapegoat ritual symbolized the removal of sin rather than its punishment.
19. **Covenant and blood.** Blood in atonement signifies covenant commitment and life, not transactional compensation.
20. **Expiation versus propitiation.** Expiation refers to the removal or cleansing of sin itself, while propitiation refers to appeasing divine wrath.
21. **Propitiation critiqued.** The idea of appeasing God's wrath through sacrifice is not explicitly taught in biblical atonement texts.
22. **Sacrifices do not appease wrath.** No biblical passage explicitly links atoning sacrifices with appeasing God's wrath, a concept the article associates more closely with pagan religious practice.
23. **Faith and obedience over sacrifice.** Scripture emphasizes faith and obedience as what truly pleases God rather than ritual offerings alone (cf. 1 Samuel 15:22).
24. **Repentance required.** Atonement presupposes repentance and a turning away from sin.
25. **Renewed faithfulness.** Atonement represents a recommitment to covenant relationship rather than a mere reset of moral status.
26. **New Testament reconciliation language.** The New Testament uses relational terms such as *katallagē* (reconciliation), *hilastērion* (mercy seat), and *aphiēmi* (release) over commercial or payment language.
27. **Christ as mercy seat, not appeasement.** Christ fulfills the role of the "mercy seat" (Romans 3:25), the place where reconciliation and cleansing occur, rather than a payment that appeases wrath.
28. **Unified biblical definition.** Atonement is defined as God's gracious action to remove sin and its effects in order to restore a broken relationship, with sacrifice serving that goal rather than being the goal itself.
29. **Covering motif.** The Hebrew concept of atonement involves "covering," which includes cleansing, protection, and restoration.
30. **Garments of righteousness.** The covering of Adam and Eve foreshadows God's provision of righteousness through Christ.

31. **Adam performed the first sacrifice.** Following Ellen G. White, the article holds that Adam himself, not God, performed the first sacrificial killing, foreshadowing that humanity instigated by Satan caused Christ's death.
32. **Sanctuary typology.** The sanctuary system illustrates atonement as a process of cleansing, mediation, and restored access to God.
33. **Greek prepositions describing Christ's death.** The New Testament describes Christ dying "for" sin using *dia*, *hyper*, and *peri*, each contributing a distinct nuance of cause, benefit, and sacrificial reference.
34. **The term "anti" would be required for true substitution.** Clear substitution in Greek is expressed by *anti*, meaning "instead of," a word never used in New Testament statements about Christ dying for sin.
35. **Romans read as covenantal, not forensic.** The article reads key Romans passages as describing covenantal transformation and restored relationship rather than a purely forensic legal transaction.
36. **Redemption as liberation, not payment.** "*Apolytrosis*" in Romans 3:24 is understood as release or liberation from sin's power rather than a commercial payment made to satisfy a debt.
37. **Faith as relational trust.** Biblical faith is neither merely intellectual belief nor mere behavioral obedience, but a relational trust in which a believer yields the will to God.
38. **The *Sola Fide* formula.** The Protestant pattern is "faith leads to salvation and good works," not "faith plus good works leads to salvation," distinguishing it from the Catholic view of justification as a lifelong process.
39. **The 1888 message on righteousness by faith.** The 1888 Minneapolis session, led by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner and supported by Ellen White, renewed emphasis on righteousness by faith over legalistic tendencies.
40. **Righteousness understood as right-doing.** Jones and Waggoner taught that justification means actually becoming a "right doer" through faith, not merely being declared righteous in a legal sense.
41. **Justification requires ongoing obedience.** Ellen White taught that justification cannot coexist with the continued practice of known sin, requiring continual surrender of the will and obedience to be retained.
42. **Dual Atonement (SDA).** Adventist theology teaches both the completed sacrifice of Christ and his ongoing heavenly ministry.

43. **Daily and yearly sacrifices as type.** The daily sacrifice, which secured forgiveness, and the yearly Day of Atonement, which secured cleansing, together typify the two necessary phases of dual atonement.
44. **A century of debate over dual atonement.** From the 1888 message through the 1957 Questions on Doctrine and the 1980 Glacier View Conference, Adventism has continually renegotiated the language of dual versus single atonement.
45. **God's law as a transcript of character.** In Adventist theology, God's law is not an arbitrary legal code but a revelation of God's own character, central to the purpose of atonement.
46. **God's law written in the heart.** Atonement includes the new-covenant promise that God writes His law in the heart, producing internal, relational obedience rather than external legalism.
47. **Final goal of atonement.** The ultimate purpose of atonement is the full restoration of God's image in humanity and the eradication of sin.

► X. Spirit as Essence

According to the Trinity doctrine, the Holy Spirit is identified as the third Person of the triune Godhead. This understanding was formally established as church doctrine at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 AD. However, the Catholic Church acknowledges that this doctrine cannot be conclusively derived from the Old Testament and is only partially revealed in the New Testament. This acknowledgment is reflected in the following statements:

- **“The Old Testament clearly does not envisage God’s spirit as a person...God’s spirit is simply God’s power. If it is sometimes represented as being distinct from God, it is because the breath of Yahweh acts exteriorly...The majority of New Testament texts reveal God’s spirit as something, not someone; this is especially seen in the parallelism between the spirit and the power of God”** — [*“God’s Spirit Not Presented as a Person,”*](#) New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, 2003, Vol. 13, pp. 426, 429.
- **“On the whole the New Testament, like the Old, speaks of the spirit as a divine energy or power”** —W.E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, [*A Catholic Dictionary, 9th Edition, p. 841.*](#)

Thus, if one believes the Holy Spirit to be a Person, that belief rests on a position that cannot be conclusively proven from Scripture. The Old Testament offers no direct support for it, and the New Testament provides only limited and arguable evidence. Rather, the position taken here is that the spirit is best understood as God’s power—His divine energy or essence. This article seeks to establish this understanding.

Executive summary. The major topics covered are the following:

- The spirit is not in key passages
- The spirit is not the soul
- [The spirit is not a person](#)
- [The spirit does not have names and gender](#)
- [The spirit does not have consciousness](#)
- [The spirit attributes are derivative](#)
- [“God is spirit” in John 4:24 is misinterpreted](#)
- [The spirit is the Paraclete](#)
- [The spirit is God’s power](#)
- [DA: The mighty agency of the third person](#)
- [EGW on the spirit](#)
- [Key takeaways](#)

The spirit is not in key passages

Distinguished by omissions. There are many key passages in the New Testament where the holy spirit is not mentioned. The question should be asked, “Why not?” Here are some examples:

- **The Lord’s Prayer.** Jesus’ model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) does not include the holy spirit.
- **Father and Son are one (*John 10:30*).** The spirit is not mentioned.
- **Eternal life.** Jesus declares eternal life to be a knowledge of the Father and Son (*John 17:3*)—but not the spirit.
- **The Throne.** The Father and Son are on thrones or on a throne (*Matthew 19:28*; *Hebrews 12:2*; *Revelation 3:21*; *22:1, 3*)—but not the spirit.
- **The Temple.** The temple in the New Jerusalem will be “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (*Revelation 21:22*)—no mention of the spirit.
- **The Light.** The light in the New Jerusalem will be the glory of God and the Lamb (*Revelation 21:23*)—no mention of the spirit.
- **Glorify and honor.** The apostles give praise, glory, and honor to the Father and Son without mentioning the spirit (*1 Timothy 1:16-17*; *Hebrews 2:9*; *1 Peter 1:3-9*; *2 Peter 1:16-17*; *Revelation 5:13*; and so on). If the spirit were part of the Trinity, this would be a grave omission.
- **Salutations (greetings).** Nearly all the salutations in the New Testament include the Father and Son—but not the spirit. The two exceptions are *1 Peter 1:2* and [Revelation 1:4-5](#). However, they do not refer to a Third Person when carefully read.

Those in support of the holy spirit being a Person argue that the holy spirit is not mentioned in these key passages because:

- The spirit’s role was **progressively revealed**.
- The **focus** of those passages was on the Father or the Son.
- The spirit’s work is **implicit**, not always explicit.
- The spirit’s ministry is **to glorify Christ**, not himself.
- The early Christian writings maintain **literary simplicity** and continuity with Jewish prayer forms.

However, The claim that the holy spirit is **implicit** in passages where it is *not mentioned* often functions as a **theological presupposition rather than an exegetical conclusion**. The counter-argument is as follows:

1. **Argument from silence vs. argument from absence.** It is important to distinguish between:

- An **argument from silence**, which tries to *prove something* from the fact that it's not mentioned, and
- An **argument from absence**, which notes that something's *consistent non-mention* may suggest it was *not in view* or *not a developed concept* at the time.

When one observes that the spirit is not mentioned in key formulaic or theological passages (e.g., the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13, or the salutations in Paul's letters), one is not arguing *from silence* in an isolated case—but *from a pattern of absence*. This difference is significant: the consistent omission suggests that the spirit was not being treated as a coequal personal agent alongside the Father and the Son in early formulations of faith or prayer.

2. **The burden of proof lies with the implicit-argument claim.** If a text *does not mention* the spirit, it is **the burden of the claimant** to show that the spirit is nevertheless intended or implied. Saying that the spirit is “implicitly present” in passages like the Lord's Prayer or Pauline greetings assumes a **Trinitarian framework retroactively** rather than deriving it from the text itself. In sound exegesis, one cannot simply insert a later theological development into earlier texts unless there are clear contextual indicators.
3. **Consistency of explicit mention.** If the spirit were understood as a coequal Person in the same sense as the Father and the Son, one would expect **consistent triadic formulations**—especially in passages dealing with prayer, blessing, or divine identity. However, this is *not* what we find:

- The **Lord's Prayer** (Matt. 6:9–13) invokes only the Father.
- Most **epistolary greetings** mention only “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Doxologies** such as 1 Timothy 1:17 or Jude 25 also omit the spirit.

The consistent absence in such formal and theological expressions undermines the claim that the spirit's Personhood or coequality was universally assumed.

4. **The “implicit” argument as theological circularity.** The argument that “the spirit must be implicit” tends to be **circular**:
 - Premise: The holy spirit is coequal and personal.
 - Conclusion: Therefore, the spirit must be implied wherever God is at work or mentioned.

But this does not arise *from* the text—it reads theology *into* the text (*eisegeisis*). The reasoning is circular because it assumes the very thing it tries to prove.

5. **Possible alternative explanations.** The consistent omission may suggest that early Christian communities:

- Primarily associated **God’s presence and agency** with the Father *through* the Son, not through a distinct third Person.
- Understood the “spirit” as **God’s power or presence**, not as a separate entity to whom prayer or greeting was directed.
- Only later—centuries later—as Trinitarian theology developed, was the spirit’s Personhood systematized into formal doctrine.

Conclusion. The argument that the holy spirit is “implicit” in texts where it is not mentioned is **hermeneutically weak**. It assumes later Trinitarian categories, shifts the burden of proof, and overlooks the significance of consistent omission in key theological contexts. A more textually faithful reading would acknowledge that early Christian usage reflects the original understanding of God’s spirit—one that does not fit the personified or coequal conception of later creedal theology.

The spirit is not the soul

The Bible distinguishes clearly between the spirit and the soul. These two are not the same: the spirit is not the soul, and the soul is not the spirit. Although many Christians use the terms interchangeably, Scripture maintains a clear distinction between them.

“Soul” defined. When God created Adam, He formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7), and Adam became a living soul (*nephesh*). Thus, a soul is the union of a physical body—formed from dust—and the divine breath that imparts life (cf. Job 33:4, “*The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life*”). In simple terms:

body + spirit = soul

Therefore, a soul is **not** something a person *has* but something a person *is*—a living, breathing being composed of body and spirit.

Soul as person. To many Christians, the term *soul* carries connotations of immortality and mysticism, but this is not a biblical concept. In Hebrew, *nephesh* (“soul”) refers to the person as a whole. For example, in 1 Kings 20:32, the phrase “Let me live” is literally “Let my soul [*nephesh*] live,” expressing the desire for one’s life to be spared. Similarly, Genesis 27:4 says, “that my soul may bless you before I die,” which simply means

“that *I* may bless you.” In such cases, “soul” identifies the person—the self—not a separate life force, spirit, or energy. Accordingly, Bible translators generally and correctly render *nephesh* as referring to the person, emphasizing that the *soul* in Scripture denotes one’s entire being rather than an independent, immaterial entity.

Soul death. Moreover, if a soul—i.e. “person”—lacks a spirit, or if the spirit departs from it, the soul dies. James explains this principle: “*For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26).

This is also understood from these Bible verses:

- *Psalms 104:29*: You hide your face; they are troubled. You take away their breath [*ruach*]; they die and return to the dust.
- *Ecclesiastes 12:7*: and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit [*ruach*] returns to God who gave it.

Spiritual life. Thus, the *spirit* of a person is the *life* that animates the body. No one is alive once the spirit has departed from the body. In the same way, in the biblical understanding of **spiritual life**, when Paul wrote that “the spirit is life” (Rom. 8:10), he was affirming that God’s eternal spirit is the true source of life. For this reason, Scripture teaches that no one possess eternal life until he receives God’s life-giving spirit. When Jesus declared, “I am come that they might have life” (John 10:10), he was referring to the divine life—the spirit of God that was poured out on the day of Pentecost. As Acts 2:33 states, “Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you now see and hear.” This, then, is the very purpose of Jesus’ coming: to make humanity partakers of the spirit of God—the holy spirit—the *life* of God.

[DA 21.2](#): But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. “I do nothing of Myself,” said Christ; “the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.” “I seek not Mine own glory,” but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. **All things Christ received from God**, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: **through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all**; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.

The spirit is not a person [\[e\]](#)

Since a soul is defined as the union of body and spirit (i.e. **body + spirit = soul**), the definition of a soul—or “person”—necessarily includes the fact that the person **has a body**.

God the Father is a Person. It is widely accepted in Christian theology that God the Father **is a Person**. In Trinitarian doctrine, as expressed in the creeds, the Father is: *one of the three Persons of the one Godhead*. However, when Trinitarians use the term “Person,” they do not mean it in the same sense as a human person composed of body and spirit. God the Father, being spirit (John 4:24), is not incarnate as Jesus is, and therefore has no physical or material form.

This raises an important question regarding the definition of “person” within the doctrine of the Trinity. Humans are persons because they possess bodies, yet God the Father is called a Person though He has none. This distinction is evidently incongruous and self-contradictory. Early Adventists, however, did not encounter this difficulty, since they believed that God the Father *possesses a body*—not an earthly one of mortal substance, but a heavenly one of immortal substance. Ellen G. White herself affirmed this concept, reporting a vision in which it was confirmed.

Early Adventists view on God’s materiality. Early Adventists held to this very position: that God the Father is a Person with a body and body parts—i.e. that God the Father is a *material* being, not *immaterial*. James White, EGW’s husband, made the following statements which was the commonly held view in those days:

- [PERGO 7.4](#): **What is God?** He is material, organized intelligence, **possessing both body and parts**. Man is in his image.
- [PERGO 7.5](#): **What is Jesus Christ?** He is the Son of God, and is like his Father, being “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” He is a material intelligence, **with body, parts, and passions; possessing immortal flesh and immortal bones**.

In Early Writings, EGW tells us of the conversation she had with Christ in vision as follows:

[EW 54.2](#): I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. **He said He had**, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.”

God’s body parts. Does the Bible support the idea that God has a body with body parts? Yes, it does. Consider the following references:

God's body parts	Scriptures
Head & hair	Dan. 7:9
Eyes	Prov. 15:3; Deut. 11:12; Ps. 34:15
Eyelids	Ps. 11:4
Ears (hear)	Ps. 17:6; 34:15; 5:3
Nose (smell)	Lev. 26:31; Amos 5:21; Phil. 4:18
Nostrils	Ex. 15:8; Job 4:9; Ps. 18:8, 15
Mouth	Deut. 8:3
Tongue	Isa. 30:27
Lips	Job 11:5; 23:12; Isa. 30:27
Breath	Ps. 33:6
Voice	Gen. 3:8; Deut. 4:12; Isa. 6:8; 30:30
Face / countenance	Ex. 33:20; Ps. 13:1; Num. 6:26; Ps. 4:6
Arm	Deut. 33:27; Isa. 51:5
Hands	Gen. 49:24; Ex. 15:17; Isa. 5:12
Finger	Ex. 8:19; 31:18; Luke 11:20; Ps. 8:3
Back	Ex. 33:23
Feet	Ex. 24:10; 2 Sam. 22:10; Isa. 60:13; Nah. 1:3
Bodily form or "image"	Num. 12:8; James 3:9; Rev. 4:3; Gen. 1:26-27 with 5:3
Heart	Gen. 6:6; 8:1; Hos. 11:8
Spirit	Gen. 1:2; 1 Cor. 2:11
Soul	Isa. 1:14; 42:1; Jer. 5:9, 29

God also rides, walks, sits, stands, feels and thinks. Yes, we are made in God's likeness or *image*, not just in soul and spirit but also in body!

Spirit not a person. Again, the Father is a person and the Son is a person because they have bodies. However, the spirit of God has no body; therefore it is *nobody*. It is God's life. Man was created in the image of God, and we can see from our own makeup that our spirit is not another person either. Our spirit is our life, and God's spirit is God's life. God's life is in his body, just as our life is in our body. So, the spirit of God is the life that is in the Father, which he gave to the Son (cp. John 5:26, "*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself*"), and which the Son was ordained by God to give to others (John 17:2, "*to give eternal life to all whom you have given him*"). Jesus was always very aware of his dependency on his Father for his life (cp. John 6:57, "*Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father,*

so whoever feeds on me will also live because of me”). We should also maintain such an awareness and a gratitude to Jesus for ours (cp. Col. 1:17, “*He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together*”).

EGW: God is a person, but the spirit is an essence. Ellen G. White differentiated between God being a “person” and the holy spirit being an “essence”. Moreover, she warned *against* the idea (or theory) that God is an essence.

- [8LtMs, Ms 93, 1893, par. 6](#): Every church member will be vigorous and fruitful in proportion as he honors **the Father, who is not to be regarded as an essence but as a personal God who made man in His own image and likeness.**
- [13LtMs, Ms 117, 1898, par. 10](#): Through Jesus Christ, **God—not a perfume, not something intangible, but a personal God**—created man and endowed him with intelligence and power.
- [CCh 322.6](#): The theory **that God is an essence** pervading all nature **is one of Satan’s most subtle devices.** It misrepresents God and is a dishonor to His greatness and majesty.
- [FLB 40.5](#): The theory **that God is an essence** pervading all nature is received by many who profess to believe the Scriptures; but, however beautifully clothed, **this theory is a most dangerous deception...**
- [19LtMs, Ms 153, 1904, par. 25](#): Oh, the wonderful sophistry that is coming in, the masterly sophistry—**that God is an essence. We have got a God, a personal God and a personal Saviour.**

However, EGW clearly stated that the holy spirit **is** an essence.

- [7LtMs, Ms 8c, 1891, par. 12](#): The believers in all ages are to be one, and **the Holy Spirit is the living essence** that cements, animates, and pervades the whole body of Christ’s followers.
- [8T 326.4](#): Fathers and mothers, teach your children of the **wonder-working power of God. His power is manifest** in every plant, in every tree that bears fruit. Take the children into the garden and explain to them how He causes the seed to grow. The farmer plows his land and sows the seed, but he cannot make the seed grow. He must depend upon God to do that which no human power can do. **The Lord puts His own Spirit into the seed, causing it to spring into life.** Under His care the germ breaks through the case enclosing it and springs up to develop and bear fruit.

Also consider these statements from EGW:

- [MH 417.2](#): The Bible shows us God in His high and holy place, not in a state of inactivity, not in silence and solitude, but surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands of holy beings, all waiting to do His will. Through these messengers He is in active communication with every part of His dominion. **By His Spirit He is everywhere present. Through the agency of His Spirit and His angels He ministers to the children of men.**
- [Ed 132.2; 1903](#). The greatness of God is to us incomprehensible. “The Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Psalm 11:4); **yet by His Spirit He is everywhere present.** He has an intimate knowledge of, and a personal interest in, all the works of His hand.

The spirit does not have names and gender [\[↵\]](#)

Persons have names. The Father and Son are “persons”. They have names—Yehovah in the case of the Father (in the OT) and Jesus in the case of the Son (in the NT). Moreover, Yehovah has other secondary names in the OT while Jesus has other secondary names in the NT.

However, the spirit has no “name” other than spirit or holy spirit. Rather than the spirit being a “person,” the Bible identifies it as an “essence” with titles and attributes largely *derived* from the Father and Son. In the NT, when the spirit is referenced, it is simply the “holy spirit” or “God’s spirit” or the “spirit of God” or the “spirit of Christ”.

“Spirit” or “spirit.” Capitalization was not a part of the original languages of the Bible, given that the Old Testament languages (Hebrew and Aramaic) did not have upper and lower case letters, while the New Testament Greek manuscripts were all written in uppercase (i.e. “uncial” or “majuscule” script). Thus, wherever you see “Spirit” (vs. “spirit”) and “Holy Spirit” (vs. “holy spirit”) in your English Bibles, you are reading the translator’s interpretation (or translation *bias*) for the given word when the term is capitalized.

Wrong gender. The word “spirit” in Hebrew is *feminine*, while in the Greek it is *neuter* (i.e. neither *masculine* nor *feminine*). Yet, in Trinitarian thinking, the holy spirit is always understood as a “He” not a “She” or an “It”. In the New Testament the word “spirit” (*pneuma*) and surrounding context should be understood and translated as *neuter* — “it” not “he” or “she”. But, alas, that is not the case. Most Bible translations slant the meaning to the masculine without grammatical justification. For further discussion on the term *pneuma*, see the resource entry: [Translation of pneuma](#).

Non-familial relationship. God is our Father and Christ is our Elder Brother (Rom. 8:29). But, the spirit is none of those—he (or “it”) is neither Father, Mother, or Brother, but a totally non-familial relationship to us. Jesus desired that the Father and Son be one with us (John 17:21-23), as a kind of **family**, without ever mentioning the spirit. How could Jesus forget about the spirit in this equation? It is because the spirit is not in the family as a Person but as an Essence.

The apostle John said that our “fellowship is *with* the Father and *with* his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3) but failed to mention the spirit. Are we not to have fellowship with the spirit also? There is a reference to “the fellowship *of* the holy spirit” in 2 Corinthians 13:14 but note that it is “*of* the holy spirit” not “*with* the holy spirit”. Again, Essence not Person.

The spirit does not have consciousness [\[e\]](#)

The spirit is not described in Scripture as a self-conscious, independent being. Rather, the biblical term for “spirit” (Hebrew *ruach*; Greek *pneuma*) commonly denotes the life-force or the breath that animates a person. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly present the spirit as a pre-existing, self-aware entity that survives apart from the body after death. While the Bible includes accounts that modern readers sometimes label “ghosts” or “phantoms,” those passages do not establish a clear, systematic doctrine that human spirits remain conscious and active apart from bodily existence.

Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-25). The one exception often cited is the story of the Witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28—the sole account of a séance in the Bible. In this narrative, King Saul seeks out a medium to summon the supposed spirit of Samuel for counsel. However, proper **biblical principles of interpretation** must guide our understanding of passages involving witches, mediums, or similar practices, especially when the text appears unclear. The biblical principles (and flaws) in the story are discussed in detail in the resource entry, “[Witch of Endor](#).” A summary list of arguments *against* the notion that this story proves consciousness after death is given below:

1. **God’s law forbids contact with the dead.** Since Scripture *strictly prohibits* any attempt to consult the dead (Deut. 18:10–12; Lev. 19:31), it would contradict God’s character for Him to assist Saul in doing so. **Interpretation:** The séance scene cannot represent a **divinely approved revelation of Samuel’s spirit**, because that would make God complicit in the act He forbids. Therefore, whatever appeared was **not truly Samuel**, but a **deceptive apparition**, perhaps **demonic** in nature.

2. **“Samuel” was only an imitation or illusion.** The entity that appeared **only looked and sounded like** Samuel. The witch “saw gods (elohim) ascending out of the earth” (v.13), which may suggest **supernatural deception** rather than an authentic resurrection. Saul himself “**perceived**” it was Samuel (v.14)—but the text never explicitly says that *God* or the narrator confirmed this perception as fact. **Conclusion:** The being was an **imposter**, not the real Samuel.
3. **God had already stopped speaking to Saul.** **Key text:** “When Saul inquired of Yehovah, Yehovah did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets” (v.6). **Reasoning:** If God had completely withdrawn His communication, it would be inconsistent for Him to allow a **dead prophet** to speak on His behalf. Therefore, this encounter must have come from a **different source**—not divine, but deceptive.
4. **The dead know nothing.** **Theological premise:** Passages like Ecclesiastes 9:5–6 (“*the dead know nothing*”) and Psalm 146:4 (“*in that very day his thoughts perish*”) describe death as the **cessation of consciousness**. Thus, Samuel—if truly dead—could not be conscious or communicating. Any appearance must therefore be **supernatural mimicry**, not genuine resurrection.
5. **The “prophecy” reflects prior knowledge.** The so-called prophecy of Saul’s death (vv.19–20) does not require supernatural foresight: Saul was already told repeatedly by Samuel (before his death) that the kingdom would be taken from him. The Philistines’ military superiority made Saul’s defeat **predictable**. So the “prophecy” may have been a **taunt** from an evil spirit, not a divine revelation.
6. **The narrative is descriptive, not doctrinal.** Even if one takes the story at face value, it is **not teaching doctrine about the afterlife**—it merely reports what Saul did in his rebellion and despair. The passage serves as a **warning**, not a theological proof: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness... and for consulting a medium for guidance” (1 Chron. 10:13–14). Thus, its moral thrust is about **disobedience and divine judgment**, not **post-mortem existence**.
7. **Possible alternative explanations.** **Psychological:** Saul, terrified and exhausted, could have **imagined** the encounter. **Visionary:** God may have allowed Saul to see a **visionary image** (not a real Samuel) to confirm his condemnation. **Demonic deception:** A familiar spirit impersonated Samuel to **deceive** Saul further.

Summary: One can *reject* the **consciousness after death** interpretation on the basis that:

- The story violates divine law

- God had ceased communication with King Saul
- Scripture elsewhere denies consciousness in death
- The “Samuel” figure could have been an evil spirit or an illusion
- The narrative’s purpose is moral, not metaphysical.

Hence, the Witch of Endor account does **not** teach that spirits have consciousness after death. It is a **narrative of judgment and divine intervention**, not a **doctrinal exposition on the nature of the spirit**. In the broader biblical framework, “spirit” refers to the **life-breath** God gives, which returns to Him at death—not to a conscious, immortal essence that survives the body.

The spirit attributes are derivative [\[e\]](#)

Derivative attributes. Carefully studied, it becomes evident that all of the titles and definitions applied to the holy spirit describe characteristics that stem from the Father and the Son and do not necessitate an additional personality.

- “The Spirit of God” (Matthew 3:16)
- “The Spirit of Christ” (1 Peter 1:11)
- “The Spirit of Holiness” (Romans 1:4)
- “The Spirit of Truth” (John 14:17)
- “The Spirit of a Sound Mind” (2 Timothy 1:7)
- “The Holy Spirit of Promise” (Ephesians 1:13)
- “The Spirit of Meekness” (Galatians 6:1)
- “The Spirit of Understanding” (Isaiah 11:2)
- “The Spirit of Wisdom” (Ephesians 1:17)
- “The Spirit of Glory” (1 Peter 4:14)
- “The Spirit of Counsel” (Isaiah 11:2)
- “The Spirit of Grace” (Hebrews 10:29)
- “The Spirit of Adoption” (Romans 8:15)
- “The Spirit of Prophecy” (Revelation 19:10)

Also, many of the spirit’s attributes can be shown to originate in the Father or the Son. For example, the spirit is named “Comforter” in John 14:26 (KJV), yet the Father is called “the God of all comfort” in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Other examples include making intercession: Romans 8:26; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; and enabling spiritual understanding: 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 1 John 5:20.

Attributes of the spirit of man. If the spirit of God were a person, then what would the spirit of man be? Would it not also be a person? From the Bible, we learn that man’s spirit can be:

- “troubled” (Gen. 41:8)
- “revived” (Gen 45:27; Isa. 57:15)
- “stirred up” (1 Chr. 5:26; 2 Chr. 36:22; Ezra 1:1)
- “wounded” (Prov. 18:14)
- “overwhelmed” (Ps. 77:3)
- “refreshed” (1 Cor. 16:18)

Further, the spirit of man is said to:

- Be willing to do something (Ex. 35:21)
- Restrain one from an action (Job 32:18)
- Searches things out (Ps. 77:6; Prov. 20:27; Isa. 26:9; Ezek. 13:3; Matt. 22:43)
- Sometimes fails (Ps. 143:7)
- Sustains a man (Prov. 18:14)
- “Rejoice” (Luke 1:47)
- Serve God (Rom. 1:9)
- “bear witness” (Rom. 8:16)
- “confess” (1 John 4:2)
- Knows things (1 Cor. 2:10-11)
- It can pray (1 Cor. 14:14)
- It can work (Eph. 2:2)
- It needs rest (2 Cor. 2:13)
- It travels (Eccl. 3:21; 12:7; Luke 8:55, cp. 1 Cor. 5:3-4)
- It can go places and return (Judges 15:19)
- It can stand up and do work (Eccl. 10:4; Eph. 2:2)

Again, do the above attributes of the spirit of man, make that spirit another person or entity? Certainly, not! When a man’s spirit prays, the man is praying. When a man’s spirit knows something, the man knows something. Your spirit is you. And God’s spirit is God. None of the activities of man’s spirit means that man’s spirit is a person, and yet Trinitarians use the same or similar attributes of God’s spirit as evidence that it is a Third Person.

We were created in God’s image, and the fact that the Bible mentions things done by the spirit of God is only to be expected, since our spirits do the same kind of things. It is altogether proper to speak of the holy spirit as living, feeling, performing deeds, and knowing, because God does those things. And he does them by the same means we do them: by the spirit that dwells in him. God’s spirit is his life, just as our spirit is our life (James 2:26).

“God is spirit” in John 4:24 is misinterpreted [\[d\]](#)

The following discussion pertains to the passage:

John 4:24: God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

Single occurrence. First, the reader should note that the phrase “God is spirit” appears in John 4:24 and nowhere else in Scripture. This observation relates to a well-established principle in biblical interpretation (*hermeneutics*): doctrine should be built on the consistent teaching of Scripture as a whole—not on a single, isolated passage.

Moreover, a foundational principle in Christian theology is that clear passages help interpret those that are less clear. Some verses are straightforward and repeatedly affirmed, while others are rare, symbolic, or ambiguous.

Additionally, doctrines that are central to the faith are typically repeated frequently, taught across multiple books, and expressed with clarity. For example, core teachings such as love, repentance, and faith appear throughout the Bible. By contrast, a teaching found in only one place may not carry the same doctrinal weight.

Context matters. A single verse can easily be misunderstood if it is removed from its immediate context (the surrounding verses), its cultural or historical setting, or its literary genre (such as poetry, narrative, or prophecy). Building doctrine on a verse without considering these factors often leads to distortion.

There is also the danger of proof-texting. “Proof-texting” occurs when a verse is taken out of context and used to support a pre-existing belief. This approach can produce imbalanced or even false doctrines, especially when the verse is symbolic, the language is idiomatic, or the meaning is debated.

Analysis of John 4:24. Given these interpretive considerations, the immediate context of John 4:24 is Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–26). In this dialogue, Jesus addresses the question of where and how true worship should occur—whether on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem. **His point is that true worship is not tied to a specific location, ritual, or external form, but to the inner spiritual reality of communion with God.**

The Greek phrase translated “God is spirit” is *pneuma ho theos* (literally, “spirit the God”), where *pneuma* (“spirit”) functions as a qualitative predicate nominative and *ho theos* (“the God”) is the subject. Most modern translations *correctly* render this as “God is spirit,” rather than

“God is *a* spirit,” as found in some older translations.

The interpretive question, then, is whether the statement “*God is spirit*” describes God’s essential nature in a physical or metaphysical sense (i.e., that He is formless), or whether it describes His character or mode of being—similar to statements such as “*God is light*” (1 John 1:5) and “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8).

The position taken here is that this verse is not a description of God’s “physical” makeup, but (as the context suggests) of **His character and spiritual nature**. Accordingly, the verse may be paraphrased as follows:

John 4:24 (paraphrased): God is a spiritual (and truthful) being, therefore, those who worship him must worship him in the same way: spiritually and truthfully.

Understood in this way, the verse is not describing God’s physical composition, but His spiritual nature—just as Scripture affirms that God is light and love. **True worship, therefore, involves a correspondence between Spirit and spirit:** God’s Spirit engaging with the human spirit in truthful communion.

The spirit is the Paraclete [\[e\]](#)

In his farewell address to his disciples (found in John 14-17), Jesus told them, “the Father will send you **another Paraclete** like me” (John 14:16, *paraphrased*). This statement highlights continuity: the Paraclete—identified as the holy spirit in v.26—would *continue* Jesus’ personal presence and mission among his disciples.

The Greek word translated as “**another**” means “another of the same kind” (see the resource entry “[Another Paraclete](#)” for details). Jesus was the first Paraclete, and the holy spirit was to be the second. This second Paraclete would be another manifestation of Jesus himself, as he declared: “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you” (John 14:18). The disciples did not understand what he meant, so Judas (not Iscariot) asked, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” (John 14:22). What they failed to grasp was that Jesus was speaking of a **spiritual manifestation**—Jesus was speaking to them in a **spiritual sense**. As Ellen G. White explains,

[12LtMs, Ms 44, 1897, par. 3](#): That Christ should **manifest** Himself to them, and yet be invisible to the world, was a mystery to the disciples. They could not understand the words of Christ in their **spiritual sense**. They were thinking of the outward, visible manifestation. They could not take in the fact that they could have the presence

of Christ with them, and yet He be unseen by the world. **They did not understand the meaning of a spiritual manifestation.**

The disciples did not yet understand that Jesus would manifest himself to them spiritually—that he could come to them by his spirit. They would experience his presence not visibly or tangibly, but in a spiritual way—in a **spiritual sense**, by a **spiritual manifestation**. Likewise, we too can experience the presence of Christ by his spirit. Moreover, this manifestation includes not only Jesus but the Father as well. Jesus himself explained, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and **we will come to him** and make our home with him” (John 14:23). This statement supports the preceding verse: “On that day you will know that **I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you**” (John 14:20).

This **spiritual sense** concept is mentioned again in Desire of Ages:

[DA 670.1](#): The disciples still failed to understand Christ’s words **in their spiritual sense**, and again He explained His meaning. **By the Spirit, He said, He would manifest Himself to them.** “The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things.” No more will you say, I cannot comprehend. No longer will you see through a glass, darkly. You shall “be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” Ephesians 3:18, 19.

Christ alone. It is through Christ alone that we come to the Father. “No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

[DA 663.5](#): **Christ alone** could represent the Father to humanity. . . [\[DA 664.1\]](#) Christ’s work testified to His divinity. **Through Him the Father had been revealed.**

But how does one come to the Father through Christ alone, when Christ is in heaven? Again, EGW:

[DA 166.2](#): While Jesus ministers in the sanctuary above, **He is still by His Spirit** the minister of the church on earth. **He is withdrawn from the eye of sense**, but His parting promise is fulfilled, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matthew 28:20. While He delegates His power to inferior ministers, **His energizing presence** is still with His church.

The answer is that it is **by his spirit**—the spirit of Christ—that we come to the Father. But it is not only the spirit of Christ that dwells in us, but also the spirit of the Father. Our spirit communicates with the Father’s

spirit through the Son's spirit.

Romans 8:9-11: You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if in fact the **spirit of God dwells in you**. If anyone does not have the **spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to him.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the **spirit is life** because of righteousness.¹¹ And if the **spirit of him which raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you**, he who raised Christ from the dead will also **give life** to your mortal bodies because of his spirit that dwells in you.

The life of Christ. And what are we given when we receive the spirit of Christ? At the beginning of his farewell discourse, Jesus told his disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and **the life**. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). What we receive is **the life of Christ**. Jesus is the life promised by the Father:

- *1 John 5:11-12:* And this is the testimony: that God gave us eternal **life**, and **this life is in his Son**.¹² **He who has the Son has life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
- *John 5:26:* For as the Father has life in himself, so he has **granted** the Son to have life in himself.
- *John 6:57:* Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of [Or, *by*] the Father, so whoever feeds on me will also live because of [Or, *by*] me.

Notice what John 5:26 is telling us, "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has **granted** the Son to have life in himself." What is this life that the Father has **granted** the Son? Here is what EGW says,

DA 21.2: But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and **I live by the Father**." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. **All things Christ received from God**, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: **through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all**; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, **representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life**.

Thus, the life that the Son possesses—the life **granted**—originates from the Father, and *through* the Son, this divine life "flows out to all."

The Father is the source; the Son is the channel. This life is **the spirit of life**—eternal life itself, the very life of the Father shared *through* the Son and received by us. It is **the law of life**, the **law of the spirit of life** in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:2: For **the law of the spirit of life** in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death.

Moreover, with this life we obtain **freedom** from sin and death by the spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus, that comes from the Father.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18: Now **the Lord is the spirit**, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is **freedom**.¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from **the Lord who is the spirit**.

When we are joined to Christ we are one with him in spirit—his spirit in communion with our spirit. “But he who is joined to the Lord is one with him in spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). Therefore we can conclude:

- When we are joined to Christ, we partake of the spirit of life.
- When we are joined to Christ, we have access to the Father.
- When we are joined to Christ, we have power to overcome our hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil.

The Paraclete within. When Jesus was on earth, he was the Paraclete *with us*; now, through his spirit, he is the Paraclete *within us*, so that we may become **partakers of the divine nature**.

- *2 Peter 1:3-4*: **His divine power** has given us everything we need for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by glory and virtue.⁴ Through these he has given us his precious and exceedingly great promises, so that through them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desires.
- *Hebrews 6:4*: For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift and **become partakers of holy spirit**,
- *Ephesians 3:19*: and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God**.
- *Colossians 2:9-10*: [*For we have been given Christ in whom*] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,¹⁰ and **you have been filled by him**, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

The spirit is God's power [\[e\]](#)

The kingdom of God has come in power—the power of the spirit of God.

- *Acts 1:8*: But you will receive **power** when the holy spirit has come upon you.
- *Romans 15:19*: by the power of signs and wonders, **by the power of the spirit of God**—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;
- *Ephesians 3:16*: that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power through his spirit** in your inner being,
- *2 Timothy 1:7*: for **God gave us a spirit** not of fear but of **power** and love and self-control.

Spirit power is not human power. It is not human influence, prestige, hierarchy or authority. The church might communicate much knowledge and offer the community very good and worthy services. But, if it does not have the life of Christ and does not manifest **the power of the spirit**, then it is all in vain. The work and counsel of man comes to naught (Acts 5:38). The power is in the being, not the doing. And the work we do is not of human devising, but God gives the plan and the leading. The planning is of God, and the power is from God.

Holiness made possible. The kingdom is God's doing. It is God working in the life of a believer, creating in him a character of holiness, the likeness to His Son. It is a transformed life, a miracle, the working of God.

If and when you see hypocrisy and pretenders in the church, it is because they have lost the reality of the kingdom of God which is *a transformed life*. They have a form of godliness **but no power** (2 Tim. 3:5). What many in the church lack is a complete commitment and willing desire to receive the life of Christ in the soul. It is the willingness to have God work in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.

DA: The might agency of the third person [\[e\]](#)

Trinitarian Adventists have long claimed that the publication of *The Desire of Ages* (henceforth, DA) by Ellen G. White in 1898 marked a “paradigm shift” in the Adventist understanding of the nature of God. Two statements are frequently cited in support of this claim: DA 530.3 and DA 671.2. The first one, DA 530.3 which refers to Christ is discussed in the article “*Christology*” under “[The works of Jesus](#),” and DA 671.2 is discussed below, as it relates specifically to the Holy Spirit.

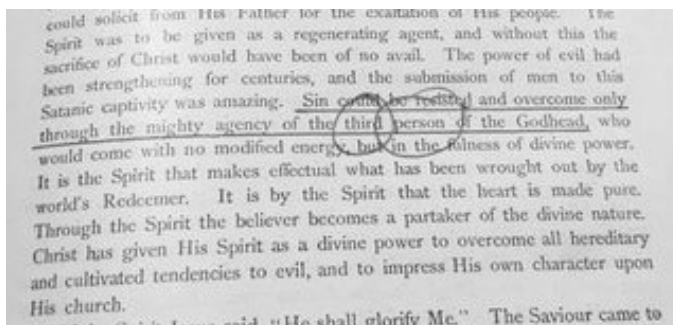
DA 671.2: “The mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead.”

This *assumed* Trinitarian phrase is quoted in full below (emphasis supplied).

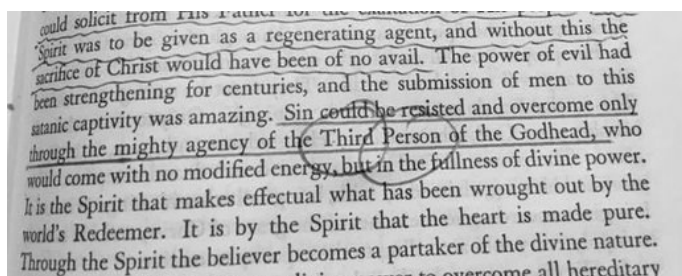
DA 671.2: In describing to His disciples **the office work of the Holy Spirit**, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail. The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. **Christ has given His Spirit** as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.

“Third Person” was originally published in lowercase. For more than forty years after the initial release of *The Desire of Ages* (from 1898 until 1939), the phrase consistently appeared in lowercase form. Beginning in 1940, however, it was changed to “Third Person” with uppercase letters. In *Evangelism* (Ev 617.2), published in 1946, the quotation retains the lowercase “third person,” while the subtitle uses uppercase, suggesting that the Trinitarian shift was already underway.

Here is the pre-1940 edition of DA 671:



And below is DA 671 from 1940 to the present:



Godhead and Person. Besides tampering with *casing*, there is also a misunderstanding of the two key words: *Godhead* and *Person*.

Godhead as Deity or Divine Nature. In Ellen G. White's time, the word *Godhead* did not carry the meaning that many modern Adventists assume it does today. The English term *Godhead* originated in the late 1300s and was originally intended to mean *deity* or *divine nature*, not a synonym for *Trinity*. Most modern Bible translations have replaced the term *Godhead* with *deity* or *divine nature*, which more accurately reflect both the meaning of the original Greek and the sense of the term in early English usage.

Person as “character of office.” Over a century ago the word *person* could be understood as “character of office”. See Definition #6 in *Noah Webster Dictionary* (1828) on “*Person*”.

Definition #6 for *Person*: **Character of office.** [Example] How different is the same man from himself, as he sustains the *person* of a magistrate and that of a friend.

Ellen G. White's intended meaning of the word *person* in *Desire of Ages* 671.2 can be inferred from the context of the paragraph itself, which begins, “In describing to His disciples the **office work** of the Holy Spirit.” The focus of the passage is on the *office work*—that is, the functional role or character—of the Holy Spirit. Thus, EGW's use of *person* here refers not to a distinct entity, but to the character of that office or function.

The phrase “the mighty agency of the third person” is unique in Ellen G. White's writings. Aside from its appearance in *The Desire of Ages* (p. 671.2), it occurs only twice in the *Review and Herald*—specifically in the [May 19, 1904 \(par. 3\)](#), and [November 19, 1908 \(par. 5\)](#) issues—and nowhere else in her original works. In both of these *Review and Herald* articles, the term “third person” appears in lowercase, consistent with its original publication in *The Desire of Ages*, as noted earlier.

Conclusion. Based on the evidence presented, the context—and therefore the intended meaning—of the paragraph becomes clear. At the close of the passage, the Holy Spirit is identified as *Christ's Spirit*: “Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power” ([DA 671.2](#)). Thus, the phrase “*the*

mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead” can be more accurately understood as “**the mighty agency of the third office of divinity**,” which comes “in the fullness of divine power.” This divine power originates from Christ himself, for “Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power.” The paradigm shift, therefore, does not involve Ellen G. White identifying a third distinct entity (i.e., the Holy Spirit) but rather **a third agency or office of divinity**. This agency is described as a “mighty agency,” “the power of God,” or Christ’s “representative”—that “converting, enlightening, and sanctifying power,” which is characterized as Christ’s “donation.”

EGW on the spirit [\[e\]](#)

Here is how EGW describes the spirit:

- “The indwelling of Christ” ([DA 324.1](#); cf. [DA 323.2](#) which equates it to “the indwelling of the Holy Spirit”)
- “The omnipresence of the spirit of Christ, called the Comforter” ([14MR 179.2](#))
- “Jesus the Comforter” ([19MR 297.3](#))
- “The Spirit of Christ” ([9T 189.3](#))
- “The life of Christ” ([DA 805.3](#); [MH 130.5](#))
- “The soul of His life” ([RH, May 19, 1904](#))
- “The personal presence of Christ” ([RH, Nov. 29, 1892](#))
- “The presence and power of God” ([ST, Nov. 23, 1891](#))
- “The vital presence of God” ([Becho Aug. 5, 1901, par.4](#))
- “An influence emanating from God” ([ST Sept. 4, 1893, par.7](#))
- “The Father gave his Spirit without measure to his Son” ([RH Nov. 5, 1908, par. 4](#))”
- Christ’s “person, the divinity of his character” ([RH, April 5, 1906](#))

There is no power apart from Christ. Ellen G. White repeatedly asserts that the power to overcome, the power to save from sin, to be free from the power of evil, comes from Christ and Christ alone. And that he imparts this power through his spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

- [YI June 29, 1893, par. 8](#). **There is no power in you apart from Christ**, but it is your privilege to have Christ abiding in your heart by faith, and he can overcome sin in you, when you cooperate with his efforts, putting your will on the side of God’s will.
- [RH February 10, 1891](#). **Jesus alone has power to save from sin, to free from the power of evil**; and to doubt him who has laid down his life for us, is to grieve and insult the Father, who has in

one gift poured out all heaven to a lost world.

- [*SC 26.3*](#). Christ is the source of every right impulse. **He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin.** Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts.
- [*9T 189.3, 1909*](#). They have one God and one Saviour; and **one Spirit—the Spirit of Christ**—is to bring unity into their ranks.
- [*DA 324.1*](#). The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness.
- [*ISM 251.1*](#). The Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the only-begotten Son of God, binds the human agent, body, soul, and spirit, to the perfect, divine-human nature of Christ.
- [*Letter 124, 1897. {DG 185.2}*](#). When trials overshadow the soul, remember the words of Christ, remember that **He is an unseen presence in the person of the Holy Spirit**, and He will be the peace and comfort given you, manifesting to you that He is with you, the Sun of Righteousness, chasing away your darkness.
- [*RH May 19, 1904, par. 1*](#). With his Spirit Christ sends a reconciling influence and a power that takes away sin.
- [*14MR 84.3*](#). **The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ**, which is sent to all men to give them sufficiency, that through His grace we might be complete in Him.

The Bible says that there is only one mediator: “For there is one God, and there is **one mediator** between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Key takeaways [\[e\]](#)

The following are the key takeaways from this article:

1. **The Spirit's personhood is a post-biblical formulation.** The doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the third Person of the Godhead was formally established at the First Council of Constantinople in AD 381, centuries after the apostolic era.
2. **Catholic scholarship concedes the Old Testament gap.** The New Catholic Encyclopedia acknowledges that the Old Testament does not envisage God's spirit as a person but simply as God's power.
3. **New Testament evidence is limited and arguable.** Catholic reference works admit that the majority of New Testament texts reveal God's spirit as something, not someone, paralleling the spirit with the power of God.
4. **Spirit understood as divine power or essence.** The article argues that the spirit is best understood as God's power, energy, or life-force rather than a separate personal being.
5. **Consistent omission in key biblical passages.** Many foundational texts mention only the Father and Son, suggesting the spirit was not viewed as a coequal Person in early Christian formulations.
6. **Pattern of absence, not argument from silence.** The consistent non-mention of the spirit across formulaic passages of prayer, blessing, and divine identity constitutes a meaningful pattern of absence suggesting the spirit was not treated as a coequal personal agent.
7. **The burden of proof rests on the implicit-presence claim.** Asserting that the spirit is implicitly present in texts that never mention it assumes a Trinitarian framework retroactively rather than deriving it from the text.
8. **The implicit argument is circular.** Reasoning that the spirit must be implied wherever God is at work presupposes the very coequal personhood it seeks to prove—*eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*.
9. **An alternative reading fits the evidence better.** Early Christians associated God's presence with the Father through the Son and understood the spirit as God's power or presence. Only centuries later was personhood systematized into creedal doctrine.
10. **Spirit is distinct from the soul.** Biblically, the soul is the living person (body + spirit), while the spirit is the life-giving breath or force.
11. **Soul is not inherently immortal.** Scripture portrays the soul as the whole person, capable of dying when the spirit departs.
12. **Spirit as the source of life.** Both human life and eternal life depend

on God's spirit, which animates and sustains life.

13. **A soul is what a person is, not what a person has.** The Hebrew *nephesh* denotes the whole living person—the self—not an independent, immortal, immaterial entity.
14. **The soul dies when the spirit departs.** Just as the body without the spirit is dead (James 2:26), when God takes away the breath, people die and return to dust while the spirit returns to God (Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 12:7).
15. **Spirit is not a person.** A “person” requires a body; since the spirit has no body, it is not a person but God's life within him.
16. **God the Father and Son are bodily persons.** Early Adventist theology held that both the Father and Son possess real, though heavenly, bodies.
17. **Biblical language supports God's corporeality.** Scripture frequently attributes bodily parts and actions to God, reinforcing a literal understanding of divine personhood.
18. **The Trinitarian definition of Person is self-contradictory.** Calling the Father a Person while denying Him any form is incongruous, since humans are persons precisely because they possess bodies.
19. **Early Adventists affirmed God's materiality.** James White taught that God is material, organized intelligence possessing body and parts, and that Christ likewise has immortal flesh and bones—the commonly held view of that era.
20. **Ellen White's vision confirmed the Father's form.** In Early Writings 54.2, Jesus told her that the Father has a form like his own, though beholding its glory would end her existence.
21. **Ellen G. White distinguished God from the spirit.** EGW taught that God is a personal being, while the Holy Spirit is an essence or divine presence.
22. **Spirit identified as an essence, not an entity.** EGW explicitly referred to the Holy Spirit as a “living essence” that animates and unifies believers.
23. **Spirit lacks personal name and gender.** Unlike the Father and Son, the spirit has no personal name and is grammatically feminine or neuter in biblical languages (see next item).
24. **Grammatical gender contradicts the Trinitarian ‘He’.** ‘Spirit’ is feminine in Hebrew and neuter in Greek, yet most translations render *pneuma* as masculine without grammatical justification.

25. **Capitalization of ‘Spirit’ is translator interpretation.** The original biblical languages had no upper/lowercase distinction, so every capitalized ‘Spirit’ in English Bibles reflects the translator’s theological bias.
26. **The spirit stands in no familial relationship to believers.** God is our Father and Christ our Elder Brother, but the spirit is neither Father, Mother, nor Brother—Jesus’ family-oneness prayer in John 17 never mentions it.
27. **Fellowship is ‘of’ the spirit, not ‘with’ the spirit.** John declares our fellowship to be with the Father and with His Son (1 John 1:3), while 2 Corinthians 13:14 speaks only of the fellowship of the holy spirit—essence, not Person.
28. **Spirit lacks independent consciousness.** The Bible does not describe the spirit as a self-aware being existing apart from the body.
29. **Witch of Endor does not prove spirit consciousness.** That narrative is descriptive, morally cautionary, and compatible with deception—not proof of conscious spirits after death.
30. **Spirit’s attributes are derivative.** Titles and functions ascribed to the spirit originate from the Father and the Son rather than indicating a distinct personality.
31. **Human spirit analogy clarifies meaning.** Just as a human’s spirit is not another person, God’s spirit is God Himself in action.
32. **Your spirit is you; God’s spirit is God.** When a man’s spirit prays, the man prays; likewise, the activities of God’s spirit are the activities of God Himself, not evidence of a third Person.
33. **“God is spirit” describes nature, not form.** John 4:24 speaks of God’s spiritual character, not His physical composition or lack thereof.
34. **“God is spirit” occurs only once in Scripture.** Sound hermeneutics builds doctrine on the consistent teaching of the whole Bible, not on a single, isolated passage.
35. **The context of John 4:24 is worship, not metaphysics.** Jesus’ point to the Samaritan woman is that true worship is tied not to location or ritual but to inner spiritual communion with God.
36. **The phrase is qualitative, like ‘God is light’ and ‘God is love’.** Pneuma functions as a qualitative predicate describing God’s character and spiritual nature, not His physical composition or formlessness.
37. **Christ’s coming to believers is a spiritual manifestation.** The disciples struggled to grasp that Christ would manifest himself to them by his spirit—present with them yet invisible to the world (John

14:22–23).

38. **The Paraclete is Christ's spiritual presence.** The promised Comforter is understood as Christ manifesting himself spiritually, not a third divine being.
39. **Through the indwelling Paraclete we partake of the divine nature.** Jesus, once the Paraclete *with* us, is now through his spirit the Paraclete *within* us, making believers partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3–4).
40. **Christ ministers on earth by his spirit while in the sanctuary above.** Ellen White explains that while Jesus ministers in heaven, He remains by his spirit the minister of his church on earth, fulfilling 'Lo, I am with you alway.'
41. **The Father is the source; the Son is the channel.** Through the beloved Son the Father's life flows out to all, completing the circuit of beneficence that is the law of life for the universe (DA 21.2).
42. **Spirit is God's operative power.** Scripture consistently associates the spirit with divine power, transformation, and victory over sin.
43. **Holiness results from God's indwelling life.** True Christian transformation flows from receiving Christ's life, not from human effort or structure.
44. **'Third person' was originally lowercase.** From 1898 until 1939 *The Desire of Ages* printed 'third person of the Godhead' in lowercase; the capitalized 'Third Person' first appeared in 1940 editions.
45. **The phrase is rare and consistently lowercase in her original works.** 'The mighty agency of the third person' appears only in *The Desire of Ages* and two *Review and Herald* articles (1904, 1908), always in lowercase.
46. **Later editorial changes shaped interpretation.** Capitalization and wording changes after 1940 contributed to Trinitarian readings of EGW's writings.
47. **"Third person" language is functional, not ontological.** EGW's phrase refers to the office or agency of divine action, not a separate being within a Trinity.
48. **EGW consistently equated the spirit with Christ's presence** Across her works, the Holy Spirit is described as Christ's life, power, influence, and indwelling presence.
49. **There is one mediator.** Scripture's capstone confirmation: 'For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Timothy 2:5).

► C'. Plan of Salvation

Executive summary. Two main topics discussed in this article are:

1. **Salvation plan.** In Christianity, salvation is the saving of human beings from sin and its consequences. God has a plan that was set before the creation of the world and will extend to all eternity.
2. **The problem of evil and the purpose of God.** The Christian must have a theological *theodicy* in order to establish a loving God. A *theodicy* is an argument that attempts to vindicate God's goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil.

1. Salvation plan

Christianity defines salvation as the good news of saving (or delivering or redeeming) mankind from sin and death. This was made possible and freely given by the Father through his Son (*Jesus Christ*) to all who will accept it by *faith* in his Son. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Salvation is the "gift of God" (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8). This gift is not a *what* but a *who*. It is the gift of God's Son to mankind. The Bible reveals to us this plan of salvation in symbolic language. Beginning in Genesis with a coming Messiah (the "seed of the woman" Gen. 3:15) and ending in Revelation with a conquering Messiah (the "Christ of God" Rev. 11:15; 12:10). Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29) in the New Testament.

In the plan of salvation, it was necessary for Jesus Christ to live a victorious life (perfect *righteousness*), die a cruel death (his *crucifixion*) and rise from the dead (the *resurrection*) with an immortal body. All this so that God could be just in putting an end to sin and death, and bring to nothing the one who has the power of death, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

Salvation will not be complete until "apostasy comes first and the man of sin is revealed, the son of destruction" (2 Thess. 2:3). This "coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the working of Satan, with all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, and with every kind of wicked deception among those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved" (2 Thess. 2:9-10). Thus, the plan of salvation is not only about saving those who accept Christ, but also about condemning those who reject him (2 Thess. 2:12).

Salvation will be completed in two resurrections. The first resurrection will be for the righteous at the second coming of Christ when he

raises them from the dead and takes them to heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The second resurrection will be for the wicked after the Millennium in which they are judged and destroyed with Satan and his angels in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:5-15).

Acceptance of salvation. In order to receive the gift of salvation a person must accept it. It is conditioned on *faith*—believing and receiving. When truly received, the person’s faith is made *manifest* in a changed life and behavior (i.e. “good works”). However, it is important to understand that salvation is not having faith and good works, but faith is what leads to salvation and good works. This distinction is important and is covered in detail in the article, “*Atonement*,” under the section, “[Faith only \(sola fide\)](#)”.

Plan of Salvation summary.

A. Sons of God

... B. Creation, Fall and Curse

..... X. Christ

..... a. The Promised Seed

..... b. The Life of Christ

..... x. The Death of Christ

..... b’. The Resurrection of Christ

..... a’. The Promised Spirit

..... X’. Antichrist

..... 1. The Rise of Babylon

..... 2. The Fall of Babylon

... B’. Re-Creation

..... 1. Second Coming

..... 2. Final Judgment

..... 3. New Creation

A’. Sons of God

A. Sons of God

“Sons of God.” God creates the “worlds” through his Son (Heb. 1:2). This includes the creation of the angels in Heaven, who are called “sons of God” (Job 1:6).

Rebellion in Heaven. Sin begins in the Eden of Heaven, the “Garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13). It originates with the angel, Lucifer (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19), called the Devil and Satan, followed by “his angels” (Rev. 12:9). The Book of Revelation refers to the Devil and Satan as “the old serpent” and “the great dragon” which are allusions to Genesis 3 (the

serpent) and Job 41 (Leviathan). Satan and his angels are cast out of Heaven (Isa. 14:15; Ezek. 28:16-17; Rev. 12:7-9).

B. Creation, Fall and Curse

The Creation. God creates our world in six literal days, followed by the seventh, rest day, called the Sabbath (Genesis 1-2). His completed creation was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The original animals and Man (Adam and Eve) ate only plants (Gen. 1:29-30). Life was perfect.

Rebellion on Earth. God gives Man a test of loyalty in the Eden of Earth, the “Garden of Eden” (Gen. 2:15), by commanding Man not to eat of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” which is in “the midst of the garden” (Gen 2:9, 16-17). Man fails the test and subsequently receives the Curse—the consequence of his disobedience—and is cast out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). All of Adam’s descendants are under the Curse.

X. Christ

a. The Promised Seed. God promises to give Man a second chance with the promise of a coming “seed” (Gen 3:15). The term “seed” is a recurring theme in the Bible. It refers to the seed of plants, but also to the seed of man. Metaphorically, it refers to: progeny, offspring, children, descendants, race, and generation. The terms, “the seed of the woman,” “the seed of Abraham,” and “the seed of David,” all refer to the promise of the coming Messiah. The term “seed” is also used figuratively to mean “the word of God” (Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23).

b. The Life of Christ. Jesus comes as the Messiah (“the Christ”). He is born a man from a virgin and lives a holy, righteous life to become the “Son of Man,” the Second Adam, our Perfect Example (Luke 24:7; 1 Cor. 15:45; Heb. 12:1-3).

x. The Death of Christ. God is able to forgive man’s sins through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)—through faith in him (Rom. 3:25-26). Note that it says “the *sin* of the world,” not “the *sins* of the world.” What Jesus accomplished is to break the bondage to sin, to break the power of sin in our lives.

b’. The Resurrection of Christ. As the first-fruits, the resurrection of Christ gives evidence to the reality of God’s promise of Eternal Life for all who accept salvation through Christ. Jesus becomes the means by which God can offer Eternal Life (John 3:16). Satan is excluded from the heavenly courts as man’s representative and Jesus takes his place as the second Adam (Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:10; 1 Cor. 15:45).

a’. The Promised Spirit. Man is gifted with the spirit of God, poured out

at Pentecost by Christ after his Ascension and Glorification (Acts 1-2). This spirit enables Man to live the Life of Christ. Christ becomes “the Resurrection and the Life” to all who accept him by faith (John 11:25).

X'. Antichrist

The Rise of Babylon. A period of time must pass to fully reveal the character of Satan and his followers. The rise of the “Man of Sin” (2 Thess. 2:3-10) is accomplished through a counterfeit (antichrist) religious system called Babylon. It is given power for a period of 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6), or “a time, and times, and half a time” (Rev. 12:14), or 42 months (Rev. 13:5). All of these add up to the same number which is interpreted prophetically to mean 1,260 years (a day representing a year). Seventh-day Adventists believe it to be the Papal dominance evident in the period from 538 AD to 1798 AD. Some also interpret this prophecy to represent a future fulfillment of a literal 3-½ year period of Papal reemergence and worldwide dominance prior to the Second Coming (Rev. 13).

The Fall of Babylon. The final struggle between good and evil culminates in the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) in which Babylon is destroyed (Rev. 17-18).

B'. Re-Creation

Second Coming. Jesus completes his mediatory work in Heaven as our High Priest and returns to Earth, resurrects the righteous (“the first resurrection,” Rev. 20:5), and takes them to Heaven for a period of 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-6).

Final Judgment. After the 1,000 years are ended, Jesus returns to Earth, and the New Jerusalem also descends and settles on the Earth. The wicked are then raised and surround the New Jerusalem, where they are judged and finally annihilated together with Satan and his angels in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:7-15).

New Creation. The fire that destroys the wicked will also cleanse the Earth. God then makes a New Heavens and New Earth (Rev. 21:1). The holy city, New Jerusalem, is the place where God dwells with Man forever (Rev. 21:3). It becomes the New Eden on Earth.

A'. Sons of God

The redeemed of mankind are made kings and priests to the Almighty God and the Lamb for eternity (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 22:3-5).

2. The problem of evil and the purpose of God [\[↵\]](#)

The problem of evil. Christians fully recognize, experience and question the presence of evil in this world. How then does one reconcile the goodness of God with the presence of evil? The answer comes by way of a theological *theodicy*. A theodicy is an argument that attempts to vindicate God's goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil. The challenge is then to provide a well-reasoned and life-satisfying answer to the problem of evil. In its most basic form, the problem of evil involves the following assumptions:

1. That God is all good, all powerful, and all knowing.
2. That our world was made by God and exists in a contingent (i.e. dependent) relationship to him.
3. That evil is our present reality. Why?

If God is good and powerful and evil is bad and ever present, then God should desire to eliminate evil, given His goodness and power. But He has not done so which, humanly speaking, suggests that,

- God is all good *but not all powerful*, in which case He does not have the ability to intervene.
- Or, God is all powerful and all-knowing *but not all good*, in which case He has a mean streak.
- Or, God *is indifferent and uninvolved* in our lives. It's as if He started the clock and then walked away.

But, this is not the God described in the Bible. According to the Scriptures, He is truly all good, all powerful, all knowing and personally involved in our lives. Then why do we continue to experience evil?

Is God *justified* in permitting evil? The crux of the problem is our assumption that, "There is *no reason* that would justify God to permit evil." Christians have come up with various arguments or models in response. Only two are explored below. Before we start, however, it should be understood that God *will* ultimately settle the problem of evil. In the end, in the Final Judgment, God will put an end to evil and establish an eternal reign of righteous.

The "free will" model. The "free will" model states that love is not love without the freedom to choose. You cannot *make* someone love you. When God gave man the power to choose, He also gave him the ability to not love Him. You are free to love God, and you are also free not to love Him. But what does it mean to not love God? It means to refuse what He offers. Since God is the source of light, life, and all that is good; it

means to reject the source of light, life and goodness. By rejecting God, one embraces evil. As cold is the absence of heat, so darkness is the absence of light; death is the absence of life; and hate is the absence of love. Thus, evil continues in this world because man has chosen and continues to choose to reject God and embrace evil. God cannot be blamed for the consequences of our choosing, if we continually choose to reject Him.

Powerless under sin. But the “free will” argument is criticized for the fact that ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, man has lost much of his power to choose. Man is born in a fallen state with a weakened will. As the Scriptures tell us, we are wretched slaves to the will of Satan (2 Tim. 2:26; Eph. 2:2-3; 2 Cor. 4:4). How can man be blamed for evil when he is incapable of doing good? It would seem that the responsibility for evil ultimately lies with God, who allowed man to choose to fall into sin. This was Adam’s excuse to God: It was the wife *you gave me*, who caused me to sin. And Eve accused the serpent. And the serpent had nothing to say.

It is not enough to “know” God. It is evident then that it is not enough to “know” the goodness of God. Such knowledge is not enough. “For we *know* that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold as a slave to sin” (Rom. 7:14). The Apostle Paul longed for the purity, the righteousness, to which in himself he was *powerless* to attain, and cried out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24).

The power that comes through Christ. The answer for us today, is that God has not abandoned mankind. Through the merits of Christ, we can be restored to God’s original plan. Man can be given a new heart and a new spirit. Jesus referred to it as being born again, or being born from above. God can work through man, if man allows Him to. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). If we are willing to be made willing, God will act on our behalf. This work of salvation, this power from above, God has made possible through his Son.

To Jacob was revealed the way by which he, a sinner, could be restored to communion with God. “He dreamed and saw a stairway set upon the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12). This mystic ladder of his dream represented Jesus, the only means of communication between God and man. Jesus affirmed this interpretation in his conversation with Nathanael when he said, “you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (John 1:51). Through Christ, earth is again linked with heaven. By his own merits, Christ has bridged the

gulf which sin had made, so that the ministering angels can hold communion with man. Christ connects fallen man in his weakness and helplessness with the source of infinite power. Through Christ, man can be restored to communion with God.

Look to Jesus. “And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Those who had been bitten by the serpents in the wilderness in the Exodus story were told to look and live (see Numbers 21:4-9). It was this same instruction that Jesus gave to Nicodemus when he came to him by night (see John 3:1-18). “So must the Son of Man be lifted up” was the instruction given. By beholding, you become changed (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). It is an act of contemplation and meditation on the life of Christ. It is spending time learning about Jesus—his teachings and the principles he lived by.

The “soul making” model. There is then the “soul making” model. In this model, a person has the ability to actively and constructively respond to evil. Effectively, sin and suffering is viewed as a means to some good that God has ordained. For, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28). Nothing forces a person to confront his true self like suffering. Suffering causes our focus to turn inward, to face those parts of ourselves we might otherwise ignore. God can use suffering then to develop us into better versions of ourselves and be equipped to fulfill a higher purpose.

The primary argument against this model is that it seems like a “leap of faith” that no matter what happens, God has good intentions for the individual. Yet, the Bible gives many examples where this is the case. The chief example, of course, is the life of Christ. His suffering in this life ultimately made it possible for God to use him as the means of salvation for all of mankind. There are many other examples in the Bible of individuals who had less intense but similar experiences, such as,

1. **Joseph.** As a teenager, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, which was as good as being sentenced to death (Genesis chapter 37). Yet God allowed this to happen so that one day Joseph could become second to Pharaoh and save many from a multi-year famine. Years later, Joseph told his brothers, “you meant it for evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).
2. **Moses.** Taken from his parents as a child, to be raised in Pharaoh’s house the first 40 years of his life, then exiled as a shepherd in the land of Midian for another 40 years. All this was training

ground for Moses to become the deliverer of Israel from Egypt in the Exodus account.

3. **Esther.** She lost her parents and was adopted by her cousin, Mordecai, to eventually become Queen Esther and was able to save her people from extinction in the land of Persia.
4. **Daniel.** As a teenager, Daniel was taken into Babylonian captivity, made a eunuch, to eventually become the great prophet Daniel, who gave us time prophecies which included the coming of the Messiah.
5. **Blind man.** In Jesus day, there was a blind man from birth. “His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?’”³ Jesus answered, ‘Neither did this man sin nor his parents, but it happened so that the works of God might be revealed in him’” (John 9:2-3). Jesus subsequently healed the blind man, who later testified about Jesus and gave glory to God before the Pharisees.

To be clear, suffering never becomes good. Suffering remains evil. But God can use it in a constructive and purposeful way to His glory.

God’s higher purpose. The *causes* of true happiness are internal. They are matters of the heart. Jesus taught true happiness in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-10): Happy are the humble, the mourner, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. God’s higher goal then is the development of inward beauty. His universal inward ideal is the character of His Son. Those who suffer greater conflict, always have something to say to those who have suffered less. We all get richer when we recognize our poverty. We all get stronger when we boast of our weakness.

Prescribed from birth. It is evident from Scripture that God is not only responsible for what happens to us during our lifetime, but that He also takes responsibility for how we were made.

- *Psalms 139:16:* Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.
- *Isaiah 45:9-10:* Woe to him who strives with his Maker—a clay pot among the clay pots of the earth! Shall the clay ask him who fashions it, “What are you making?” or your work, “He has no hands?”¹⁰ Woe to him who says to a father, “What have you become the father of?” or to a mother, “What have you given birth to?”
- *Exodus 4:11:* Yehovah said to him: Who made man’s mouth? Or

who makes one mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Isn't it I, Yehovah?

Ten “unchangeables.” We face at least ten “unchangeables” that God allows and can use to His glory. They include:

1. Parents. Born with the wrong parents (e.g. alcoholics), or raised with a single parent, or no parents.
2. Time in history. Born in time of conflict and war.
3. Nationality (country). Born in a country with limited freedom and opportunities.
4. People groups. Born to a discriminated “race”.
5. Gender (male/female)
6. Birth order (1st, 2nd, 3rd born)
7. Number of brothers and sisters
8. Physical features (e.g. height, hair color, bone structure)
9. Mental abilities (capacity)
10. Aging and death

A person, particularly a teenager, may logically reason:

1. God created *everyone*. (God is all powerful.)
2. God loves *everyone*. (God is love.)
3. God created and loves *me*.
4. Conclusion: If what I see in the mirror is a reflection of God's love and power, then why should I dedicate myself to Him? If He messed me up the first time when He had a chance, what will He do to me if I dedicate myself to Him now? My situation could get even worse!

God's purpose in the “unchangeables.” As mentioned earlier, in the case of parents, or lack thereof, God may have a special purpose for your life as evidenced by the stories in the Bible of Joseph, Moses, Samuel, Esther and Daniel. Indeed, if the loss of parents *is* your situation, then thank God that He has called you to a special purpose and humbly go about fulfilling it. The psalmist's sentiment concerning God is true, “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (Psalm 68:5).

God's work in your life has just begun. Think in terms of the potter (God) and the clay (you). Or, think in terms of a painting that the painter (God) has just begun to paint (you). God is not finished with you yet. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring

it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Physical suffering. In the case of physical defects or infirmities, first understand that outward appearance is not related to inward happiness. The greatest example, of course, is Christ himself, “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2).

Inward beauty developed through conflict. As strange as it may sound, God may even sacrifice outward beauty to develop inward character. “Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). He allows inherited weakness. “The sins of the fathers are visited on the children.” Why? Because God wants us to live by His strength and power and not ours.

The great apostle Paul had an infirmity. Many believe it was an eye problem. And he prayed about it. Three times. But God said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I [Paul] will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). To Paul, his infirmity, his defect, became a thing of glory to him. Because, when he was weak, then he was strong.

Thus, it’s not the defect that matters, but the meaning behind it. “Scars” were things of glory in Europe many years ago. Back then when sword fighting was popular, a man with scars on his face was looked up to. Women would admire such a man. Why? Because it meant that he had survived a sword fight. He was a skilled sword fighter. The other guy lost. It’s not the “scar” it’s what it means.

A little girl once came home from school and told her mother, “Mommy, I want braces.” Her mother said, “Why do you want braces? You have a wonderful set of teeth.” She said, “Because all the popular kids in school have braces.” Again, it’s not what it is, it’s what it means.

What to do with your “scar”.

1. **Fix it.** If your hair is in your face, get a haircut. If your face is dirty, wash it. If there is something medically that can be done to fix your problem then do it.
2. **Exercise the prayer of faith.** “Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone of good cheer? He should sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has

committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:13-15). The illness could be one of three:

- a. *Sickness to death*. “The days of our years are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty years” (Psalm 90:10).
 - b. *Sickness to chastisement (i.e. punishment)*. Judged of God. (e.g. not caring for your body). The best one can ask for is for God to extend mercy which he may or may not grant.
 - c. *Sickness to the glory of God*. Two types of glory. One is an outward miracle, the other is inward. Examples include: the blind man in John 9:2-3 (outward) and Paul’s infirmity in 2 Cor. 12:9 (inward).
3. **Glory in the unchangeable**. Attach new meaning to your “scars”. They are:
- a. *Marks of ownership*. “For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” 1 Cor. 6:20).
 - b. *Motivators to develop inward qualities*. For example, developing beatitudes.
 - c. *Motivator to have a servant spirit* (i.e. Mark 10:44).

Prayer of acceptance. “Thank you Lord for the way you made me, especially for (fill in the blank). I put myself back in your hands—you are the Master Potter—to mold me into your image, to develop in me the qualities of Christ, to become a living message of your truth and your love.”

Reference: Portions of the above were adapted from BasicSeminar.com, “Session 02: How to Overcome Self-Rejection.”

► B'. Steps to Christ

The following is an adaptation and summation of the first part of the book, *Steps to Christ*, by Ellen G. White, and portions of the seven basic life principles as taught by Bill Gothard (BasicSeminar.com).

Executive summary. The outline to the steps of salvation (i.e. Steps to Christ) are given below. Bear in mind, that the following only covers the first part of the book, Steps to Christ, and only a very small portion of the BasicSeminar.com content. The reader is encouraged to both obtain a copy of the book (or access it online) and read it in its entirety, and watch the complete BasicSeminar.com video series.

1. **Knowledge of God.** A knowledge of the God of the Bible reveals that God is love, and to trust in Him (i.e. having faith in Him) leads to salvation.
2. **Repentance and Confession.** Faith in God awakens conscience and true repentance.
3. **Consecration.** The basis of victory over sin.
4. **Moral Transformation.** The Christian life is a transformed life.

1. Knowledge of God

Trust in God. Salvation (i.e. Biblical “atonement”) begins with a true knowledge and trusting relationship with God. According to the Old Testament, the beginning of wisdom and understanding is to know God (Prov. 9:10). And Jesus declared in his longest prayer (John 17:3) that to know God is eternal life. A knowledge of God is not a mere intellectual ascent, but a change of man’s nature, a new self (Col. 3:10). It is a “born again” or “born from above” experience (John 3:5-7). The apostle John describes it as being in “fellowship” with Him (1 John 1:3), of having an “abiding” presence with Him (1 John 2:24).

God’s goodness. Both the natural world and *revelation* alike testify of God’s love. Our Father in heaven is the source of life, of wisdom, and of joy. God made man perfectly holy and happy; and the fair earth, as it came from the Creator’s hand, bore no blight of decay or shadow of the curse. It is transgression of God’s law—the law of love—that has brought woe and death. Yet even amid the suffering that results from sin, God’s love is revealed. It is written that God cursed the ground for man’s sake. Genesis 3:17. The thorn and the thistle—the difficulties and trials that make his life one of toil and care—were appointed for his good as a part of the training needful in God’s plan for his uplifting from the ruin and degradation that sin has wrought. The world, though fallen, is not all sorrow

and misery. In nature itself are messages of hope and comfort. There are flowers upon the thistles, and the thorns are covered with roses.

The problem of evil. Yet many have a problem reconciling evil in this world with a good God. This important subject is covered in detail in the article, “*Plan of Salvation*” under the section, “[*The problem of evil and the purpose of God*](#).” Please read it first, before you go on, since that is the basis of all that follows in this article. That is, if you are unable to accept the Biblical teaching that God is a loving God who has a purpose for your life; and you are unwilling to trust in him, then there is no point in reading any further, since there is no real foundation to build on.

Purpose through Christ. God has not abandoned mankind, but through his Son has made it possible to restore mankind to God’s original plan. Man can be given a new heart and a new spirit, in the likeness of his Son. It is in looking to Jesus as our Savior, spending time with him—learning his teachings and the principles he lived by—that will give us true meaning and purpose.

2. Repentance and Confession

Awakened conscience and renunciation of sin. How can a man be made right with God? How can he come to Christ and obtain the gift of eternal life? The same question was asked by the multitude on the Day of Pentecost, when, convicted of sin, they cried out, “Brothers, what should we do?” (Acts 2:37). The first word of Peter’s answer was, “Repent.” At another time, shortly after, he said, “Repent... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We will not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness. Until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

The Biblical sense of repentance is not the forced confession of a guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking forward to judgment—lamenting being caught and fearful of the suffering to follow, more than the sin itself. Rather, conviction takes hold of the mind and heart. He senses the righteousness of God and feels the terror of appearing, in his own guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts. He sees the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity, and he longs to be cleansed and to be restored to communion with Heaven. Psalm 51 is a worthy chapter to read in this context. This prayer of David, after his fall, illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. His repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his guilt; no desire to escape the judgment threatened. David saw the enormity of his transgression; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only

that he prayed, but for purity of heart. He longed for the joy of holiness—to be restored to harmony and communion with God.

A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ. Just here is a point on which many may err, and hence they fail of receiving the help that Christ desires to give them. They think that they cannot come to Christ unless they first repent, and that repentance prepares for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Bible does *not* teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ, “Come to me, all of you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. Peter made the matter clear in his statement to the Israelites when he said, “God exalted him by his right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins.” (Acts 5:31). We can no more repent without the spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ. Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that his spirit is moving upon our hearts.

Rationalizations not to repent.

1. My sin was so small; trivializing sin.
2. I’m not good enough; trivializing God’s power in my life.
3. I’m basically a good person and don’t need to repent.
4. Waiting to become better, which never arrives.
5. God is too merciful for him not to save me.
6. I am as good as those who profess Christianity.
7. Procrastination; I can change when I choose; numbing the conscience.
8. Pseudo-Christian; an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, but the heart is not repentant and cleansed.
9. Overwhelmed with guilt and fear of God’s rejection.

CONFESSION, not concealment. We need not make long and wearisome pilgrimages, or perform painful penances, to expiate our transgression. “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

True confession is always of a specific character, and acknowledges particular sins. They may be of such a nature as to be brought before God only; they may be wrongs that should be confessed to individuals who have suffered injury through them; or they may be of a public character, and should then be as publicly confessed. But all confession should be

definite and to the point, acknowledging the very sins of which you are guilty. They are to be limited to the offended parties—always God, and only to those persons you’ve offended. The purpose is not to broadcast sin, but to confess *and* forsake it.

Avoid balancing guilt with blame. Guilt is a function of our spirit. Heavy guilt throws our mind out of balance—i.e. mental breakdown, futile attempts at *coping* with guilt, etc. A guilty person will often try to balance guilt with blame with excuses like,

- “*It’s not your fault but your parents fault.*” You feel guilty for hurting your mother, but you shouldn’t feel guilty since she didn’t show love to you when you were young.
- “*You stole but it’s not your fault since you live in a deprived society.*” Or, the Robin Hood mentality—stealing from the rich and giving to the poor.

The problem with blame is that it leads to bitterness, then the guilt becomes greater. One must get rid of both poisons: guilt and blame.

Clear Conscience. Become desperate for a clear conscience. Acts 24:16, “So I always **take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.**” God may forgive and forget, but people have longer memories.

- *Shipwreck faith.* 1 Timothy 1:19, “having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have shipwrecked their faith.”
- *Skeletons in the closet.* Proverbs 28:13, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

A clear conscience is a vital component of genuine love. 1 Timothy 1:5, “The aim of our charge is **love** that issues from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and a sincere faith.” It is like taking the beam out of your own eye, in order for you to see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye (cf. Matt. 7:5).

Steps in gaining a clear conscience.

1. *List their offenses.* Such as, broken promises, false accusations, favoritism, inconsistency, anger in discipline.
2. *List your offenses.* Such as: resisting authority, ungratefulness, difficult to live with, disloyalty, not being there to help in need, irresponsibility, laziness, disorderliness, deception—giving part of the truth, pride, resentment.
3. *Purpose to ask forgiveness.*

- a. *Become desperate for a clear conscience.* To avoid shipwreck (1 Tim. 1:19). To avert failure (Prov. 28:13). To leave immaturity (Heb. 5:14). To escape discrediting (1 Peter 3:15-16).
 - b. *Better not to hear than not to apply.* “For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them” (2 Peter 2:21).
4. Identify the basic offense. Was it your attitudes, actions, words, or negligence (i.e. failure to do what is right)?
5. Work out the right wording. Template wording, “**God has convicted me of how wrong I was in (name the basic offense). I don’t deserve your forgiveness, but would you forgive me?**” Then wait for a response. In naming the basic offense, there is no need to go into details, since they already know what happened and will not want to relive the painful experience.
 - a. *No blame.* Not, “I was wrong and you were wrong.”
 - b. *No justification.* Not, “I was tired.”
 - c. *No pride.* Not, “If I was wrong”
 - d. *No presumption.* Not, “I want you to forgive me.” Rather, I don’t deserve your forgiveness. An attitude much like that of the prodigal son in Luke 15:18.
6. Use the appropriate method. The purpose is to erase the past, not document it.
 - a. Personal visit or phone call.
 - b. *No* text messages, *no* emails, *no* letters—all of which can lead to misuse or no response.
7. *Understand refusal to forgive, if it comes.*
 - a. They also have a balance of guilt and blame.
 - b. They might not see a genuine spirit of repentance in you.
 - c. Is restitution needed? “Where is the money you stole?”
 - d. They might want to see a change in behavior
 - e. They may need time for healing

8. *Beware of misplaced conviction.* Genuine conviction starts with God, then deals with the major offenses first, followed by the smaller offenses.

3. Consecration [\[e\]](#)

The problem of iniquity. There is a difference between *sin* and *iniquity*. Think in terms of an archer, aiming his arrow at a target. In the case of *sin*, the archer misses the target, failing to meet the standard of excellence; while in the case of *iniquity*, the archer *intended* to do so. He missed the target because that was his inclination, his desire, his will. In the same way, as long as an individual continues to harbor (cherish, entertain, regard) *iniquity* in his heart, he continues to sin—it is his inclination, desire, and will. In such a condition, the Bible tells us that God can neither answer his prayers nor accept him into his kingdom:

- *Psalms 66:18:* If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.
- *Matthew 7:23:* Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice iniquity.’

Change of heart. A change of heart is required, but God cannot do it alone. He must have man’s consent and cooperation. Unless the person manifests a *willingness* to change, the change will never occur.

Jeremiah 29:13: You will seek me, and find me, when you search for me with all your heart.

It is a whole heart commitment, if he is to be restored into God’s likeness. And since this requires an entire transformation—a renewing of his whole nature—he must yield himself wholly to Him.

Surrender is a struggle. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, is a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness. Yet, it is not blind submission, an unreasoning control. It appeals to the intellect and the conscience. Man does not become a robot or a puppet in the hand of God. He does not force the will of man. God does not accept homage and worship that is not willingly and intelligently given. Moreover, as his crowning work of creation, God desires that man reach the highest possible development. God sets before us the height of blessing. It remains for us to choose whether we will be set free from the bondage of sin, to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Surrender all. Yet it is necessary to give up *all* that separates us from God. “So then, any one of you who does not give up all that he has, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). Whatever draws away our heart from God

must be given up. Whether it is the love of money, or wealth, or reputation, or a life of ease, or freedom from responsibility; all our idols must be given up. All the slavish bands that bind us must be broken. We cannot be half God's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are his entirely. Although, to give up all does not mean to give up anything that God sees is for our best interest to retain. But there is a change of focus: The things we retain no longer become ours but his, and we use them for his purposes and to his glory.

Not of works. This process of a change of heart through surrender cannot be bypassed with a “righteousness by works” mentality. Many think that they can form a right character and obey God's law by their own efforts; that they do not have to change their hearts. That by mere change in outward behavior, they can fulfill the requirements of the law and salvation. But this is self-deception. An outward change without an inward transformation will not work and is not what God asks for. God does not want or need people who pretend to be Christians—who are outwardly righteous but inwardly corrupt; who have a form of godliness, but deny its power.

Surrender of the will. The surrender of self is the surrender of the will, above all else. It is the surrender of the power of choice, or of decision making, or of governance. You are no longer boss over your life, but Christ is your boss. You no longer choose to service self (where all the world revolves around you), but you choose to serve God (where all of your world revolves around Him). By giving God your will, He will then work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

It may be that you cannot control your own thoughts and emotions. It may be that you are weak in moral power, a slave to doubt, controlled by bad habits. It may be that your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot change your heart and are powerless to give God your affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will. Make it a daily commitment. As Paul said, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31), and “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.

Believe and accept. You have confessed your sins, and in heart put them away. You have resolved to give yourself to God. Now go to Him, and ask that He will wash away your sins and give you a new heart. Then believe that He does this *because He has promised*. This is the lesson

which Jesus taught while He was on earth, that the gift which God promises us, we must believe we do receive, and it is ours.

You cannot atone for your past sins; you cannot change your heart and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You *believe* that promise. You confess your sins and give yourself to God. You *will* to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed, then God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It *is* so if you believe it. Do not wait to *feel* that you are made whole, but say, “I believe it; it *is* so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.”

Mark 11:24: Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you are receiving it, and it will be yours.

Do not draw back, but day by day say, “I am Christ’s; I have given myself to him,” and ask him to give you his spirit and keep you by his grace. As it is by giving yourself to God, and believing in Christ, that you become God’s child, so you are to live in Christ. The apostle says, “Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to walk in him” (Col. 2:6).

Contrary to human reason. The change that God makes in the heart and mind of a believer is a radical change indeed. It is so radical that, at times, it will appear contrary to human reason. Consider, for example, the words of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:43-45: You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may [*prove yourselves to*] be sons of your Father in heaven.

This teaching is opposite to human reason, but it is the teaching of Christ. Be prepared to be radicalized; be prepared to change your way of thinking regarding things and relationships. A Christian no longer sees people from a human, fleshly, or external viewpoint, but as God sees them (2 Cor. 5:16). He no longer sees things as needing to be accumulated and idolized, but as means to help ourselves and others, and to glorify God.

Those who become new creatures in Christ Jesus will bring forth the fruits of the spirit, “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22, 23). They will no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts, but by the faith of the Son of

God they will follow in his steps, reflect his character, and purify themselves even as he is pure. The things they once hated they now love, and the things they once loved they hate. The proud and self-assertive become meek and lowly in heart. The vain and supercilious become serious and unobtrusive. The drunken become sober, and the profligate pure. The vain customs and fashions of the world are laid aside. Christians will seek not the “outward adorning,” but “the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3: 3, 4).

Yet, the closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes; for your vision will be clearer, and your imperfections will be seen in broad and distinct contrast to his perfect nature. This is evidence that Satan’s delusions have lost their power; that the vivifying influence of the spirit of God is arousing you. The less we see to esteem in ourselves, the more we will see to esteem in the infinite purity and loveliness of our Savior. A view of our sinfulness drives us to him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power. The more our sense of need drives us to him and to the word of God, the more exalted views we shall have of his character, and the more fully we shall reflect his image.

Ever abide in him. In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven’s light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ.

Jesus teaches the same thing when He says, “Abide in me, and I will abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you *bear fruit* unless you abide in me. . . . because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5). You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for growth and fruitfulness. Apart from him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

By *faith* you became Christ’s, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to *give* all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must *take* all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your

heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey.

Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, “Take me, O Lord, as wholly yours. I lay all my plans at your feet. Use me today in your service. Abide with me, and let all my work be accomplished in you.” This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. Surrender all your plans to him, to be carried out or given up as his providence will indicate. Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ.

A life of restfulness. A life in Christ is a life of *restfulness*. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to his strength, your ignorance to his wisdom, your frailty to his enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ. Let the mind dwell upon his love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of his character. Christ in his self-denial, Christ in his humiliation, Christ in his purity and holiness, Christ in his matchless love—this is the subject for the soul’s contemplation. It is by loving him, copying him, depending wholly upon him, that you are to be transformed into his likeness.

It is Satan’s constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Savior and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life’s cares and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these Satan will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are really conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus by separating them from Christ he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we will be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. Say with the apostle Paul, “I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to him. If you will leave yourself in his hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through him who has loved you.

Further steps. Again, more can be said here, but the reader is encouraged to obtain a copy of the book, “Steps to Christ,” and read the book in its entirety. You can also access it online at: ellenwhite.info/books/bk-sc-

contents.htm. Also, you are encouraged to complete the Basic Seminar (BasicSeminar.com) which is a 24-hour video course that emphasizes the factors needed to develop and maintain healthy, growing relationships with God, family members, and friends.

4. Moral Transformation [\[e\]](#)

The Christian life is a **transformed life**. It is the visible outworking of salvation—a life renewed by grace, empowered by the spirit, and conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). It signifies not just forgiveness, but renewal, resulting in a life that bears witness to God's redemptive power.

Metamorphosis. This spiritual and moral transformation (*metamorphosis*) occurs when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and is empowered by his spirit to live in a new way. This transformation involves a change in heart, mind, and behavior—moving from sin and self-centeredness toward righteousness, holiness, and Christ-centered living.

- *Romans 12:2*: Do not be conformed to the *pattern* of this age, but be transformed [*metamorphousthe*] by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.
- *2 Corinthians 3:18*: And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed [*metamorphoumetha*] into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from the Lord *who is* the spirit.

Metamorphosis in Christ means:

- Dying to the old self (Rom. 6:4-6). Spoken of as “the old man”.
- Made new in spirit (Eph. 4:22-24). Spoken of as “the new man”.
- Continual change in the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), “from one degree of glory to another”.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul combines the above points as follows, “I have been **crucified with Christ** [*the old man*], and it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me** [*the new man*]. The life that I now live in the flesh, I live **by the faith of the Son of God** [*in the likeness of Christ*], who loved me and gave himself up for me.”

New birth, new creation. Believers experience a new birth, a new creation, a new identity in Christ.

- *2 Corinthians 5:17*: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have

become new.

This new birth, new creation, changes how believers think and desire, aligning them with God's will.

- *Ephesians 4:23*: and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
- *Hebrews 10:16*: This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord [*Yehovah*]: I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds.
- [Philippians 2:5](#): Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus,

He puts off his former self [discards his former nature, “the old man”]—corrupted by deceitful desires.

► A'. God-centric Doctrines

Executive summary. The God-centric foundational teachings of the Bible are arranged as follows:

TOPIC	DESCRIPTION
1. GOD'S NATURE	Who God is
2. GOD'S CREATION	Who we are (in God's image)
3. GOD'S LAW	God's <i>operational</i> attributes; His will expressed
4. GOD'S GRACE	God's power in us to attain God's attributes
5. GOD'S JUSTICE	God's recompense (punishment vs. reward)
6. GOD'S MERCY	Withholding deserved punishment
7. GOD'S REST	

The first six are better understood when viewed in pairs: nature/creation, law/grace, and justice/mercy; with “God’s rest” at the end.

1. God's nature

One God. There is only one personal God—a singular divine Being, not a plurality of gods. He is neither tri-theistic (three separate gods) nor Trinitarian (three persons in one God), but truly one. In the Old Testament, his most common name is **Yehovah** (the Tetragrammaton), and in the New Testament, he is called “**the God**” (*ho theos*) to distinguish him from the Greek deities. The God of the Bible is a personal being, not an abstract substance or essence. Jesus addressed God as his Father and taught his followers to do the same. This belief is discussed in greater detail in the article, “[God of the Bible](#).”

One Lord. There is one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father (John 1:18), the one through whom God created all things, and through whom we exist (1 Cor. 8:6). That he took on himself the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race; that he dwelt among men, full of grace and truth, lived our Example, died our Sacrifice, was raised for our justification, ascended on high to the right hand of the Father in heaven, to be our only Mediator, where through the merits of his shed blood, he secures the pardon and forgiveness of the sins of all those who persistently come to him; and, as the closing portion of his work as our High Priest, before he takes his throne as King, he will make the great and final Atonement for the sins of all such, and their sins will then be blotted out (Acts 3:19) and borne away from the sanctuary, as patterned in the service of the Levitical priesthood, which foreshadowed and prefigured the ministry of our Lord in heaven.

Also, with regard to Christ's nature, see the article "[*Christology*](#)."

One Spirit. The spirit is not a divine Person, but an Essence. This is explained in detail in the article, "[*Spirit as Essence*](#)".

Materiality. God (the Father), his Son, and the redeemed are all persons and material—not essence, not immaterial. The “everlasting inheritance” that the saints will possess to all eternity will also have substance and materiality. The spirit, however, is not a person, but essence and, therefore, immaterial. The Father has a spirit, it is “God’s spirit” or “the spirit of God”; the Son has a spirit, it is “Christ’s spirit” (Rom. 8:9); and we have a spirit, it is “man’s spirit”. But the spirit does not have a spirit, that would be redundant and irrational.

2. God's creation [\[e\]](#)

The account of origins found in the Book of Genesis chapters 1-11 is not allegorical, but a factual presentation of actual events. Therefore, it provides a reliable framework for scientific inquiry.

The Creation. The creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 consisted of six consecutive, “evening and morning,” *literal* days of creation, starting in Genesis 1:1 and ending in Genesis 2:3 on the seventh day, which was a rest day. In contrast, the numerous views that try to fit evolution or millions of years into this creation account are rejected as unbiblical. The most common of these fallacious theories include: the gap theory, progressive creation, day-age, framework hypothesis, theistic evolution, functionality-cosmic temple, analogical days, and day-gap-day.

Creation kinds. The original life forms (Genesis “kinds”), including mankind, were made by direct, creative acts of God (“he spoke and it came to be”). They were not created by natural, physical processes over millions of years. The living descendants of any of the original kinds (apart from man) may represent more than one species today, reflecting the genetic potential within each original kind. One kind does not change over time into a different kind, even given the limited biological changes (including mutational deterioration) that have occurred naturally since creation.

The Flood. The Genesis account of the great flood (Genesis 6-9) was an actual historic event, worldwide (global) in its extent and catastrophic in its effects. This flood was a significant geological event, and most worldwide sedimentary deposits, much of which contains buried animal and plant matter, were deposited at that time. The creation of coal, petroleum, and natural gas found in these sedimentary layers is largely a result of this deposition during the flood and subsequent application of pressure and

heat in the centuries that followed. A detailed explanation of this process is explained in the answersingenesis.org article, "[The Origin of Oil](#)".

Mankind. Man (Hebrew, *Adam*; Gen. 1:26-27), consisting of male and female (two genders), was created in the image of God ("let us make man in our image"). The Bible does not explain or define the "us" in this narrative, but is interpreted to mean the Father speaking to his Son, which is consistent with the New Testament concept that God created the worlds through his Son (Hebrews 1:2). Adam and Eve were the first two humans. Thus, the human race is Adam's race.

In the beginning, man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature.

[Education 20.2](#): Created to be "the image and glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:7), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny. Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, **they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker**. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator's glory. . . .

But, while sin nearly obliterated the divine image, Christ came to restore that which was lost. Today we may reflect the image of God in character, but it is at the Second Coming of Christ when he will change our vile bodies, and fashion them in the likeness of his glorious body. For, "we know that when he appears, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). "For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Cor. 15:53).

The pre-Flood *Nephilim*, mentioned in Genesis 6:4, are believed to have been the line of Seth intermarrying with the line of Cain, producing notable, rebellious children. The idea that fallen angels bred with human women to produce the Nephilim is rejected as unbiblical and fanciful. There is no biblical evidence that angels have the ability to procreate.

All human life is sacred and begins at conception (defined as the moment of fertilization). Each unborn child is a unique, living human being, created in the image of God, and must be respected and protected both before and after birth. The abortion of an unborn child or the active, intentional taking of human life through euthanasia or assisted suicide constitutes a violation of the sanctity of human life and is a crime against God and man.

Mortality (temporal life). God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim. 6:16) by virtue of being uncreated and eternal. Yet He offers immortality

to humanity—a concept theologically termed *conditional immortality*. This promise will be fulfilled through Christ at his Second Coming, when this mortal body will “put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53–54).

Marriage. Based on the creation story, the only legitimate marriage sanctioned by God is the joining of a biological man and woman in a single, exclusive union as delineated in Scripture. Numerous laws, statutes, ordinances, and even apostolic opinion (e.g. 1 Cor. 7) are found in the Bible to help regulate and protect the marriage covenant.

Divorce was permitted under the Law of Moses (Deut. 24:1–4). However, according to Jesus, **remarriage** after divorce constitutes adultery (*moicheia*) (Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18). In Mark and Luke (Mk 10:11–12; Lk 16:18), Jesus allows no exceptions. The concept of divorce followed by remarriage does not appear in his teaching, at least as recorded by these two evangelists. Only Matthew includes an “exception clause,” stating, “except on the ground of *porneia*” (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). A study of *porneia* and *moicheia* in the Greek New Testament shows that these terms are distinct: *porneia* does not mean or include *moicheia*, and *moicheia* does not mean or include *porneia*. Therefore, the so-called “innocent party” in a divorce has no legitimate grounds to remarry unless *porneia*—not *moicheia*—was the reason for the separation. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see “[Divorce and Remarriage](#)” in the Resources section of this book.

The Fallacy of Evolution. There is no observable evidence of the following four evolutionary postulates:

- a. **No proof of life forming from non-life.** No experiment to date has demonstrated life arising spontaneously from non-living matter. In every laboratory attempt, the presence of a genetic code such as DNA and other organic components has been necessary, meaning these experiments never truly start from non-life.
- b. **No proof of single-cell life evolving into multi-cell life.** No evidence exists that single-celled organisms evolved into multicellular life. Transitional forms—such as two-, three-, or five-celled organisms—have never been observed; instead, we only find fully developed, complex multicellular organisms. The proposed evolutionary transition from single-celled life (e.g., bacteria) to multicellular organisms remains an unproven hypothesis. Furthermore, evolution provides no satisfactory explanation or evidence for the origin of cell differentiation and specialization—how distinct cell types, such as nerve, heart, muscle, or pancreatic cells, arose. The *probability* of such a complex development occurring through undirected evolutionary processes is vanishingly small.

- c. **No proof of micro-evolution leading to macro-evolution.** Charles Darwin's central idea was that minor variations within a *species* (*speciation* or micro-evolution) could accumulate over time, eventually producing significant changes and leading to the formation of new *genera* or *families* (macro-evolution). The biblical term "kind" in Genesis 1 corresponds more closely to the evolutionary classification of "genus" or "family," rather than "species." However, such large-scale developments have not been observed. All documented minor variations remain within the genetic variability of the species, and no entirely new genetic information has ever been observed—only modifications or losses of existing information. For example:

- **Dogs (genus *Canis*):** wolves, coyotes, jackals, and domestic dogs remain within the *Canis* genus.
- **Cats (genus *Panthera*, family *Felidae*):** lions, tigers, jaguars, leopards, and domestic cats remain within their genus.
- **Horses (genus *Equus*):** horses, donkeys, and zebras remain within the *Equus* genus.
- **Ducks (family *Anatidae*):** ducks, geese, swans, and related birds remain within the same family.
- **Fruit flies:** remain fruit flies.

Again, no microevolutionary changes (*speciation*) have been shown to produce entirely new genera or families.

- d. **No proof that time and chance favor evolution.** The probability of random processes producing even the simplest proteins—the basic building blocks of cells—is extraordinarily small. Proteins are not mere fragments of organic material; they consist of long chains ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 amino acids. For example, the largest known protein in humans, Titin, contains 34,350 amino acids.

But the highly improbable formation of a single protein is only the beginning. Consider baker's yeast, a single-celled organism that contains 4,399 distinct proteins^[a], totaling over 40 million protein molecules within one cell^[b]. What are the odds that all 4,399 distinct proteins could have arisen by chance? And what are the odds that over 40 million protein molecules would assemble randomly to form a single functioning cell?

The challenge does not stop there. These proteins must then organize into functional subunits, called organelles, to form a complete

[a] [Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry, September 29th, 2008](#)

[b] ["Simple Cell Contains 42 Million Protein Molecules, Biologists Say"](#)

cell. Additionally, the cell must have a source of energy and the ability to reproduce. From a probabilistic perspective, there is not enough time or opportunity in the known universe—even considering multiple universes—for this to occur naturally. In other words, the evolution of a single cell is not merely improbable; it exceeds what can be considered *rationally believable*—that is, logical, non-extreme, and empirically verifiable.

Evolution is incompatible with the God of the Bible. According to Scripture, God created a good and perfect world in six days and rested on the seventh. The Bible presents the world as initially complete, flawless, and inherently good. Evolution, by contrast, suggests that the world began incomplete, imperfect, and in need of gradual development over millions of years. It was **not perfect** because countless mutations—most of them unsuccessful—would be required over time to produce human beings. It was **not good**, since evolution relies on “survival of the fittest,” a process involving pain, suffering, and death.

3. God's law ^[d]

Universal and non-optional. God's law is not limited to the Ten Commandments, which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:2–17), nor to the Law of Moses (also called the Mosaic Code), which contains over 600 laws found in the Pentateuch. Rather, it encompasses all laws and principles revealed throughout Scripture—both Old and New Testaments—as well as those established in God's Creation, including the laws of nature. In other words, God's law includes the moral, spiritual, and natural principles by which He governs the world and guides human behavior.

Moral vs. ceremonial laws. A distinction exists in the Bible between moral and ceremonial laws. Ceremonial laws are rules governing how believers were to worship God through the sacrificial system established during the Exodus. These laws included instructions for sacrifices and religious feasts centered around the sanctuary. They were symbolic, pointing to the coming Messiah and finding their fulfillment in Christ as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). Christians generally understand that ceremonial laws no longer apply today, since they were fulfilled in Christ.

The moral law, in contrast, regulates human behavior in relation to God and others. The Ten Commandments constitute the foundation of the moral law, and other biblical laws related to morality are based on them. Christians generally recognize that moral laws were not abolished by Christ's death but remain binding today.

Matters of the heart. In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Jesus

revealed the deeper meaning of the moral law, showing that it was not merely external compliance but an internal way of life, reflected in purity of thought, motive, and action. He succinctly summarized obedience to the law as love for God and love for others (Matt. 22:36–40; cf. Rom. 13:8–10).

Teach and meditate on the moral law. The Bible instructs parents to teach their children God’s commandments, statutes, and ordinances. Deuteronomy 6:4–8 emphasizes this responsibility:

Deuteronomy 6:4–8: Hear, Israel: Yehovah is our God. Yehovah is one. ⁵ You shall love Yehovah your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ **These words**, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; ⁷ **and you shall teach them diligently to your children**, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

In this passage, “these words” primarily refer to the Ten Commandments, detailed in the previous chapter (Deuteronomy 5). Parents have the primary responsibility to educate their children about ethical principles and proper behavior, instilling a strong moral compass. If parents fail to do so, outside influences may shape their children’s values instead. While the Ten Commandments form the foundation, all other laws should also be studied and applied.

As Yehovah told Joshua when he succeeded Moses,

Joshua 1:8: This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

This emphasizes not only teaching the law but also meditating on it continuously, making it a central part of daily life.

Characteristic of the Remnant. The saints at the end of time will be identified as those who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). In other words, a saint is someone who wholeheartedly believes in God’s law and principles and demonstrates them through daily life, following Christ’s example of trust and obedience.

Satan’s lie regarding law. Satan’s greatest deception is the claim that God’s law functions like human law—with arbitrary rules that require external enforcement. In Satan’s system of governance, laws are upheld

through coercion, fear, and punishment; he willingly inflicts pain and suffering on those who disobey. He wants us to perceive God and His laws in the same tyrannical way. The following table illustrates the key differences between God’s law and Satan’s counterfeit system.

Subject	God’s reign	Satan’s rule
Laws	God’s created order includes laws of nature and reality, and of life	“Special-interest,” man-made rules; arbitrary; contrary to nature
Sin	Causes harm by its very nature, because it violates how God made us.	It is God who has a problem with sin. There is nothing wrong with sin itself.
Punishment	Sin brings its own punishment. It is a natural result of law-breaking.	Enforcement through coercion and fear, even pain, suffering and torment
Justified	By faith. Because of Christ’s merits, it is just for God to forgive and grant his grace (i.e. power) to the penitent.	By works. Justice demands the punishment of the transgressor. Forgiveness is only possible thru works.
Final Judgment	We determine our own fate. In the end, we will judge ourselves by the revealed truth (Jn. 12:48)	Satan rejects Christ’s atoning sacrifice for mankind and impugns God as the ultimate cause.

Early Adventists and the law. It is widely acknowledged that early Seventh-day Adventism (prior to 1888) tended to emphasize the law more than the gospel. There are several forces that contributed to this reality.

1. **Anti-antinomian reaction.** Many early Adventists came from churches that taught: (a) the law was abolished; and (b) obedience was unnecessary under grace. Adventists swung hard the other direction to protect moral seriousness.
2. **Eschatological urgency.** The belief that Adventists were the end-time remnant intensified focus on: (a) commandment-keeping; and (b) visible obedience as a sign of loyalty to God.
3. **Forensic clarity, evangelical thinness.** Early Adventism excelled at: doctrinal coherence, biblical proof-texting, and systematic theology. But it often lacked: (a) experiential language of grace, and (b) Christ-centered preaching in the evangelical sense.

The above reasons are why some historians say Adventism had a “law-centered message with a gospel assumption”, rather than a gospel-centered proclamation. Ellen G. White acknowledged the problem and sought to realign the issue:

RH March 11, 1890, par. 13: As a people, we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain. **We must preach Christ in the law**, and there will be sap and nourishment in the preaching that will be as food to the famishing flock of God.

Christ in the law. It was after 1888 that the concept of “Christ in the law” took shape in Adventism and particularly in EGW’s writings. She began to focus on a “blended” truth that incorporated both Christ and the law. Here is one noteworthy quote:

RH May 27, 1890, par. 9: There should be deep searching of the Scriptures that the ministers of God may declare the whole counsel of God. **The relation of Christ to the law** is but faintly comprehended. Some preach the law, and feel that their brethren are not doing their whole duty if they do not present the subject in the very same way in which they do. These brethren shrink from the presentation of justification by faith, but just **as soon as Christ is discovered in his true position in relation to the law**, the misconception that has existed on this important matter will be removed. **The law and the gospel are so blended** that the truth cannot be presented as it is in Jesus, without blending these subjects in perfect agreement. The law is the gospel of Christ veiled; **the gospel of Jesus is nothing more or less than the law defined**, showing its far-reaching principles.

Thus, rather than doing away with the law, the post-1888 Adventist movement focused on this “blended” truth: That Christ is the center of the law. It is not about rejecting the law, but reframing it on the basis of grace: (a) the law reveals sin; (b) Christ alone provides righteousness; and (c) obedience flows from union with Christ—a gift of grace.

Shift in EGW’s writings. The changes in EGW’s post-1888 writings in noteworthy for the following reasons:

1. **Linguistic shift.** An explosion of “in Christ” language occurred in her writings, with emphasis on: union with Christ, abiding, dependence, trust, rest, and reception rather than performance. This language was scarce before 1888 and abundant after.
2. **Justification becomes experiential.** Justification is no longer merely forensic background but: present, continuous, assurance-producing, and power-generating. Faith is no longer just assent—it is relational trust.
3. **Assurance is rehabilitated.** Where earlier writings cautioned against “presumption,” later works emphasize: confidence in

Christ, peace with God, freedom from condemnation, and joyful obedience. Fear-based motivation is increasingly rejected.

4. **Tone.** Post-1888 Ellen White: writes more warmly, appeals more personally, uses relational metaphors, and centers love rather than duty. Her Christology becomes affective as well as doctrinal.

Evidence of shift in her writings. In her post-1888 works that mark the shift, there are not found new doctrines, but new centers of gravity:

- **Steps to Christ (1892)** – almost unimaginable in tone pre-1888
- **Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing (1896)** – grace-saturated ethics
- **The Desire of Ages (1898)** – Christological re-centering of all doctrine
- **Christ’s Object Lessons (1900)** – gospel-driven obedience

Notably, *The Desire of Ages* is her most Christ-centered work—and it comes **after** the 1888 Minneapolis Conference.

4. God’s grace [\[d\]](#)

Grace defined. Grace, according to *Strong’s Concordance*, is “the **divine influence** upon the heart, and its reflection in the life.” At its foundation, grace is God’s initiative toward humanity—freely given, unearned, and extended to all.

God’s grace makes salvation possible by **enabling individuals to respond to the gospel in faith**. As Scripture teaches, “by grace you have been saved through faith... it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Grace frees a person to believe, removing every barrier that would otherwise prevent a genuine response to God. This means that forgiveness is not achieved by human effort, but is received as a gift.

This grace is **universal in its offer**. It “has appeared to all,” and God shows no partiality (Titus 2:11; Acts 10:34–35). Just as the sun shines on both the evil and the good, so God extends His grace to every person. The view that grace is limited or intended only for the elect—those chosen by God for salvation—is therefore rejected as unbiblical.

However, grace is not forced upon anyone. **It can be resisted**. Each individual retains the ability to either receive or reject God’s gracious call. For this reason, Scripture warns against receiving the grace of God “in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1). Likewise, the Calvinistic view that grace is *irresistible*—the “I” in the TULIP acronym—is rejected as unbiblical.

Grace not only brings a person into a restored relationship with God, but also **sustains** that relationship. From beginning to end, the believer's life rests upon grace. God protects and preserves the relationship with those who continue to trust in Him, though a person may choose to turn away by resisting grace.

Importantly, forgiveness through grace is never a license to continue in sin. While **grace abounds** even where sin is great (Rom. 5:20), it does not encourage sinful living. On the contrary, those who receive grace are called to turn away from sin. **Grace restores** the broken relationship between God and humanity, not merely by overlooking wrongdoing, but by bringing the individual into a new standing before Him.

Grace produces transformation. Grace does more than forgive—it transforms. The same divine influence that restores a person also renews and reshapes his life. Grace is not merely a change in man's attitude toward God; it is a powerful work within the human heart that results in a changed life.

Scripture describes grace as actively training believers “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives” (Titus 2:11–12). This shows that grace is not passive; it instructs, empowers, and produces real moral and spiritual change.

This transforming power of grace is seen in many ways:

- **Strength in weakness.** God's grace sustains believers in trials, providing the power to endure. As Paul learned, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).
- **Motivation for holy living:** Grace produces a desire to live righteously and to turn away from sin (cf. Titus 2:11–12).
- **Empowerment for service:** Believers receive abilities and gifts through grace, equipping them to serve others (Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:7–8).
- **Energy for diligent labor:** Grace does not produce passivity, but effort. Paul testified that he labored abundantly, yet recognized that it was the grace of God working through him (1 Cor. 15:10).
- **Generosity and love toward others:** Grace overflows into acts of giving and mutual care, strengthening the bond among believers (2 Cor. 9:8, 14).
- **Endurance in difficulty:** Grace provides help in times of need, enabling perseverance (Heb. 4:16).

Grace is also dynamic and growing. Believers are called to “grow in

grace” (2 Pet. 3:18), and to faithfully use what they have received as stewards of God’s varied grace (1 Pet. 4:10). This growth is closely connected with humility, as God gives greater grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5–6).

Importantly, grace deals not only with the symptoms of sin but with its root. It is not merely a temporary relief, but a true remedy. Grace works to restore the whole person—renewing the mind, reshaping the character, and enabling victory over sin. It leads to a new way of life in which the believer turns from sin and lives in devotion to God.

Run the race

To better understand “**grace**” a person must recognize that **salvation is a journey**—not merely a one-time event. Paul frequently uses the **imagery of a race** to describe the believer’s experience, emphasizing both God’s initiative and our ongoing response. Describing salvation as a journey does not deny its certainty; rather, it clarifies its **nature**. It is a living relationship with God that:

- begins with **grace**
- continues through **faith**
- endures through **perseverance**
- culminates in **victory**

In Paul’s imagery, we run—but only because God first calls us to the race, runs alongside us, and waits for us at the finish line. God is actively involved at every stage. His divine influence (**grace**) is present throughout the entire journey.

1. The race has a beginning: God’s initiative. Every race begins with a starting point—and in the Christian life, that starting point is **God’s grace**. Paul writes that we are saved “by grace...through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). This reminds us that salvation is not something we originate; it is something God initiates. He calls, draws, convicts, and offers forgiveness before we ever take a step.

- God sets the course
- God provides the strength
- God opens the way

Without His action, there is no race to run.

2. The race requires participation: Our response. While God initiates salvation, Paul makes it equally clear that believers are not passive. In passages like 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, he urges believers to:

- Run with purpose

- Exercise self-discipline
- Aim for the prize

This shows that salvation involves **active faith**—not merely belief as a concept, but a lived-out trust that shapes choices, priorities, and direction. Faith, in this sense, is not standing still—it is moving forward with God.

3. The race demands perseverance. Paul’s race analogy especially highlights endurance. In 2 Timothy 4:7, he says: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” This implies that:

- The race is long, not short
- There are obstacles and struggles
- Finishing matters, not just starting

Salvation, then, is not only about beginning in faith but continuing in faith—holding on through difficulty, doubt, and growth.

God works in us as we walk. A key balance appears in Philippians 2:12–13: We are told to “work out” our salvation; yet “it is God who works in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” This reveals a partnership: God supplies the power; we cooperate with that power. It is not a competition between God and us, but a relationship of dependence and response.

4. The goal of the race: transformation and victory. The finish line is not merely “getting to heaven,” but becoming what God intends. Paul describes the goal as:

- Being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29)
- Receiving the “crown” (2 Timothy 4:8)
- Reaching maturity in faith (Ephesians 4:13)

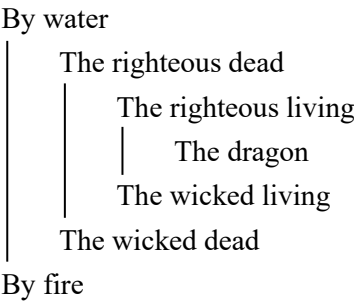
This means salvation is: forgiveness at the start, transformation along the way, and victory (or maturity) at the end.

Conclusion. God’s grace (His divine influence) is recognized by two inseparable characteristics: it **initiates** faith in the Christian life, bringing a person from unbelief into faith (Romans 1:17), and it **transforms** by enabling him to continue the journey. It restores the sinner to a right relationship with God and actively reshapes the believer’s life into one marked by righteousness, humility, and love. Any understanding of grace that separates these two aspects, or ignores the second, fails to reflect its full biblical meaning.

5. God’s justice [\[d\]](#)

My eschatology is *premillennial* (Christ comes before the 1,000 years in heaven) and *annihilationist* (the unsaved are destroyed and cease to exist) in the Final Judgment.

Seven judgments. At least seven primary divine judgments are identified in Scripture. They are arranged below in chiasitic form (not chronological order). They are judgments “of” or “by”:



1. **Judgment by water.** Except for Noah and those in the Ark, the world was destroyed through a worldwide flood (Gen. 6-9).
2. **Judgment of the righteous dead.** Adventists call this, “The Investigative Judgment”. They believe it began in 1844, at the conclusion of the 2300-day prophesy of Daniel 8:14, when Christ entered the Most Holy Place in heaven.
3. **Judgment of the righteous living.** The righteous living are judged and sealed just prior to the Second Coming (Rev. 7:2-3). It is for those who do not receive “the mark” of the Beast and his image. This is considered the concluding act of The Investigative Judgment, just prior to the Second Coming.
4. **Judgment of the dragon.** Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven in the war with Michael and his angels (Rev. 12:7-9). Yet Satan’s war continues on earth against the Woman, the male child and the Woman’s children. Ultimately, Satan and his angels are judged and destroyed in the lake of fire.
5. **Judgment of the wicked living.** Those who have received “the mark” of the Beast and his image are judged by way of seven last plagues and destruction at the Second Coming (Rev. 6:15-17). The Beast and False Prophet—which represent the false religious and civil powers—are also judged at the Second Coming (Rev. 19:20).
6. **Judgment of the wicked dead.** Investigative judgment of the wicked by the saints in the Millennium. (Rev. 20:4-6)
7. **Judgment by fire.** Destruction of Satan, his angels, and the wicked

in the lake of fire in the Final Judgment.

The judgment of the righteous is completed just prior to Christ's second coming, while the judgment of the wicked concludes on earth after the Millennium.

Final Judgment. The lake of fire is the Final Judgment. It consists of the final *annihilation* of Satan, his angels, and the wicked by fire. The nature of the fire is certainly physical, since it will leave neither root nor branch (Malachi 4:1; cf. Hebrews 10:26-29) and, at the end, will purify the earth (2 Peter 3:7,10). But it must also involve a mental-spiritual component, since it is said that there will be a "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42). Moreover, the Bible speaks of greater and lesser condemnation (Luke 12:48; James 3:1), meaning that there will be greater and lesser punishment. Above all, Satan will receive the greater condemnation.

Wrath. Disobedience carries consequences—not because God imposes punishment, but because violating His established laws of reality—moral, physical, and spiritual—naturally produces outcomes. Just as jumping from a tall building or falling off a steep cliff results in injury or death due to the law of gravity, so too do violations of God's other laws produce predictable results. Whether one disobeys intentionally or out of ignorance does not change the outcome. Intervention is possible, however, and this is where God's grace and mercy come into play.

God's wrath vs. Satan's wrath. The Bible speaks of the wrath of God and the wrath of Satan.

- *Romans 1:18:* For the **wrath of God** is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness.
- *Revelation 12:12b:* For **the devil** has come down to you in **great wrath**, because he knows that his time is short.

Both God's wrath and Satan's wrath produce similar outcomes—both are bad, not good. However, while the *result* of experiencing wrath is the same, the *method* or *operation* of wrath is different—indeed, opposite. Satan's wrath manifests as the active use of power to inflict harm, whereas God's wrath occurs when He *withholds His power*, allowing harm to take its natural course.

Breaking God's laws directly and inevitably will cause us harm, and God, in harmony with His character of love, expends His power, His energy, His resources, to hold at bay the harm that results from breaking His established laws of reality and to impart healing solutions. While Satan uses his power to injure, God uses His power to heal, restore, recreate, renew, and rebuild.

God's wrath occurs when God *respects* the choices made by the rebellious. He gives them what they insist on—freedom to disobey God's design-based order and freedom to reject His healing power and presence. In rejecting God's order and establishing our own, we cause our own disintegration.

The Scriptural basis for this understanding is found in Romans 1:18-32, where God's wrath is manifest with the expression, "God gave them up" or "God gave them over," which occurs three times in this passage (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). God's wrath is ultimately understood as God's punishment which we, in freedom, bring upon ourselves. The inevitable outcome of rejecting his laws and principles of life is separation from His life-giving power. The final outcome is death.

In Ellen G. White's *The Desire of Ages*, the clearest statement about sin containing the seeds of its own destruction is found near the end of the book in the chapter "**It Is Finished**" (chapter 79).

[DA 764.1](#): This is not an act of arbitrary power on the part of God. The rejecters of His mercy reap that which they have sown. God is the fountain of life; and when one chooses the service of sin, he separates from God, and thus cuts himself off from life. He is "alienated from the life of God." Christ says, "All they that hate Me love death." Ephesians 4:18; Proverbs 8:36. God gives them existence for a time that they may develop their character and reveal their principles. This accomplished, **they receive the results of their own choice**. By a life of rebellion, Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so out of harmony with God that **His very presence is to them a consuming fire. The glory of Him who is love will destroy them**.

The idea is that sin is inherently self-destructive because separation from God—the source of life—naturally results in death and destruction. In this framework, God is not portrayed as arbitrarily inflicting torture, but rather sinners reap the inevitable consequences of choosing rebellion against divine life and love.

False teaching of "God does not kill." The doctrine commonly called "God does not kill" teaches that God never directly takes life, destroys sinners, or actively executes judgment. According to this view, God's role in judgment is essentially *permissive* rather than *active*. When destruction occurs in Scripture—whether the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the death of the firstborn in Egypt, or final destruction—it is interpreted as the natural consequence of sin and separation from God, not as a direct act of divine execution.

Advocates of the doctrine generally argue the following: (a) God is only life-giving and never life-taking; (b) sin inherently destroys sinners

when God withdraws His sustaining protection; and (c) Biblical passages describing God “destroying,” “slaying,” or “sending judgments” are often understood as: permissive language, phenomenological language (how events appeared), or descriptions of God allowing destructive forces or evil agents to act. God’s wrath is primarily defined as His “giving people up” (cf. Romans 1) rather than actively punishing them. The character of God revealed in Jesus is interpreted as excluding direct lethal violence by God.

Why it is false. This teaching is considered false because it cannot be sustained from the plain testimony of Scripture. While the idea often arises from a sincere desire to defend God’s love and character, it usually goes beyond what the Bible itself says and creates serious theological and interpretive problems.

It is true that God sometimes destroys indirectly by giving people over to sin, withdrawing His protection, and permitting evil powers to act. Scripture, however, also distinguishes such cases from instances in which God directly intervenes in judgment. Examples of both appear throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The major error of the “God does not kill” doctrine is its tendency to collapse all divine judgments into mere passive permission. Scripture does not make such a reduction. To deny this truth often requires reinterpreting large portions of the Bible against their natural meaning.

Scripture consistently presents God not only as Savior, but also as Judge. Because God is righteous, He judges evil. Judgment is not contrary to love; rather, it is an essential aspect of moral governance. This false teaching assumes that if God destroys, He cannot be loving. Yet Scripture never accepts that premise. The same God who declares, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), also declares, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29). In Scripture, divine love and divine justice are not opposites. A judge who never judges evil cannot truly be good.

Noah’s Flood (Gen. 6-9) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19). Those who subscribe to the “God does not kill” teaching argue that: (1) God withdraws His sustaining protection, (2) sinners reap the consequences of rebellion, and (3) destructive forces already present in creation or Satanic agencies then destroy. Under this view:

- The Flood occurred because God released restraint over “chaotic waters.” (Note: There is no biblical support for the notion that the waters prior to the Flood were “chaotic.”)
- Sodom was destroyed when God ceased shielding it from “destructive forces.” (Note: The Bible does not state that “destructive forces” were being held in check. This is an assumption.)

The problem with this interpretation is that the Bible uses direct language of divine action:

- “I will destroy man whom I have created” (Gen. 6:7).
- “The LORD rained brimstone and fire” on Sodom (Gen. 19:24).
- “The LORD killed all the firstborn” in Egypt (Exodus 12:29).

The biblical writers do not merely describe passive withdrawal; they often portray God as the active Judge.

Intrinsic vs. Judicial Judgment. The balanced biblical view is that divine judgment is both **intrinsic** (sin naturally brings destruction) and **judicial** (God actively judges evil). These two aspects are not mutually exclusive. Thus, in the story of the Flood, the narrative presents both human wickedness morally corrupting and destroying the world, *and* God judicially sending the Flood. One may therefore say that sin brought destruction inevitably, while God sovereignly executed judgment through the Flood. That is, the time of probation in Noah’s day came to an end and the God-directed *and* God-executed judgment followed.

Likewise, the judgments upon the Flood and upon Sodom and Gomorrah were not acts of arbitrary vengeance, but judicial responses to entrenched evil. These acts also served God’s redemptive purpose in preserving the promised “seed” (i.e., Christ), through whom salvation would come. Had the corruption of the pre-Flood world continued unchecked, there may ultimately have been no faithful remnant through whom the promised Messiah could come. God’s intervention was therefore not merely punitive, but also preservative and therapeutic.

Probationary time. In Scripture, “probationary time” is a divinely granted period in which sinners are allowed opportunity to repent before judgment falls. Using the Flood as an example, the pattern is consistent:

- **Sin increases**—Gen. 6:5-6, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth.”
- **God warns**—Gen. 6:7, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the surface of the ground.”
- **God delays judgment**—120-year time of probation (Gen. 6:3).
- **Mercy is extended**—Noah is told to make an ark (Gen. 6:14ff) and give the warning (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).
- **Probation closes**—At the end of the 120 years, Noah enters the ark and the door is shut (Gen. 7:7).
- **Judgment falls**—The Flood begins (Gen. 7:11ff).

This pattern only makes coherent sense if God is the One ultimately bringing the judgment.

God's forbearance means He is restraining judgment. The New Testament repeatedly describes God as *patiently withholding wrath*. As per Romans 2:4-5, the sequence is: God is currently restraining judgment, judgment is future, the delay is mercy, and the coming judgment is God's righteous act. Similarly, per Romans 3:25, God "passed over" former sins in His forbearance. That does not mean He denies justice forever; it means He temporarily withholds immediate judgment.

First and second deaths. In Scripture, the "first death" and the "second death" are related but fundamentally different concepts. Understanding the distinction is important for biblical theology, especially in discussions of resurrection, judgment, and eternal destiny.

The first death is the ordinary physical death experienced by humanity as a consequence of sin entering the world through Adam. It is the physical cessation of life, common to all humanity (except those translated without seeing death), temporary in the sense that it is followed by resurrection, and often described metaphorically as "sleep."

The "second death" is a phrase used primarily in Revelation to describe the final destruction of the wicked after judgment (cf. Rev. 2:11; 20:6; 21:8). The key characteristics of the "second death" are that it occurs after resurrection and judgment, is final and irreversible, is associated with the lake of fire, no resurrection follows it, and represents ultimate separation from life.

The theological significance is that the first death is the consequence of humanity's fallen condition and a temporary sleep from which Christ will awaken all people. Importantly, all humanity—both the righteous and the wicked—will be raised from the first death. The key point is that *the first death is not final*; both believers and unbelievers are resurrected from it.

"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

Thus, resurrection is universal with respect to the first death, though the outcomes differ. This distinction is important when discussing the teaching that "God does not kill." The question then becomes: "Which death is being referred to?" If it is the first death, Scripture clearly shows that God at times directly causes death—or metaphorically "puts to sleep"—until the final judgment and the second death for the wicked.

Jesus is to judge. The Bible tells us that,

- *John 5:22*: The Father judges no one, but has given **all judgment to the Son**,
- *John 5:27*: And he [*the Father*] has given the Son authority to **execute judgment**, because he is the Son of Man.

Yet, Jesus' mission was to save the world, as is found in the meaning of his very name, *Yeshua* ("Yehovah saves"). How then can Jesus both save and judge the world at the same time? The answer is in the Old Testament meaning of the term "judge". The judges that God raised up in Israel's past, particularly in the Book of Judges, were deliverers from their oppressors. A judge was to them a "savior". But a judge also functioned as a ruler of the people. In that case, he ruled the people in righteousness and equity, according to the law of God. It is in this way that Jesus was to judge—he was to be both a deliverer (or "savior") and ruler.

Jesus is *not* to judge. But now we run into a different problem, Jesus himself said that he would judge no one,

John 12:47-48: If anyone hears my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for **I did not come to judge the world**, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

How could Jesus come to judge and *not* to judge all at the same time? The answer is in v.48. The ultimate judge of the world is not Jesus, but what Jesus said and did and offered. Jesus came to proclaim truth and life, and those who reject truth and life experience ultimate death "on the last day".

John 3:17-19: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the [*basis of the*] judgment: that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Thus, ultimately, man judges himself.

[*DA 468.1*](#): The fact that although they could find no sin in Christ the Jews would not receive Him proved that they themselves had no connection with God. They did not recognize His voice in the message of His Son. They thought themselves passing judgment on Christ; but **in rejecting Him they were pronouncing sentence upon themselves.** "He that is of God," said Jesus, "heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."

Man's imperfect judgment

Man's value system and judgment. A **value system** is a set of *consistent* values used for the purpose of ethical or ideological integrity. The value system is "consistent" when both the personal and communal values bear no contradictions or situational exceptions between them. **Value judgment** is an assessment of something as good or bad in terms of his own standards or priorities—i.e. his own **value system**.

Four sources of "value". How does a person derive value? Christians determine "value" in a fourfold manner: *scriptural* truth *experienced* in life, made intelligible and self-consistent through *reasoning*, and mediated through the historic Christian *tradition* and community. None of these sources (i.e. scripture, experience, reason, and tradition) exists without the correctives and balancing features of the others.

Valuing beings. Human existence is a valuing, choosing existence. The character of human decision is understood essentially in this way: *Decision means to affirm one value at the price of the negation of the other*. To decide is to elect one desirable or worthy configuration of value in lieu of another and never without some sense of loss of some genuine good. Choice demands negation^[a].

The tragic choice. There is a tragic dimension to the valuing memory, in that it is never possible to actualize all the goods we can envision. Whenever I choose to actualize one set of values, I neglect other potential values. Every pursued good implies a dozen unpursued goods. Every moment spent on the achievement of one goal is time lost on the achievement of numerous other potential goods. I cannot be a chooser without being a denier. As a consequence, a value-negating existence is an existence bound up in guilt. **Guilt** and **anxiety** perform directly parallel, analogous, yet opposite functions. While guilt is directed toward the past, anxiety is directed toward the future.



When the self relates to the future so as to symbolize its possibilities as a threat to values considered necessary for one's existence, then one experiences anxiety. Analogously, when the self relates to the past so as to symbolize remembered events as irresponsible negations of values considered necessary to one's existence, then one experiences guilt.

[a] Thomas C. Oden, "The Structure of Awareness," 1969

Human judgment. In human awareness there is a tension among three decision-making functions analogous to the tension among the three basic functions of government.

Government	Time-related	Individual decision	Evaluation
Legislative	Future possibilities	Self-rulemaking: Exploring and choosing the best possible maxims (“rules of conduct”) for self-direction and fulfillment	Envisioning
Executive	Contextual present (the now)	Self-direction: The actualization of the good envisioned in the maxim. It is the gifted painter putting paint and brush to work	Actualization
Judicial	Remembered past	Self-review: To reflect back in order to judge the adequacy of the intent and performance of the maxim	Judging

Conscience. The connotation of “knowledge *with*.” The Latin *conscientia* and the Greek *syneidesis* share the notion of a knowledge which one has with oneself. It is the awareness that I stand under norms of value which I identify with my very self, which make my life worth living, which give meaning to my existence. In conscience, what I “know” (*science*) is internalized patterns of valuing which I regard as necessary for my well-being. It is possible, at least temporarily, to not listen to my conscience.

Accountability. Taking *accountability* is me judging myself. I bring myself to the bar of conscience, set forth evidence against myself and call upon myself to defend my actions. The case is argued internally, and I am my own prosecutor and defense attorney. I judge myself both in terms of the adequacy of my own maxims, and in the way they were executed. I may not like my verdict, but I submit to it, feel it intensely, acknowledge its immense importance, since it is really *me* judging myself.

Righteous judgment. Christians are to judge rightly (or righteously) in the following ways:

1. ***Judge yourself first.*** For judgment begins at the household of God. That is, judgment begins with you! (cf. 1 Peter 4:17-18)
2. ***Judge with mercy.*** James 2:13: For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.
3. ***Judge not by appearances.*** John 7:14.
4. ***Judge redemptively.*** Matthew 18:15-20. It is for the purpose of restoring a brother in the faith.
5. ***Judge directly, not underhandedly.*** Do not go behind someone’s back and diminish his reputation through whisperings. The Bible tells us that this is a great evil. You will sin when you whisper and rumor and gossip.

Judge not. First of all, as already discussed, it is humanly impossible not to judge. Our very existence demands valuing and choosing and making judgments. Then what is Jesus telling us about not judging others in Matthew 7:1? The verse reads, “Judge not, that you be not judged.” What is Jesus really saying? It is the context itself that tells us what Jesus meant. First, the immediate context reads as follows:

Matthew 7:1-5: Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give, will be the measure you get. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the beam that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, there is a beam in your own eye? ⁵ **You hypocrite!** First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

It is clear from the immediate context that Jesus is addressing those who judge others, who don’t examine themselves first. The greater context of the Sermon on the Mount is also primarily directed at the inferior teachings of the scribes and Pharisees relating to the moral law. Jesus said, “unless your righteousness *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). And, “when you give to the needy” do not be like the **hypocrites**; and “when you pray, do not be like the **hypocrites**”; and “when you fast, do not be gloomy like the **hypocrites**” (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16); etc. So, Jesus’ teaching is not that one should not judge per se, but that one should not judge, *like a hypocrite*. That is, not to judge without first examining yourself to see if you are not more guilty than the other person. Paul, in Romans chapter 2, has a similar message to hypocrites. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be something he is not. He is like an “actor” wearing a mask.

Enforcement. Enforcement of the moral law is incumbent on both the church and society, in order to have both an ordered church and an ordered society. In the Corinthian church there was a case of incest that Paul spoke against. Paul declared that he had already *judged* the man.

1 Corinthians 5:3: For though I am absent in body, I am present in spirit. And I have already judged the man who did this, just as though I were present.

And, further, Paul instructed the Corinthian church to do the same.

1 Corinthians 5:12-13: Aren’t you supposed to judge those who are inside the church? ¹³ God will judge those who are outside the church. “Therefore you must remove the evil person from among you.”

As is true in the church, it is even more true in society at large, where the breaking of moral laws is ever present.

Legislating morality. Morality in relationship *to man* is how we treat our fellow man (the last 6 of the 10 commandments), and every government today and throughout history has been charged with enforcing this type of morality; it is the main duty of government. By contrast, morality in relationship *to God* (the first 4 of the 10 commandments), and how you worship God; is a religious matter and not for government to intrude upon.

A problem arises when religious traditions not only include the first four commandments into their theology, but also the last six—the moral laws and principles relating to man. But not all religious traditions (whether Christian or otherwise) teach and practice morality (in relationship to man) the same way. *Someone’s* morality will of necessity be enforced by the government at the expense of the others. So which of the religious traditions concerning (man-related) morality should the government choose?

The SDA Pioneers found nothing wrong with wanting *Christian* moral principles to be enforced beyond the church level. Ellen White’s strong crusade against alcohol is a good example, as is the early Adventists’ opposition to slavery and support for abolition and, later, their opposition to abortion and support for the physicians’ crusade against abortion. Thus, advocating and involvement in dialogue with civil authorities regarding morality was actively practiced in Ellen G. White’s day.

Two dominant value systems. Of the two dominant value systems in the United States, the Left and Right ideologies, it should be abundantly clear to a Bible-believing Christian that the Left-wing ideology is largely unbiblical. Yet, Right-wing ideology is not without its faults, particularly when legislated to an extreme. The table below helps to describe and distinguish them.

Subject	Right (conservative) — “king of the north”	Left (liberal)—Egypt; “king of the south”
Morality	Moral absolutes; “the truth”. Focused on virtues based on biblical maxims. Follow the teachings and example of Christ.	Moral relativism; “your truth”; moral diversity; situational ethics. Focused on equality and compassion.
Wealth (or Economy)	Capitalism; property rights of the individual	Socialism. The redistribution of wealth. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world. Forced “cooperation” for the common good.
Accountable	Emphasis on personal and societal responsibilities	Emphasis on personal and societal rights and fairness

Religion	God-centric (theistic); God is the measure of all things. Freedom of religion and conscience	Man-centric (secular humanist); mankind is the measure of all things. Enforcement: others must observe
Truth	God's word	Science and Reason
Origins	Creation	Evolution
Human nature	Fallen and flawed; in need of salvation. Emphasis on rebirth and renewal sought from God. Being transformed into the image of His Son.	Inherently good and capable of self-realization and fulfillment. Emphasis on individual autonomy and self-expression
Family	Traditional family unit is God made and God sanctioned. Character building. Parents have the primary responsibility of educating their children.	Affirm the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. Deny the importance of fathers; encourage "single parenting by choice." Potential building
Community	Based on morals	Based on ethics
Protection	Hawks; strong defense; gun ownership	Doves; pacifist; gun control
Speech	"Free speech"; individual freedom to speak one's mind	Suppression of free speech at all levels; ; "cancel culture". "Hate speech" is any speech the Left does not agree with. Focused on group speak and narrative
Freedom and equality	Equality of opportunity and freedom to be allowed to achieve	Equality of outcome (i.e. having a level playing field) and freedom from power, abuse and inequality
Race	Committed to racial <i>integration</i> . Those who believe race is significant are <i>racists</i> . The color of a person's skin is <i>insignificant</i> .	Committed to racial <i>segregation</i> . Those who believe, "There is only one race, the human race" are racists. E.g. separate black graduations.
The poor	Focused on finding them a job; personal responsibility; local charities	Focused on empathy and government handouts
Criminality	The fault of individual choices	The fault of society and economic hardships
Nationalism	Nation-state; governed by <i>laws</i> ; protect borders	Utopian; governed by <i>the majority</i> . Committed to open borders. Citizens of the world.
America	Patriotic; venerate conservative American values. America is the last, best hope of the earth.	America is racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, violent, and imperialistic. The "left" is the last hope.
Moral Society	Moral improvement happens gradually, thru the moral improvement of the individual, by doing battle with his/her own weaknesses and flaws.	Moral improvement thru <i>social revolution</i> and radical, fundamental transformation. The battle is over society's moral failings. Focused on combatting: sexism, racism, intolerance, xenophobia, homophobia, islamophobia, and many other evils that permeate society.
Virtue and Freedom	"Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom." — Benjamin	Education of children focused on the flaws of America. Social issues have replaced character education (e.g.

	Franklin. Why? Because freedom requires self-control. The focus is on character development, because you cannot make society better unless you make its people better.	global warming, social inequality, rape culture). More passionate about fixing America than fixing their own character.
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Fruit of left-wing ideologies. Corruption, loss of individual liberties, higher taxes, economic decline, debt, moral decline. Left-wing practices has resulted in churches splitting, such as the Methodists (United Methodist vs. Global Methodist), Lutheran (Luthern vs. Evangelical Lutheran), Presbyterian, and Episcopal. It has even invaded Adventism and caused division.

The tolerance agenda. The *tolerance* agenda which purports to be *inclusive* no matter what the lifestyle or cultural or religious ideology a person may have, is in reality a tolerance *paradox*. The paradox is that tolerance leads to intolerance. The more tolerant a society becomes, the more intolerant it gets. Just look at the protected groups in our society we are supposed to tolerate. You are in a protected group if it’s based on race, color, creed, gender (male or female), sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age (senior citizen), physical disability, mental disability, and veteran status. What is the problem?

The problem is that it fragments society. We all end up belonging to a group or several groups that competes with the other groups. Then, out of self-interest, we protect our turf by demanding our rights. We make laws protecting our group over and against the other groups. It’s my rights over your rights every day of the week. The tolerant become intolerant out of self-interest. And so, the more the tolerance agenda is pushed, the worse off we become. It is not unifying but divisive.

6. God’s mercy [\[↩\]](#)

Mercy is an attribute of God’s nature.

- *Ephesians 2:4:* God, who is rich in mercy...
- *2 Samuel 24:14:* for [Yehovah’s] mercies are great
- *Daniel 9:9:* To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness

Mercy is *not receiving* what we deserve as a consequence of a violation of God’s law. In the case of a physical fall (such as falling off a steep cliff), mercy is not getting injured by that fall. In the case of salvation,

Titus 3:5: [God] saved us, not because of any righteous works we have done, **but according to his mercy**, through the washing of *the* holy spirit that brings about a new birth and new life.

God chooses to be merciful not because of any merit of ours, but because it is an expression of who he is (Exodus 34:6-7).

Mercy to the contrite in heart. God's mercy is extended to those who are of a remorseful, penitent heart, who desire atonement. The best example is that of King David. He had committed adultery with someone else's wife and then had her husband killed in battle (2 Sam. 11-12), but he pled for mercy (Ps. 51:1) and it was granted to him.

- *Psalm 51:1*: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your covenant-love. According to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin.
- *2 Samuel 12:13*: David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against Yehovah." Nathan said to David, "Yehovah also has put away your sin. You will not die."

David deserved death, but God extended mercy to him and he would not die. However, he was to endure other hard and harsh consequences to his bad choices, as the Bible details (cf. 2 Sam. 12:10-12, 14). As in King David's example, we are also admonished to ask for mercy.

Hebrews 4:16: Therefore let us draw near to the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Blessed are the merciful. As God is merciful to us, we are also to be merciful to others.

- *Matthew 5:7*: Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- *Luke 6:36*: Therefore be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Atonement. God is able to extend mercy and offer forgiveness through a process called "atonement" which is detailed in the article, "[Atonement](#)." Thus, God's mercy is aligned with God's work of Atonement.

7. God's rest [\[e\]](#)

Periods of rest. God ordained cycles of work-and-rest in all of human activity. The Bible delineates at least seven cycles of physical rest, several of which are tied to the Levitical system, and have importance in the fulfillment of various Bible prophecies.

1. **Daily.** Daily rest occurs during **sleep**, lasting about a third of the 24-hour day. Several important physiological processes occur in the

brain during sleep, including: processing (i.e. consolidating) “declarative” memories (learning of information) during deep (slow-wave) sleep, and processing “procedural” (and emotional) memories mainly during REM sleep. Also, toxic proteins (*metabolites*) formed in the brain during the day are cleansed during sleep. Several other important physiological processes occur during sleep relating to melatonin, prolactin, and HGH levels. Human sleep is generally **biphasic**, occurring in symmetrical bouts, several hours in duration, with a roughly 1-2 hour “waking” (not necessarily fully awake) interval in between. Most of deep (slow-wave) sleep occurs in the first half of the night (first phase), while most of REM sleep occurs in the second half (second phase).

2. **Weekly.** The 7th day of rest is the Sabbath (Saturday). See below on “Sabbath *physical* and *spiritual* rest” for further discussion.
3. **Monthly.** In the Levitical system, the 7th week counted from the 15th day of the month of Nisan (after **Passover** in March-April). The day after, i.e. the 50th day, is **Pentecost**.
4. **Yearly.** The 7th month is Tishri (Sept-Oct), on the 15th day is the week of **Tabernacles**.
5. **Seven years.** The 7th year is the Sabbatical year of rest.
6. **Seven weeks of years.** That is, 7x7 years, or 49 years; the 50th year is the year of **Jubilee**.
7. **Seven millennia.** The 7th millennium is when the Earth rests, while the saints are in Heaven.

Sabbath *physical* and *spiritual* rest. The 7th day Sabbath rest commemorates the Creation week, as told in Genesis 2:1-3; and God commanded his people to observe it, as told in the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), as a memorial of his Creation. The Sabbath rest was not only meant to be a *physical* rest from labor (i.e. six days of labor and one day of rest), but it was also to be a *spiritual* rest. And, after the cross, it was and is meant to commemorate God’s work of salvation through His Son. After his death on the cross on Friday afternoon, as Jesus lay in quietude in Joseph’s tomb through the seventh-day Sabbath hours, EGW tells us,

[DA 769.2](#): In the beginning the Father and the Son had rested upon the Sabbath after Their work of creation. When “the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Genesis 2:1), the Creator and all heavenly beings rejoiced in contemplation of the glorious scene. “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” Job 38:7. **Now Jesus rested from the work of redemption**; and though there was grief among those who loved Him

on earth, yet there was joy in heaven. Glorious to the eyes of heavenly beings was the promise of the future. A restored creation, a redeemed race, that having conquered sin could never fall,—this, the result to flow from Christ's completed work, God and angels saw. **With this scene the day upon which Jesus rested is forever linked.** For "His work is perfect;" and "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever." Deuteronomy 32:4; Ecclesiastes 3:14. **When there shall be a "restitution of all things,** which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21), **the creation Sabbath, the day on which Jesus lay at rest in Joseph's tomb, will still be a day of rest and rejoicing.** Heaven and earth will unite in praise, as "from one Sabbath to another" (Isaiah 66:23) the nations of the saved shall bow in joyful worship to God and the Lamb.

Thus, when Jesus said he was, "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5), it was not just the seventh-day Sabbath rest from labor, but the spiritual rest of soul that comes from his redemptive work.

Human restlessness finds its rest in Christ. In this world, rest can enter our hearts through faith in Christ, but it is in the world to come that we will fully enter into his rest, both spiritually and physically. It is then when the streams of living waters that flow from within, will also flow from without, from the throne of God in the New Jerusalem. It will be in the new heavens and the new earth where righteousness dwells that our rest will be complete, within and without.

Sabbath in eschatology. Observance of the seventh-day Sabbath will have significance at the end of time, as it will be a sign of loyalty to God. In EGW's own words,

[6T 352.1](#): The Sabbath question is to be the issue in the great final conflict in which all the world will act a part. Men have honored Satan's principles above the principles that rule in the heavens. They have accepted the spurious sabbath [*Sunday worship*], which Satan has exalted as the sign of his authority. But God has set His seal upon His royal requirement. Each sabbath institution [*Saturday and Sunday worship*] bears the name of its author, an ineffaceable mark that shows the authority of each. It is our work to lead the people to understand this. We are to show them that it is of vital consequence whether they bear the mark of God's kingdom or the mark of the kingdom of rebellion, for they acknowledge themselves subjects of the kingdom whose mark they bear. God has called us to uplift the standard of His downtrodden Sabbath. How important, then, that our example in Sabbathkeeping should be right.

A persecuting “Sunday law” will be enacted at some stage in the future, as part of the final events of earth’s history before Jesus returns. Yet we are admonished to delay its enactment, as much as it is in our power of influence.

RH December 18, 1888, Art. A, par. 6: A time is coming when the law of God is, in a special sense, to be made void in our land. The rulers of our nation will, by legislative enactments, enforce the Sunday law, and thus God’s people be brought into great peril. When our nation, in its legislative councils, shall enact laws to bind the consciences of men in regard to their religious privileges, **enforcing Sunday observance**, and bringing oppressive power to bear against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath, the law of God will, to all intents and purposes, be made void in our land; and national apostasy will be followed by national ruin. We see that those who are now keeping the commandments of God need to bestir themselves, that they may obtain the special help which God alone can give them. They should work more earnestly **to delay as long as possible** the threatened calamity. If, in our land of boasted freedom, a Protestant government should sacrifice every principle which enters into its Constitution, and propagate papal falsehood and delusion, well may we plead, “It is time for thee, Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.” Some may think that because it has been revealed in prophecy that our nation shall restrict the consciences of men, it must surely come; and that if we make an effort to preserve our liberty, we shall be acting the part of unfaithful servants, and thus come under the condemnation of God.

Lord of the Sabbath. The phrase “Lord of the Sabbath” is a reference to Jesus Christ, who declared his authority over the Sabbath in the Bible, primarily in the Gospels. The key verses where this phrase appears are Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:27-28, and Luke 6:5. In these passages, Jesus asserts his right to define the Sabbath’s purpose and observance, stating, “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath”.

Jesus’ condemnation. It was for the following three primary reasons that the Jews condemned Jesus and ultimately sentenced him to death:

1. Jesus broke the Sabbath—the 7th day (e.g. John 5:18; 9:16).
2. Jesus called God his Father—the true God (John 5:18; 17:3).
3. Proclaimed himself to be the Son of God—the only begotten (e.g. Mt. 26:63-65; Mk. 14:61-64; Lk. 22:70-71).

Fasting. **Fasting** is the practice of voluntarily abstaining from some or all food, drink, or both for a specific period of time. It can be done for religious, spiritual, health, or medical reasons. Fasting practices and traditions are found in the major religions of the world, including: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. It was also practiced in ancient Egypt and by the Greek philosophers (e.g. Pythagoras and Plato).

In Judaism, the practice of fasting is referenced in the New Testament parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:12), where the Pharisee boasts, “I fast twice a week.” The Pharisees traditionally chose Mondays and Thursdays for fasting, commemorating Moses’ ascent of Mount Sinai on a Thursday and his return with the Law on a Monday. Early Christians adopted a similar custom of fasting twice a week but shifted the days to Wednesday and Friday to mark the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus expects us to fast. When Jesus was asked why his disciples did not fast, unlike the disciples of John and the Pharisees, he responded that it was not appropriate for them to fast while the bridegroom was with them. However, he added that the time would come when the bridegroom would be taken away, *and then they would fast* (Matthew 9:14–15; Mark 2:18–20; Luke 5:33–35). In this imagery, Jesus identified himself as the Bridegroom—present with his people during his earthly ministry, but soon to be “taken away” through his death and ascension. This indicates that fasting is indeed a fitting and meaningful practice for believers in the time after Christ’s departure. Fasting, therefore, is not a legalistic ritual but a spiritual discipline that expresses longing for the presence of Christ, repentance, dependence on God, and devotion in prayer (cf. Acts 13:2–3; 14:23; Joel 2:12–13).

Here are some of the *spiritual* benefits to fasting:

1. **Spiritual discipline and self-control.** Fasting helps individuals gain mastery over physical desires and impulses. By practicing restraint, one *strengthens willpower* and *focuses on spiritual* rather than material needs.
2. **Deeper connection with the divine.** Many faiths view fasting as a way to draw closer to God by removing distractions. It creates space for prayer, reflection, and meditation, enhancing one’s sense of divine presence and dependence on God.
3. **Purification and repentance.** Fasting symbolizes purification of the body and soul. It is often linked to repentance, humility, and seeking forgiveness for sins.
4. **Compassion and empathy.** Experiencing hunger fosters empathy for the poor and those who suffer. This awareness encourages

charity, gratitude, and social responsibility.

5. **Renewal and spiritual growth.** The practice offers a time for introspection and renewal of faith. It allows believers to refocus their priorities and recommit to spiritual values.

Fasting and health. In addition, there are *physical* benefits to fasting. Fasting has gained significant scientific and medical interest in recent years because of its profound effects on cellular health, metabolism, and longevity.

Here are some of the *physical* benefits to fasting:

1. **Autophagy activation (cellular cleanup and recycling).** *Definition:* Autophagy (“self-eating”) is a natural process by which cells break down and recycle damaged components—proteins, organelles, and toxins. *How fasting helps:* When nutrient intake stops, insulin and glucose levels drop, signaling cells to enter a repair mode. This triggers autophagy, especially after about 16–24 hours of fasting. *Benefits:* Removes damaged mitochondria and misfolded proteins (linked to Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s). Reduces oxidative stress and inflammation. Promotes cellular rejuvenation and longevity. **Key study:** Yoshinori Ohsumi’s Nobel-winning research (2016) demonstrated the cellular mechanisms of autophagy and its importance in health and disease prevention.
2. **Stem cell regeneration and tissue repair.** *Mechanism:* Prolonged fasting (48–72 hours) has been shown to stimulate stem cell production and regenerate immune and gut cells. *Research findings:* Studies at USC (Valter Longo et al.) found that fasting cycles trigger hematopoietic stem cell regeneration, effectively rejuvenating the immune system. Fasting reduces IGF-1 (Insulin-like Growth Factor 1), a hormone linked to aging and cancer, thereby promoting tissue repair instead of growth. *Result:* Improved organ repair, gut lining renewal, and immune function after refeeding.
3. **Improved metabolic health.** *Effects:* Reduces insulin resistance, stabilizes blood sugar, and promotes fat metabolism. Enhances mitochondrial function and energy efficiency. *Connection to autophagy:* By cleaning out damaged mitochondria, fasting enhances cellular energy production and reduces metabolic waste.
4. **Neuroprotection and brain health.** *Mechanism:* Fasting increases production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which supports neuron growth and plasticity. *Benefits:* Promotes autophagy in neurons, clearing toxic proteins (such as beta-amyloid). May lower risk of neurodegenerative diseases. Enhances mental clarity and focus

due to ketone production. *Studies*: Animal and human data suggest intermittent fasting supports synaptic function and memory.

5. **Anti-aging and longevity.** *Mechanism*: Fasting slows aging pathways such as mTOR, insulin, and IGF-1, while activating AMPK and sirtuins—key longevity regulators. *Effect*: Enhances DNA repair and genomic stability. Increases lifespan in many animal studies. Promotes youthful cellular behavior even in older organisms.
6. **Reduced inflammation and improved immunity.** *How it works*: Autophagy removes damaged immune cells and pathogens. Fasting reduces pro-inflammatory cytokines (like TNF- α and IL-6). Supports production of new, more efficient white blood cells post-refeeding. *Outcome*: Enhanced immune surveillance and resilience.
7. **Weight management and hormonal balance.** Fasting enhances fat oxidation while preserving lean muscle (especially with shorter fasts). Improves levels of key hormones: Increases human growth hormone (HGH) $\rightarrow$ tissue repair and fat metabolism. Decreases insulin $\rightarrow$ greater metabolic flexibility. Decreases leptin resistance $\rightarrow$ improved appetite control.

Thus, there are tremendous rewards to fasting, both spiritually and physically. **HOWEVER**, while fasting has well-documented health benefits for adults, it is generally not recommended for children or teenagers except under specific medical supervision. There are many reasons why, including:

1. **Children and teenagers are still *rapidly* growing.** They need a constant and balanced supply of nutrients.
2. **The brain needs constant energy.** The adolescent brain consumes up to 50% of the body's glucose supply. Fasting can compromise academic performance and mood stability in developing brains.
3. **Metabolic and hormonal instability.** Adolescents have fluctuating hormones (insulin, cortisol, estrogen, testosterone) as part of puberty. Fasting can disrupt endocrine balance.
4. **Risk of nutrient deficiency.** Teens need more nutrients than adults. Fasting or restrictive eating can lead to deficiencies that affect their health.
5. **Risk of disordered eating.** Adolescence is a high-risk period for eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, orthorexia). Introducing fasting practices can acustom teens to skip meals, which may spiral into disordered eating patterns.

II. Pagan Beliefs

► A. Teachings of the Antichrist

The wine of Babylon, as mentioned in Revelation 14:8, is understood to represent the false teachings introduced during the early centuries and later dogma during the Dark Ages of the Christian era. The list of false teachings is quite long and no effort is made here to present the complete list, but only to highlight some of the major ones. These teachings can be thought of as “anti” teachings or “anti” dogma.

Biblical “anti.” The Greek term *anti* (G473) can mean **against** or opposite to, but can also mean **in place of** (something)—i.e. a replacement of.

Catholic anti-dogma. Interestingly, both definitions of the term “anti” fitly describe the vast portion of Catholic dogma. That is, Catholic teaching can be viewed as being *both against* and a *replacement* of Biblical teaching. Effectively, as discussed in the following, Catholic teaching is **anti-Christ**, because it replaces the three fundamental roles of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. They are then *anti-Prophet*, *anti-Priest*, and *anti-King* teachings or dogma. (*In the following, CCC refers to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.*)

Executive summary. The major topics covered in this article include:

- I. **BIBLICAL: anti-Prophet**—undermining the Bible’s supremacy
- II. **SALVIFIC: anti-Priest**—distorting God’s plan of salvation
- III. **LORDSHIP: anti-King**—usurping God’s authority and power
- IV. **Supplementary Topics**

I. BIBLICAL: anti-Prophet

Catholic teaching is *anti-Prophet* because it **undermines the Bible’s supremacy**. It elevates Tradition, Creeds, Apocryphal writings, Leadership (*Magisterium*), Human interpreters, and the Theory of Evolution above the Bible. In table format:

#	Topic	Theology	anti-Theology (replacement)
1	SCRIPTURE	Bible <i>alone</i>	Bible + Tradition (Yet Church Tradition is greater)
2	TEACHINGS	Bible <i>alone</i>	Bible + Creeds (“Believing” is an ecclesial act)
3	REVELATION	Bible <i>alone</i>	Bible + Apocrypha (Two sources of revelation)

4	INTERPRETER	Spirit <i>alone</i>	Spirit + Magisterium (Two sources of trust)
5	CREATION	God spoke	Evolution is God’s method of Creation

1. BIBLICAL: *anti-Scripture*. To Catholics, “Scripture” or the “word of God” is not just the Bible, but it must include **Sacred Tradition** [CCC §97]. Those who believe in *sola Scriptura* say that the Bible is the only infallible word of God and source of faith. But Catholics teach that the word of God is contained in the Bible **and in Sacred Tradition**, and that the **Magisterium** (i.e. the Pope and the Catholic bishops) have the authority and final say as to what is infallible truth [CCC §100]. Pope Francis is quite explicit on this teaching.

“Scripture remains only a portion of the word of God, because under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **Sacred Tradition**, instead, transmits the word of God in its entirety.” —Pope Francis: “*The Word of God Precedes the Bible and Surpasses It*.” [Learn Religions, Aug. 25, 2020](#).

However, the Protestant Reformation was against this teaching. As Martin Luther, when on trial at the Imperial Diet of Worms (1521), declared, “Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have frequently erred and contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other: May God help me. Amen.”

2. BIBLICAL: *anti-Teachings*. Catholics believe that it is what the Catholic Church proposes for belief that is to be accepted and believed. It is not faith in the teachings of the Bible itself, but faith in what the Church promotes. In their own words: “**Believing” is an ecclesial act**. The Church’s faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. “No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother” (CCC §181). We believe all “that which is contained in the word of God, written or handed down, **and which the Church proposes for belief** as divinely revealed” (CCC §182).

In this regard and on this basis, the Catholic religion is **creedal** in nature. Its entire life of faith—its worship, doctrine, and identity—is formally expressed, guarded, and handed on through fixed, authoritative **summaries** of belief known as **creeds** (*symbola fidei*). Far from being optional, creeds are foundational to Catholic theology and liturgy.

Credo function as the Church's "rule of faith" (*regula fidei*). A *regula fidei* is a concise summary that provides a standard for interpreting Scripture. In their Catechism it reads, "The Creed is the spiritual seal... the summary of our faith." (CCC §197). As such, their liturgy is structured around the Creed. The Creed is not commentary—it is prayed worshipfully.

- The Nicene Creed is proclaimed at every Sunday and solemnity Mass.
- The Eucharistic celebration presupposes and expresses the creedal faith.
- The Liturgy of the Hours frequently incorporates creedal statements.

The Church's Magisterium is creedal. Catholic councils often issue creedal or profession-of-faith statements:

- Council of Trent's profession of faith
- Vatican I's Profession of Faith against modern errors
- Vatican II's reaffirmation of the Nicene Creed
- The 1998 Profession of Faith required of clergy and teachers
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, structured around and expositing the Creed

Thus the Church's doctrinal authority is exercised through creeds. It provides the framework of Catholic theology. Their Catechism is organized into four parts, the first and foundational being:

1. **The Creed**
2. The Sacraments
3. The Moral Life
4. Prayer

This structure itself communicates that all Catholic theology unfolds from the Creedal core.

In summary. The Catholic Church is creedal because:

- It was established on an apostolic confession of faith.
- Baptism and worship require a creedal profession.
- The Church maintains universal creeds as authoritative.
- These creeds serve as the rule of faith **for interpreting Scripture and doctrine.**
- Church unity is fundamentally based on adherence to the creeds.
- Theology, catechesis, and liturgy all start from and return to the creeds.

Creeds are therefore not optional statements but the essential form in which the Catholic Church expresses, guards, and hands on the faith once delivered to the saints.

3. BIBLICAL: *anti-Revelation*. What constitutes revelation and how it should be understood is in the hands of the leadership of the Church (Magisterium). Catholics believe that two sources of revelation constitute a single “Deposit of Faith” (CCC: §82, §84, §85), meaning that the entirety of divine revelation and the Deposit of Faith is transmitted to successive generations in Scripture *and* Sacred Tradition **through the teaching authority and interpretation of the Church’s Magisterium** (CCC §88).

In keeping with this authority, the Catholic Church determined the **Apocrypha**—known in Catholic terminology as the **Deuterocanonical Books**—to be fully inspired Scripture. It was at the Council of Trent (1546) where the Catholic Church issued the **first infallible, universally binding definition** of the Catholic Biblical canon. Trent declared the deuterocanonical books (the Apocrypha) to be part of Scripture “entire with all their parts.”

The Apocrypha is important to the Catholic Church because it supports several un-Biblical teachings such as:

- **Prayers for the dead.** 2 Maccabees 12:44–45 affirms praying for the dead—a foundation for Catholic teaching on **Purgatory** and intercessory prayer.
- **Veneration of the righteous dead.** 2 Maccabees 15:14 shows Jeremiah and Onias interceding for those on earth. **Teaching:** Righteous deceased individuals intercede for the living.
- **Salvation through almsgiving.** Tobit 4:10: “For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the darkness.” Tobit 12:9: “Almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin.” **Teaching:** Almsgiving can atone for sin or contribute to salvation.
- **Magic/Incantation-like practices.** Tobit 6:5–8; Tobit 8:2–3. **Teaching:** Burning the heart and liver of a fish drives away a demon.

4. BIBLICAL: *anti-Interpreter*. Catholics believe the interpreter and, effectively, final arbiter of Biblical truth is the leadership of the Church (Magisterium). “**The task of interpreting the word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him**” (CCC §100). In contrast, Protestants believe that the Bible interprets itself. That

there is no need for a man or a committee of men to interpret it for others.

Protestants overwhelmingly hold that the final interpreter and arbiter of biblical truth is **Scripture itself**, under the illumination of the holy spirit. This principle is often summarized as *sola Scriptura*. A classic Reformation phrase summarizes this: “Scripture is its own interpreter” (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). Thus, the Bible always remains above all human interpretations.

5. BIBLICAL: anti-Creation. Today, the Catholic Church supports theistic evolution, also known as *evolutionary creation*. That is to say, God’s method of Creation was Evolution. “Catholic schools teach evolution as part of their science curriculum. They teach the fact that evolution occurs and the modern evolutionary synthesis, which is the scientific theory that explains how evolution proceeds. This is the same evolution curriculum that secular schools teach.” —Wikipedia on “*Evolution and the Catholic Church*.” Further, Catholics believe that the creation story is not meant to be taken literally.

[CCC §337](#): God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity and order. Scripture presents the work of the Creator **symbolically** as a succession of six days of divine “work”, concluded by the “rest” of the seventh day. . .

As a consequence, Catholics create a “split” between the **body and soul**, where the **body** evolved over time (from lesser creatures over millions of years), then the **soul** was “infused” by God once man had fully evolved. This “split” is un-Biblical as discussed later in this article.

“While biological evolution may describe the descent of human bodily forms from ancestral primates, the **infusion of the rational soul** marks a transcendent intervention, preserving the causal primacy of divine agency in human spiritual creation.” —Saint Michael Parish, “[Creation](#)“.

The contrast between Creation and Evolution is summarized below:

Topic	Creation	Evolution (<i>anti-Creation</i>)
Source	Bible	Theory
Earth time	Young (~6,000 years)	Old (billions of years)
Creation span	Six literal days	Deep time (eons, eras, & epochs)
Biology	Supernaturally created “kinds”	Materialistic—molecules to man; common ancestor (Tree of Life)
Geology	Global Flood geology (rapid deposition of rock layers)	Uniformitarian geology (slow formation of rock strata, spanning billions of years)

These two worldviews concerning origins are fundamentally irreconcilable; one must necessarily be false. For further discussion, consult the resource article “[Evolution’s Fundamental Flaws](#).”

II. SALVIFIC: *anti-Priest* [\[e\]](#)

Catholic teaching is *anti-Priest* because it **distorts God’s plan of salvation**. It elevates certain (un-Biblical) teachings and practices as salvific, such as: Works, Sacraments, the Eucharist, Sunday worship, the Crucifix, natural Immortality, Hell, and Pagan holy days. In table format:

#	Topic	Theology	<i>anti-Theology</i>
6	SALVATION	By Grace thru Faith	Faith <i>requires</i> works (7 sacraments)
7	BAPTISM	Spiritually symbolic	Sacrament necessary for salvation
8	COMMUNION	Fellowship meal in remembrance	The Eucharist is a literal <i>Sacrifice</i> necessary for salvation
9	SABBATH	7 th day (Saturday)	Changed to Sunday
10	CROSS	<i>Non-worship</i>	Crucifix, an object of worship
11	DEATH	Soul “sleep”	Natural immortality and eternal torment in hell
12	FEASTS	Celebration of biblical events	Pagan holidays and practices merged and mixed with biblical events

6. SALVIFIC: *anti-Salvation*. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation is a merit-based system and a process.

In contrast to the **Protestant** doctrine of *sola fide*—salvation by grace alone through faith alone—the Catholic Church teaches that salvation is a **cooperative process** (*synergism*) involving both divine grace and human response. While Catholic theology insists that all merit is ultimately rooted in God’s grace (**CCC §2010**), it nonetheless requires the believer to respond through faith active in charity, participation in the sacraments (especially Baptism and the Eucharist), keeping the commandments, performing acts of penance, and pursuing indulgences to satisfy temporal punishment.

From a Protestant perspective—and particularly from the Reformation tradition—this system stands in direct contrast to the biblical doctrine of assurance grounded in the finished work of Christ alone (John 5:24; Romans 8:1; 1 John 5:13), in which the believer’s standing before God is not contingent upon ongoing sacramental participation or the accumulation of merit, but rests solely on the imputed righteousness of

Christ received through faith.

Catholic's anti-Salvation Teachings

(1) Faith and Works Together. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation involves both faith *and* works (and hope) together.

- CCC §1815 teaches that faith is a theological virtue, but §1816 says faith must be accompanied by works and hope—i.e., a living faith “works through charity.” **Council of Trent, Session 6 (Decree on Justification), Canon 9** anathematizes anyone who says faith alone justifies—which directly confirms the Protestant / Catholic divide on *sola fide*.
- The more precise citation for the faith-works-hope triad is CCC §1812–1813 (the three theological virtues) combined with §1816.
- CCC §2010 is the most direct statement on merit in the entire Catechism. It states that “the merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace.” This is also where the famous Augustinian quote appears: “*our merits are God’s gifts.*”

On the Question of Merit. The Catholic concept of **merit**—that any merit a believer accrues is itself the product of grace rather than independent human effort—nevertheless involves a category confusion. If merit is “God’s gift,” retaining the vocabulary of “merit” amounts to a verbal sleight of hand that allows the underlying logic of earning to persist under a different name. It smuggles in a transactional framework that Scripture seems designed to exclude (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 4:4–5). The Council of Trent’s qualified *synergism*—in which grace enables, **but human cooperation remains a real, contributing variable**—continues to represent the official Catholic position today.

The scholastic distinction between merit *de condigno* (strict merit, possible only because grace establishes a real equivalence between the work and reward) and merit *de congruo* (a “fittingness” rather than strict justice) struck many Reformers as an attempt to have it both ways—preserving the appearance of grace alone while still operating within an Aristotelian framework of proportionate exchange that they believed Scripture rejects wholesale with respect to salvation.

Reformers argued that the Catholic language of “merit”—however carefully hedged—fed into systems like the treasury of merits, indulgences, and purgatorial satisfaction, producing an anxiety-driven piety oriented toward “have I done enough” rather than resting in the assurance of Christ’s finished work.

(2) **The Sacraments.** Catholics believe that participation in the **sacraments**, particularly **Baptism** and the **Eucharist**, is necessary for salvation, although it leaves room for “invincible ignorance.”

- **CCC §1129** states that the sacraments are “necessary for salvation,” though it qualifies this carefully. **CCC §1257** notes that God is not bound by the sacraments—allowing for salvation outside formal sacramental participation in cases of *invincible ignorance*.
- **Baptism** is the necessary gateway sacrament (**CCC §1277**).
- The **Eucharist** is the “sacrament of sacraments” (**CCC §1211**).
- **Penance.** **CCC §1446** and **§1493** describe Penance as a sacrament of reconciliation, framing it as God’s mercy rather than human effort. **Council of Trent, Session 14** is the definitive dogmatic text. But note that the *acts of the penitent*—contrition, confession, and satisfaction—are formally required elements (**CCC §1448**).

(3) **Keeping the Commandments.** **CCC §2070** states that keeping the commandments is a “grave obligation.” **CCC §1821** ties the commandments to final perseverance and salvation explicitly. **CCC §1036** references Matthew 25 and final judgment according to works. Although **CCC §1036** is actually about the *Last Judgment* and hell—its point is the reality of judgment according to works.

(4) **Indulgences.** Catholics perform indulgences in order to reduce the *temporal punishment* due for sins that have already been forgiven, thereby reducing time in **purgatory** (see **CCC §1030–1032** on purgatory).

CCC §1471–1479 is the authoritative current statement. Indulgences are defined as remission of the *temporal punishment* due to sin already forgiven. The **Apostolic Constitution *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*** (Paul VI, 1967) is the most authoritative modern source.

(5) **Assurance of Salvation.** A Catholic has no assurance or “absolute certainty” of salvation.

Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 16 anathematizes those who claim “absolute certainty” of their own predestination. **CCC §1036** affirms that Catholics should not presume on salvation.

However, **CCC §1817–1821** on hope, and **§1023–1029** on heaven, show that Catholics distinguish between *certainty of presumption* (condemned) and *confidence in God’s mercy* (encouraged). Thus, although Catholics have no certainty of salvation, they have “confident hope” that God will be merciful.

In Summary. The Catholic Church teaches that salvation is obtained through a combination of faith, works, and hope—rejecting the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide* (faith alone). Participation in the sacraments, especially **Baptism** and the **Eucharist**, is considered necessary for salvation. Catholics are also obligated to keep the commandments, with final judgment rendered according to works. Additional practices such as **Penance** and **indulgences** address the ongoing consequences of sin and temporal punishment. Regarding assurance, the Church condemns any claim to absolute certainty of salvation, while still encouraging “confident hope” in God’s mercy.

Hope-based Salvation. Thus, Catholic salvation can be described as *hope-based* rather than *assurance-based*, for the following reasons:

What Catholics have:

- A “confident hope” grounded in God’s mercy and faithfulness
- The theological virtue of hope (CCC §1817–1821) as a genuine and encouraged disposition
- Trust that God associates believers with His grace through the sacraments, works, and perseverance

What Catholics explicitly lack:

- Any “absolute certainty” of their own predestination or final salvation
- The kind of personal assurance that Protestant *sola fide* theology grounds in the finished work of Christ alone
- The Council of Trent actually anathematizes (formally condemns) anyone who claims such certainty—making its rejection a matter of dogma, not just pastoral caution

In short: **Catholic soteriology is structurally *hope-oriented***, with salvation understood as a journey sustained by grace, sacraments, and perseverance—rather than a settled, declared status.

Catholics’ “walk with God.” In terms of a day-by-day relationship with God, Catholics rely on the sacraments as relational encounters, most centrally the Eucharist, which is celebrated weekly at Sunday Mass and on designated holy days. Their devotional life also draws heavily on prayer and contemplation—particularly the Liturgy of the Hours (the praying of the Psalms at set times throughout the day), contemplative prayer (*Lectio Divina*), and the **Rosary**—a counting tool (consisting of a crucifix, a medallion, and 59 beads) used to keep track of the cycle of *repetitive prayers* (i.e., Apostles’ Creed, Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be) while med-

itating on specific biblical events called “mysteries.” In addition, Catholics cultivate their walk with God through the intercession of *intermediaries*, namely the “communion of saints” and the Virgin Mary.

A Catholic’s daily walk involves: (a) ongoing cooperation with grace, (b) regular confession and penance, and (c) fear of mortal sin breaking one’s relationship with God. This means the relationship can feel more fragile and conditional—sustained by continued faithfulness—rather than resting on the *unconditional declared status* that Protestant forensic justification provides.

The Bottom Line. Catholic spirituality *does* have a rich relational walk with God—but it is more **liturgical, sacramental, and mediated** (via the communion of saints and the Virgin Mary) than the direct, personal, conversational relationship with God emphasized in evangelical Protestantism. The relational element is real, but it is woven into *structure and community* rather than grounded primarily in a personal, once-for-all assurance. For a Catholic, the walk with God is less “I know where I stand” and more “I am journeying toward God with the Church, sustained by His grace.”

7. SALVIFIC: anti-Baptism. Protestants view baptism as a symbol that doesn’t actually *do* anything, whereas Catholics view baptism as the first sacrament **necessary for salvation** that gives access to the other sacraments [CCC §1257]. One is “**Justified by faith in Baptism**” [CCC §1271]. It is the gateway to the Church and to Heaven. It is the act that forgives sins, grants spiritual rebirth, and the means by which one receives the Holy Spirit [CCC §1213]. “**By Baptism all sins are forgiven**, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin” [CCC §1263]. Catholic baptism is “**a journey and initiation** in several stages.” Required are “proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion” [CCC §1229]. Catholics also practice infant baptism [CCC §1250, §1282].

The Protestant counterpoints on the Catholic view of baptism are:

- Baptism is not what *gives us* salvation. Salvation is the gift of God—by mercy and grace, and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).
- One is *justified* by the faith of Christ, not by (the work of) baptism (Galatians 2:16).
- Baptism does not *forgive* anything. It is a symbol.
- Baptism *follows* a person’s faith; it is not a prerequisite or condition of faith.
- Infant baptism is not taught in the Bible.

8. SALVIFIC: *anti-Communion*. The Communion service is also known as the Lord's Supper or the **Eucharist**. Catholics will typically celebrate the Eucharist in a liturgical service called a Mass. To Catholics the Eucharist is a *sacrifice*, not a service in remembrance of Christ's Last Supper. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states it this way,

“The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: ‘The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different.’ ‘And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, **the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.**’” [[CCC §1367](#)]

Eucharist bread. Also called Sacramental bread, Communion bread (or wafer), the Lamb or simply the host. This bread is used in the Eucharist. Catholics teach that this bread substance is changed into the Body of Christ (*transubstantiation*) when the priest prays over it, otherwise it will not be salvific.

9. SALVIFIC: *anti-Sabbath*. The change of worship from the 7th day (Saturday) to the first day (Sunday) occurred centuries after the apostolic era. “During the first three hundred years of the Common Era Christian worship did take place on Sunday, but there is no evidence that Sunday was seen as a Sabbath or a day of rest. As far as the process of officially transforming Sunday into a day of rest, the first evidence is found in Constantine's decree of 321 AD.” —Edward Allen, “*How did the Jewish Sabbath become the Christian Sunday?*” [Andrews University Seminary Studies](#), Vol. 53, No. 2, 337-353.

Council of Laodicea. The Council (or Synod) of Laodicea was a regional gathering of bishops that met in Laodicea in Phrygia Pacatiana (modern-day Turkey), not an ecumenical council of the whole church. Most scholars date it to around 363 AD. It occurred within a few decades of Constantine's initial Sunday legislation (321 AD), during the reigns of successors Jovian and Valentinian I/Valens.

The council issued sixty canons covering a wide range of church discipline. According to Wikipedia's summary of the canons, one cluster specifically addressed outlawing Judaizing by resting on the Sabbath and encouraging rest on Sunday instead—this is Canon 29. The text of Canon 29 reads approximately:

“Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day; and, if they can,

resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”

“Change the times and the law.” The Catholic Church considered itself to have the power and authority to “transfer” (or dispense with) the observance of the fourth commandment for the following reasons in their official declaration:

“But the Church of God has thought it well **to transfer the celebration and observance of the Sabbath to Sunday**. For, as on that day light first shone on the world, so by the Resurrection of our Redeemer on the same day, by whom was thrown open to us the gate to eternal life, we were called out of darkness into light; and hence the Apostles would have it called the Lord’s day. We also learn from the Sacred Scriptures that the first day of the week was held sacred because on that day the work of creation commenced, and on that day the Holy Ghost was given to the Apostles.” —[Council of Trent, “The Sabbath, Why Changed To Sunday,” 1566 AD.](#)

Indeed, the Sabbath (7th day, Saturday) is a memorial, a day to remember God’s creative power (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). In the Old Testament on through the New Testament, it was observed as a day of rest from one’s own labors and devotion given to religious practice. The 7th day Sabbath was understood to be a “sign” of both God’s creative power (Exodus 31:17) and God’s covenant with his people, that it was He (Yehovah) who sanctified them (Ezek. 20:11-12). Not always observed (in the Old Testament) and taken to excess (in the New Testament), it nevertheless identified the Jewish nation as God’s chosen people. Centuries after the apostolic era, this “Jewish” Sabbath was downplayed and ultimately rejected in favor of the “Christian” Sabbath (i.e. Sunday worship). However, there is no Biblical support or evidence for making this change. Rather, Sunday observance is fully steeped in the Church Tradition of the Catholic Church.

In SDA eschatology, the change from Saturday to Sunday worship was a fulfillment of a kingdom that would “change the times and the law” of God (Daniel 7:25). Moreover, at the end of time (before the Second Coming) Sabbath observance will again come into the spotlight for God’s people, “who keep the commandments of God” (Rev. 14:12). Adventists believe that the “mark of the Beast” will (again) constitute civil enforcement of Sunday observance, which Papal Rome claims as the special acknowledgement of her supremacy. This will give full evidence that the Beast’s deadly wound was healed (Rev. 13:3). Civil authorities will manifest “wonderful zeal in taking this spurious sabbath under the care and protection of their legislatures, but they know not what they are doing.

They are placing upon a false sabbath divine honors, and when this is fully done, persecution will break forth upon those who observe the Sabbath that God gave in Eden as a memorial of His creative power” (*11LtMs, Ms 15, 1896, par. 30*).

10. SALVIFIC: *anti-Cross*. Or, crucifix worship. Catholics see the crucifix as a fulfillment of the brazen serpent created by Moses in Numbers 21:8-9, called the Nehushtan. And, as the Nehushtan became an object of worship—later destroyed by King Hezekiah’s reforms (2 Kings 18:4) for this very reason—so the crucifix has become an object of worship. The crucifix can be found inside churches where prayers are done in front of it. There are altar crosses and processional crosses. Church services in the Catholic Church (Roman Rite) require a crucifix to be on the altar or near it. A crucifix is considered one of the most effective means of averting or opposing demons and for protection from evil, which is why many wear crucifix necklaces.

11. SALVIFIC: *anti-Death*. The Bible clearly teaches the mortality of man as follows:

Psalms 146:4: His breath departs, he returns to the earth. In that very day, his thoughts perish.

However, Catholics believe in the immortality of the soul and eternal torment of the wicked in hell. A string of other Catholic teachings follow from this one foundational teaching. They include:

1. **Purgatory.**
2. **Indulgences.**
3. **Prayer, alms, and Masses for the dead.**
4. **Eternal torment in hell.**
5. **Human intermediaries in Heaven.**

Bible teachings rendered superfluous. This teaching makes the following Biblical teachings superfluous given that all souls are already either in Heaven, Purgatory or Hell.

- **Second Coming (*parousia*).**
- **Resurrection.** The two resurrections—the righteous at the 2nd Coming and the wicked at the 3rd Coming—have little to no meaning in Catholic eschatology.
- **Judgment at the end of time.**

12. SALVIFIC: *anti-Feasts*. Catholics have a long list of religious holy days with pagan origins, including:

- **Candlemas (February 2).** Derived from the Celtic holiday of Imbolc, which is celebrated by Wiccans and other neopagans.

- **Valentine's Day (February 15).** Originated from the Roman pagan festival of fertility called Lupercalia, an event filled with animal sacrifice, random coupling and the whipping of women.
- **Ash Wednesday (beginning of Lent).** Origins in the Nordic god, Odin. The laying on of ashes was done on Wednesday, the day named for Odin.
- **St. Patrick's day (March 17th).** Origins in the Celtic festival of Ostara.
- **Palm Sunday.** The 4th century is the earliest recorded date for its observance. There is no scriptural authority for its observance.
- **Halloween and All Saints Day.** Origins in the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain.
- **Easter.** See below.
- **Christmas.** See below.

Easter. the name 'Easter' was taken from the name of a Teutonic lunar Goddess, *Eostre* (from whence we also get the name of the female hormone, estrogen). Her chief symbols were the bunny (both for fertility and because her worshipers saw a hare in the full moon) and the egg (symbolic of the cosmic egg of creation), images which Christians have been hard pressed to explain. Her holiday, the *Eostara*, was held on the Vernal Equinox Full Moon. Of course, the Church does not celebrate full moons, even if they do calculate by them, so they planted their Easter on the following Sunday. Thus, Easter is always the first Sunday, after the first Full Moon, after the Vernal Equinox.

The change from the primitive observance of Passover to that of Easter-Sunday was not only a change of dates from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday, but also a change of meaning and experience. The waning influence of Jewish Christians and the growing influence of Gentile Christians led not only to the adoption of a new date, Easter-Sunday, in order to have "nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd," but also to the acceptance of pagan speculations and fertility myths, which are foreign to the biblical meaning of Passover.

Christmas. The adoption of the 25th of December for the celebration of Christmas is perhaps the most explicit example of Sun-worship's influence on the Christian liturgical calendar. It is a known fact that the pagan feast of the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*—the birthday of the Invincible Sun, was held on that date.

In fact, if truth be known, the holiday of Christmas has always been more Pagan than Christian, with its associations of Nordic divination, Celtic fertility rites, and Roman Mithraism. That is why both Martin Luther and John Calvin abhorred it, why the Puritans refused to

acknowledge it, much less celebrate it (to them, no day of the year could be more holy than the Sabbath), and why it was even made *illegal* in Boston! The holiday was already too closely associated with the birth of older Pagan gods and heroes. And many of them (like Oedipus, Theseus, Hercules, Perseus, Jason, Dionysus, Apollo, Mithra, Horus and even Arthur) possessed a narrative of birth, death, and resurrection that was uncomfortably close to that of Jesus. And to make matters worse, many of them predated the Christian Savior.

III. LORDSHIP: *anti-King* [\[e\]](#)

Catholic teaching is *anti-King* because it **mystifies God and usurps His authority and power**. Its replacement theology includes: the Trinity doctrine, Popery, the Virgin Mary as Mediatrix, and Bishops. In table format:

#	Topic	Theology	<i>anti</i> -Theology (replacement)
13	GOD	God and his Son	Three equal Gods – Trinity
14	FATHER	Father <i>in heaven</i>	Pope, “Holy Father” <i>on earth</i>
15	CHRIST	Christ <i>in heaven</i>	Pope, “Vicar of Christ” <i>on earth</i>
16	MEDIATOR	Christ <i>in heaven</i>	Christ + Virgin Mary + saints
17	HEAD	Christ <i>in heaven</i>	Pope, Head of the Church <i>on earth</i>
18	APOSTLES	Apostolic era	Bishops, successors to the apostles

13. LORDSHIP: *anti-God*. Catholics believe that the Trinity doctrine is the most fundamental of their faith. On it everything else depends and from it everything else derives. However, the Trinity doctrine is anti-God because it replaces the definition of the one true God. The Trinity doctrine is examined in detail in the article entry, “[Trinity doctrine examined](#).”

14. LORDSHIP: *anti-Father*. The Pope (Latin: *papa*; “father”) is the bishop of Rome, head of the Catholic Church [CCC §882, §936]. There are other titles for the Pope, the most important in this discussion is “Holy Father” (or typically “Most Blessed Father” in Spanish and Italian). If the Pope enters a room, you are supposed to stand and applaud. If he approaches you, you are to genuflect (i.e. bend at the knee). If he offers his hand, you kiss his ring. The ring is a mark of the Papacy and kissing it is a sign of respect and affection.

Jesus taught differently. We are to call no one “Father” or “Holy Father” but God the Father only.

- *Matthew 23:9*: And call no man your father on earth, for you have **one Father, who is in heaven**.

- *John 17:11b*: Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.
- *Romans 8:15*: For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

15. LORDSHIP: *anti*-Christ. The Pope is also called the “Vicar of Christ” (*vicarius Christi*) [CCC §[882](#), §[936](#)]. “Vicar” in the broadest sense means someone who is authorized to act as a substitute or agent for a superior. The words, “Vicarius Filii Dei,” Latin for “Vicar of the Son of God.” are found in various documents from the Vatican. As the “Vicar of Christ”, the Pope is acting as both the agent of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, since the Holy Spirit was sent to be Christ’s representative on earth (John 14:16, 26). The Pope can truly be called the antichrist as defined in 1 John 2:22, since he “denies” (effectively, *substitutes for*) the work of (and worship to) the Father and the Son. “This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22b).

Hierarchy of power. The pyramid of power that constitutes the Pope’s office as the “Vicar of Christ” consists of cardinals, patriarchs, major archbishops, metropolitans, coadjutor archbishops, diocesan bishops, coadjutor bishops, episcopal vicar, eparches, apostolic vicars, apostolic prefects, apostolic administrators and vicars general.

The name of the Beast is 666 (Rev. 13:18). Of the many titles of the pope, the “Vicar of the Son of God,” or in Latin, “Vicarius Filii Dei,” is the most significant. When the Latin name is interpreted as Roman numbers, the total adds up to 666, as the following shows.

Vicarius	Filii	Dei	
V = 5	F = 0	D = 500	
I = 1	I = 1	E = 0	
C = 100	L = 50	I = 1	
A = 0	I = 1		
R = 0	I = 1		
I = 1			
U = 5			
S = 0			
Totals			
112 +	53 +	501	= 666

Samuele Bacchiocchi an Adventist scholar, and only Adventist to be awarded a gold medal by Pope Paul VI for the distinction of *summa cum*

laude (Latin for “with highest praise”), has documented the pope using the above title.

“First, we noted that contrary to some Catholic sources who deny the use of *Vicarius Filii Dei* as a papal title, we have found this title to have been used in official Catholic documents to support the ecclesiastical authority and temporal sovereignty of the pope. Thus the charge that Adventists fabricated the title to support their prophetic interpretation of 666, is unfair and untrue.” — [Samuele Bacchiocchi, “The Saga of *Vicarius Filii Dei* on the Papal Tiara,” *Endtime Issues Newsletter* No. 196, p. 27](#)

See also: [Decretum D. Gratiani \(1559 AD\), p. 316 on “Vicarius Filii Dei”](#) at heritageandhopeministries.com/historic-documents.

16. LORDSHIP: *anti-Mediator*. Rather than a single Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5) and the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), the Catholic Church has a long list of human mediators beginning with the Virgin Mary (*Mediatrice*) followed by a communion of saints in Heaven, while the priesthood is reserved to the *ministerial* priesthood (holy orders) of the Pope, bishops and priests.

17. LORDSHIP: *anti-Head*. The Catholic Church teaches that the Pope is the head of the Church and is infallible [CCC §891]. Infallibility means the Pope is *incapable* of error in pronouncing dogma. In contrast, the Bible tells us that Christ is the head of the Church.

- *Ephesians 1:22*: And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,
- *Ephesians 5:23*: For the husband is the head of the wife **even as Christ is the head of the church**, his body, and is himself its Savior.
- *Colossians 1:18a*: And he is the head of the body, the church.

18. LORDSHIP: *anti-Apostles*. “The Bishops, established by the Holy Spirit, succeed the apostles” [CCC §938, §892, §896]. As a general rule, bishops are to be celibate [CCC §1579, §1580]. In contrast, the Bible speaks against “teachings of demons . . . who forbid marriage” (1 Timothy 4:1-3). The Bible also requires monogamy for a bishop (1 Timothy 3:2).

IV. SUPPLEMENTARY TOPICS [\[e\]](#)

Teachings not covered

Other Catholic teachings not covered are listed below. Again, this list is not exhaustive.

- The Virgin Mary as Mediatrix and Co-Redemptrix.
- Veneration of angels
- Holy water, holy oil, holy palms, medals and charms, the ring in marriage
- Fasting on Fridays and during the 40 days of Lent
- The Rosary, novenas
- The Inquisition, which declared death to heretics and those who disagree with the doctrines of the Papacy
- More than 100 “anathemas” (or curses) pronounced on those who differ with Catholic teaching, established in the Council of Trent (1545-1563). See: “[List of excommunicable offences from the Council of Trent](#)”
- Monks, nuns, monasteries, convents

Denial of Christ

The Catholic Church denies the all sufficiency of Christ in the following ways:

- To Christ’s finished work on the cross they add the Mass (continual Victim).
- To Christ’s word they add Tradition.
- To Christ’s headship they add a Pope.
- To Christ’s role as the Advocate and Mediator, they add Mary.
- To Christ’s high priestly office they add the Catholic priesthood and confessional box.
- To Christ’s merits they add their own (human works).
- To Christ’s forgiveness they add Purgatory.
- To Christ’s righteousness they add their own (filthy rags).

Theological imperialism [\[e\]](#)

“**Theological imperialism**” is a *critical label* used to describe the way one theological system, tradition, or set of assumptions is **imposed as normative**—often suppressing, marginalizing, or delegitimizing other biblical interpretations, cultures, or historical voices. The term borrows from political “imperialism,” where power expands by domination rather

than persuasion. In short: It is theological expansion achieved through *political coercion* rather than *persuasive dialogue*.

Core features. Here are several overlapping traits:

1. **System over text.** Scripture is read *through* a fixed doctrinal framework, and passages are forced to conform—even when the text resists.
2. **Universalization of a local theology.** A theology developed in a specific historical, cultural, or linguistic context is treated as timeless and universally binding.
3. **Silencing alternative voices.** Dissenting interpretations are dismissed as “unbiblical” or “heretical” without serious engagement.
4. **Doctrinal retrojection.** Later theological developments are read back into earlier biblical texts as if they were already present in full form.
5. **Power-backed enforcement.** Theological conclusions are enforced through ecclesial authority, creeds, institutions, social pressure, or political alignment rather than exegetical argument.

Concrete examples. Here are some of the instances where the Catholic Church’s theology expanded or was enforced through coercive power rather than persuasion.

1. **The Constantinian shift (4th century).** After Constantine and especially after Theodosius I: (a) Christianity moved from a persecuted faith to an **imperially backed religion**; (b) orthodoxy became aligned with **state power**; and (c) Heresy was no longer merely debated—it was **criminalized**. Theology advanced not only by councils and argument, but by **law, punishment, and exclusion**.
2. **Suppression of “heresy” by force.** Most prominent, of course, is the **Inquisition** (12th-19th centuries). It was established to identify, interrogate, and punish heresy. It was backed by both ecclesiastical authority and secular courts. Punishments included imprisonment, confiscation of property, and execution. The Church often supplied the **theological judgment**, while the state carried out the **coercive penalty**—a symbiotic imperial structure.
3. **Forced conversions.** For example, in Spain, Jews and Muslims were pressured to convert or leave. “Conversos” were later investigated for insufficient orthodoxy. There were legal disabilities: restrictions on professions, residence, and worship. Baptism was sometimes imposed under threat or duress. Theology spread or

was protected through **legal and social coercion**, not free assent.

4. **Colonial missions (15th-19th centuries).** This is perhaps the clearest example of theological imperialism, where theology was exported alongside empire, backed by military and economic force. Two examples:
 - a. **Spanish and Portuguese empires.** Here: (a) evangelization was intertwined with colonial domination; (b) indigenous religions were suppressed; (c) baptism sometimes functioned as a marker of political submission.
 - b. **Destruction or marginalization of indigenous theologies.** Here: (a) native cosmologies were labeled *pagan* or *demonic*; (b) sacred sites destroyed or repurposed; (c) Christianity often presented as the sole legitimate worldview.
5. **Papal political supremacy claims.** The proclamation of medieval Papal Bulls. Documents like *Unam Sanctam* (1302) asserted: (a) submission to the Pope as **necessary for salvation**; and (b) Papal authority over secular rulers. It was a theological claim used to justify **jurisdictional dominance**, not simply spiritual guidance.
6. **Censorship.** Orthodoxy preserved through institutional control, not open theological contest. Two examples: (a) ***Index of forbidden books***: Restricted access to theological and philosophical works, enforced through ecclesial and sometimes civil penalties; and (b) ***Condemnation of theologians***: Thinkers were disciplined or silenced when their ideas threatened centralized authority.

Working definition. Based on the above examples, *theological imperialism* could be defined as: The expansion or preservation of theological claims through political, legal, military, or social coercion rather than through persuasion, witness, and voluntary assent.

► B. Trinity doctrine examined

The **Trinity doctrine** is considered theologically untenable on three grounds: it lacks *biblical* support, defies *logical* coherence, and originated in post-apostolic Church *tradition* rather than in apostolic teaching. Its formulation developed amid the theological disputes of the fourth-century Church, particularly in connection with the Council of Nicaea and subsequent councils, where Roman imperial influence and the growing union of church and state played a significant role. Consequently, the doctrine bears the imprint of theological compromise, political expediency, and pagan philosophical thought—forces that remain influential to this day.

Executive summary. The major topics covered in this article include:

- Central MYSTERY
- Alternate views on the nature of God
- [Trinity defined](#)
- [No “proof texts”](#)
- [Trinity origins](#)
- Self-contradictory and irrational
- The “Shield of the Trinity” is incoherent
- [Roman imperial influence](#)
- Prophetic significance
- Trinitarian *nonsensical* theology on Jesus
- The Trinity is like an egg and other stupid statements
- [The issue of *materiality*](#)
- [SDA: Nine “proof texts” examined](#)
- [BRI: Twelve points of biblical evidence examined](#)

Central MYSTERY

The nature of God is the most fundamental teaching of the Bible—on it everything else depends and from it everything else derives. According to Catholics and most Protestants, it is the Trinity doctrine that best describes the nature of God. The importance of the Trinity doctrine in Catholic dogma is stated as follows:

[CCC §234](#): The MYSTERY of the Most Holy Trinity is the **central MYSTERY** of Christian faith and life. It is the MYSTERY of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other MYSTERIES of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the “**hierarchy of the truths of faith**”. (Emphasis supplied)

Notice the emphasis on the word, “MYSTERY”. The Catholic faith (and that of most Protestants) encompasses a set of “MYSTERIES of faith” of which the MYSTERY of the Most Holy Trinity is the source and central teaching of all the other MYSTERIES of faith.

What is a mystery? In Christian terms, a “mystery” refers to a divinely revealed truth that, while understood through faith, remains beyond the full comprehension of the human mind. It’s not a puzzle to be solved, but rather a deeper spiritual reality that is partially unveiled through revelation, yet retains an element of the unfathomable.

It is on this basis that the Catholic faith can be said to be founded on *mysticism*—where spiritual apprehension of knowledge is inaccessible to the intellect, but may be attained through contemplation and self-surrender. A task delegated to the priesthood who has the authority, time, and devotion to do so.

Indeed, according to [CCC §858](#), it is the apostles—of which the Catholic bishops are its true successors ([CCC §862](#))—who are called by God to be “stewards of the *mysteries* of God.” And so, a Catholic believer must go to them for spiritual understanding and direction, since, they have the “divinely” delegated authority, and the time, and devotion to peer through the veil of the unfathomable truths of the Bible. This same concept is even practiced by many Protestant believers. Thus,

[GC 596.3](#): The Roman Church reserves to the clergy the right to interpret the Scriptures. On the ground that **ecclesiastics alone are competent to explain God’s word**, it is withheld from the common people. Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in **Protestant** churches from searching the Bible for themselves. **They are taught to accept its teachings *as interpreted by the church***; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church.

[GC 598.3](#): The truths most plainly revealed in the Bible have been involved in doubt and darkness by learned men, who, with a pretense of great wisdom, **teach that the Scriptures have a *mystical***, a secret, spiritual meaning not apparent in the language employed. These men are false teachers.

In effect, they have *mystified* the plain truths of the Bible, clouding the minds of believers in order to maintain:

- **Power to interpret:** Control over *interpretation* preserves institutional authority and influence.
- **Insulation from scrutiny:** Complexity and ambiguity discourage questioning and *critical examination*; believers are instead urged simply to accept and believe.
- **Learned posturing:** Obscure language is employed to create the illusion of profound spiritual and theological insight.

Blind belief. For Protestants, blind belief was not humility but **abdication of conscience**. The Reformation framed faith as a *reasoned, biblically grounded* trust in God—not a passive acceptance of institutional claims. The Protestant Reformation arose, in large part, as a direct rejection of the expectation that Christians should **accept clerical teaching uncritically** simply because it came from ecclesiastical authority. Here is a summary of the Protestant counterview:

1. **Authority centered on the Bible.** Catholic teaching functions on a threefold authority: Scripture, Tradition, and Magisterium. This dynamic effectively requires *belief by submission*, not belief by understanding or conviction.
2. **The right and duty of private judgment.** Protestants do not argue that everyone's opinion is equally valid, but they do insist that every believer has the responsibility to test teaching. This principle is grounded in Scripture (Acts 17:11; 1 John 4:1; Gal. 1:8).
3. **Clerical mediation vs. the priesthood of all believers.** Catholic theology emphasize the clergy as **necessary mediators** of truth and sacrament. Protestants counter with the doctrine of the **priesthood of all believers** (1 Peter 2:9), where: (a) all Christians have direct access to God; (b) all Christians may read, interpret, and apply Scripture; and (c) clergy serve as teachers and shepherds, not infallible arbiters. This is a rejection of the idea that truth is *possessed* by the clergy rather than *witnessed* by the whole church.
4. **Opposition to “implicit faith”.** A key Catholic concept is *fides implicita* (“implicit faith”), where: (a) the layperson need not understand doctrine fully; (b) it is sufficient to believe whatever the Church believes, as defined by the clergy. Protestants see this as spiritually dangerous because: (a) it encourages **ignorance rather than growth**; (b) it makes believers vulnerable to abuse and error; and (c) it shifts faith from Christ and his word to **institutional trust**. Reformers insisted on **explicit faith** grounded in understanding, not mere assent.

5. **Accessibility of Scripture.** Reformers like Tyndale famously argued that even “the ploughboy” should know Scripture better than the clergy if necessary. This was not anti-learning; it was anti-monopoly on truth.
6. **Fallibility of church leaders.** Protestants emphasize that: clergy are fallible, councils can err, and Popes can contradict one another. The history of doctrinal development and reversal provides clear evidence that office does not guarantee truth. Therefore, obedience without examination is seen as **obedience to men**, not to God (Acts 5:29).

A different view of church authority. Protestants do not reject authority *per se*; they redefine it as:

- Authority is **ministerial**, not magisterial.
- Teachers serve the Word; they do not stand above it.
- Authority persuades by truth, not by status.

In this framework, belief is an act of conscience bound to Scripture, not an act of submission to hierarchy.

Alternate views on the nature of God [\[d\]](#)

Not all religious groups subscribe to the Trinity doctrine, but have varying views, such as:

- *Tritheism.* That God is one being that exists as three *distinct* persons—i.e. that there are three (ontologically) separate Gods. It is a polytheistic view of God. In contrast, Trinitarians believe the three Gods are one in Essence (the Greek concept of “ousia”). *Tritheistic* religious groups: Mormons. The Mormon religion is discussed in detail in the article, “[Daughters of Babylon.](#)”
- *Modalism.* That God is one in Essence, but he exists in three different modes. In the Old Testament, he operated as God the Father. In the New Testament, he switched modes to become Jesus. Now he has shifted modes again and operates in the world as the Holy Spirit. *Modalistic* religious groups: Oneness Pentecostals.
- *Denial of Christ’s pre-existence.* That Christ began his existence when he was born as a human. Unitarians are in this group. Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) are also in this group. To JW’s the Son of God was created (*not* begotten) as Michael the archangel, and Jesus was no more and no less than a perfect human. The JW religion is discussed in detail in the article, “[Daughters of Babylon.](#)” Others believe that Christ *became* the Son of God when he was born a man—i.e. that he did *not* pre-existence as Son, but as God.

- *Arianism*. That there is one God, the Father. That Christ pre-existed as the “begotten” (born, not created) Son of God. That the Holy Spirit is not a divine person, but an Essence. *Arian* religious groups: Early (or “Pioneer”) Seventh-day Adventists.

Of the above *alternate* views, only the *Arian* view on the nature of God is covered below to some extent, since it is relevant in the history of the development of the Trinity doctrine.

Trinity defined [\[↩\]](#)

Although the following definition employs the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s wording of the Trinity (Fundamental Belief no. 2 in the *28 Fundamental Beliefs*), it should be recognized that nearly all Christian denominations employ essentially the same theological framework or “template” in their Trinitarian formulations. There is, however, one notable omission in the Adventist statement: the issue of *materiality*.

Whereas most Trinitarian traditions explicitly define God as formless and immaterial—often summarized by the phrase “without body, parts, or passions”—the Adventist formulation simply omits this language, and does so without explanation. As a result, the Adventist statement may be regarded as incomplete with respect to articulating the nature of God. (This matter is addressed more fully in the section titled “[The issue of materiality](#).”)

Nevertheless, apart from this omission, the remainder of the orthodox Trinitarian language is retained, as follows:

[SDA Belief #2: Trinity](#). There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.

The above statement of belief makes four specific assertions that require scriptural support:

1. **Three-in-one**. That “there is one God...a unity of three coeternal Persons.”
2. **Coeternality**. That these three Persons are *coeternal*.
3. **One substance (*homoousia*)**. That these three Persons are immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present.
4. **Incomprehensibility**. That these three Persons are infinite and beyond human comprehension.

However, as demonstrated in the section “[SDA: Nine ‘proof texts’](#)”

[examined](#),” the Seventh-day Adventist Church fails to provide biblical evidence to substantiate these assertions.

No “proof texts” [\[e\]](#)

It is readily admitted by fair-minded theologians that the Trinity doctrine is not a copy of any biblical text, not even a sum of any number of texts. Its very concept is not found in any single text or multiple texts of the Bible. In the words of Charles Ryrie, an *evangelical* scholar of systematic theology:

Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie, 1999, p. 89-90: Many doctrines are accepted by evangelicals as being clearly taught in the Scripture for which there are **no proof texts**. The doctrine of the Trinity furnishes the best example of this. It is fair to say that the Bible does not clearly teach the doctrine of the Trinity. **In fact, there is not even one proof text**, if by proof text we mean a verse or passage that “clearly” states that there is one God who exists in three persons.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church makes the same admission—by way of its official magazine, *Review and Herald*, and their theological branch, *The Biblical Research Institute* (BRI):

- [*Review and Herald, 1981-07-30:*](#) While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers. . . . Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity.
- [*Biblical Research Institute Release-9, May, 2015, p. 20:*](#) No text of Scripture specifically says that God is three Persons; but theological reasoning on the basis of biblical principles leads to that conclusion.

Thus, the BRI explicitly concedes that the doctrine is grounded *not* in clear biblical testimony, but solely in “theological reasoning.” It then proceeds to enumerate twelve purported evidences, which are examined in the section titled “[BRI: Twelve points of Biblical evidence examined](#).” Readers may judge for themselves whether this reasoning truly merits the labels “theological” or “rational.” In my judgment, it does neither.

Trinity origins [\[e\]](#)

Trinity before the 4th century was non-existent. Of the prominent pre-Nicene theologians—Polycarp, Justin, Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen—none of their writings give evidence to a “set of beliefs that comprise a minimal understanding of the Trinity.” In all cases, not only is there no evidence, but also each author made statements incompatible

with any Trinity theory. One cannot presuppose the Trinity and then read it into the 2nd and 3rd century authors. (See “[The Trinity before Nicaea](#)” by Sean Finnegan.) In the words of the nineteenth century author, Alvan Lamson:

“After what has been said in the foregoing [[395]] pages, we are prepared to re-assert, in conclusion, that the modern doctrine of the **Trinity is not found in any document or relic belonging to the Church of the first three centuries**. Letters, art, usage, theology, worship, creed, hymn, chant, doxology, ascription, commemorative rite, and festive observance, so far as any remains or any record of them are preserved, coming down from early times, are, as regards this doctrine, an absolute blank. They testify, so far as they testify at all, to the supremacy of the Father, the only true God; and to the inferior and derived nature of the Son. **There is nowhere among these remains a co-equal Trinity**. The cross is there; Christ is there as the Good Shepherd, the Father’s hand placing a crown, or victor’s wreath, on his head; but **no undivided Three**,—co-equal, infinite, self-existent, and eternal. This was a conception to which the age had not arrived. **It was of later origin**.” —Alvan Lamson, [The Church of the First Three Centuries: Notices of the Lives and Opinions of Early Fathers, with Special Reference to The Doctrine of the Trinity; Illustrating Its Late Origin and Gradual Formation](#), 2nd ed. (Boston: Walker, Fuller, and Company, 1865), p. 341. ([Or full pdf](#))

Based on Church Tradition. Rather, the historical evidence shows that the doctrine of the Trinity was not derived directly from Scripture but developed through Church Tradition. It occurred progressively through a series of post-apostolic ecumenical councils that debated and ultimately defined the doctrine. The key *historical* starting point was the [Council of Nicaea](#) in AD 325, convened in the city of Nicaea (modern-day Iznik, Turkey) by the Roman Emperor Constantine. The ensuing period (325-381) became the formative era for the **doctrine of the Trinity**.

During this time (325-381 AD) a series of ecumenical and regional councils shaped the teaching through debate and discussion. Below is a chronological list of the most significant councils in that formative period—*of a total of over 80 councils*—with a brief description of each and its theological purpose.

Year	Council	Main Issue	Outcome
325	Nicaea I	Arianism; nature of the Son	Nicene Creed: “of one substance”
341	Antioch	Semi-Arian alternatives	Multiple anti-Nicene creeds

343-344	Sardica	East-West division	Nicene reaffirmed in the West
351-359	Sirmium series	Arian formulations	Anti-Nicene creeds; later rejected
359	Rimini & Seleucia	Homoean unity formula	Temporary Arian dominance
362	Alexandria	Nicene reconciliation	Terminology clarified
360	Constantinople (local)	Homoian enforcement	Later repudiated
381	Constantinople I	Full Trinitarian definition	Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

After AD 381, the Trinity doctrine continued to be refined by subsequent ecumenical councils for a total of **seven major councils**, as follows:

#	Year	Council	Main Issue
1	325	Nicaea I	Is the Son eternal?
2	381	Constantinople I	Is the Holy Spirit the Third Person?
3	431	Ephesus	Was Mary the bearer of Christ's divine nature (<i>theotokos</i>)?
4	451	Chalcedon	Did Christ have one or two natures? How?
5	553	Constantinople II	How can we interpret the dual natures without dividing Christ into two?
6	681	Constantinople III	Did Christ have one or two wills? (<i>monothelism</i> vs. <i>dyothelism</i>)
7	787	Nicaea II	Can icons of Christ be worshiped? How?

Conundrum. Thus, the historical evidence clearly shows that the doctrine of the Trinity developed as a Church Tradition over the course of several centuries. In every one of the controversies debated in these councils, particularly after 381, the “loser” got kicked out of the church. Thus, debate over the Trinity was (and is) inherently divisive. So, we have a conundrum here:

- If Trinitarian primacy is true—that it always existed and was understood and taught since the time of the apostles—then why was it absent prior to the 4th century and followed by four centuries of controversy and attempts at resolution?
- Why does history show the doctrine of the Trinity as *emerging* only after centuries of theological debate and development?

Lack of controversy by converted Jews in the first century. Moreover, there is no record of Jews who converted to Christianity ever challenging the Trinity doctrine in the first century. It should be understood that the Jewish belief in monotheism was paramount, so a switch to a multi-God (whether tri-theist or Trinitarian) would have raised major concerns to a faithful Jew who was being proselytized. But, alas, none is recorded in the New Testament. The only possible explanation for this silence is that the Trinity doctrine did not exist and was not taught by the apostles.

Self-contradictory and irrational

Self-contradictory. The claim that God is one in three persons is self-contradictory given that a being cannot be *both* three and one at the same time. Trinitarians claim that the doctrine is not self-contradictory by virtue of the following two statements:

- *What.* God is *one in essence*—i.e. God is **one *what*** or one in being.
- *Who.* God is *three in person*—i.e. God is **three *whos*** – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The “one Divine Essence, three Divine Persons” is the usual answer to the self-contradictory objection to the Trinity. However, this forces Trinitarians to make God a *what*, not a *who*; technically an “it” rather than a “he”. If you take this to mean that God is not a person, you are correct. As the early Christian author and apologist Tertullian said: “God is the name for the substance” (see [J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.114](#) or [full PDF](#)).

Unexplainable mystery and irrational. Trinitarians further claim that the Trinity doctrine is a “mystery” that should be believed by faith, but that it cannot be proven by natural reason. In other words, the doctrine is *unexplainable and irrational*, humanly speaking.

“The doctrine of the Trinity is, in its last analysis, a deep mystery **that cannot be fathomed by the finite mind**. That it is taught in the Scripture, however, there can be no reasonable doubt. **It is a doctrine to be believed even though it cannot be thoroughly understood.**” —William Evans, *The Great Doctrines Of The Bible*, “[4. The Doctrine of the Trinity: \(vs. Unitarianism\)](#),” p. 27, or [full PDF](#).

Unintelligible and unteachable. A doctrine^[a] is a teaching that is *taught*. However, a doctrine that is unintelligible *cannot* be taught. Imagine a teacher teaching a subject he does not understand nor expects his students

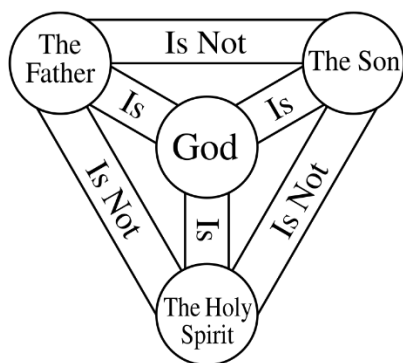
^[a] **doctrine:**—Latin: *doctrina*—”teaching, instruction, learning.” Latin verb: *docēre* — “to teach.” Core meaning: doctrine = “that which is taught.”

to understand. Then why is he teaching it in the first place? Yet this is what Trinitarian teachers expect of their students: to believe and not understand. This is what the Jewish teachers in Jesus' day practiced:

CE 142.2: Those Jewish teachers spoke in monotonous tones, and the plainest and most precious scriptures were made uninteresting and **unintelligible**, buried under such a **mass of tradition** and learned lore that **after the Rabbis had spoken, the people knew less of the meaning of the Scriptures than before they listened.**

The “Shield of the Trinity” is incoherent

Incoherent illustration. The “Shield of the Trinity” or in Latin, *Scutum Fidei* (“shield of faith”), is a diagram used to explain the teaching that God is a Trinity. Although the precise history of the “Shield of the Trinity” is unknown, it is quite old, going back to at least the 12th century. The English version of the diagram is as follows:



In this diagram, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “*whos*” while God is a “*what*”. The label “God” in the center of the diagram is not the Triune God; rather, it is the divine nature or the adjective “divine”. Each of the three—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—share the one divine nature. The divine nature is the “*what*”. The Father is God (divine by nature), the Son is God (divine by nature), and the Holy Spirit is God (divine by nature). The fifth term is the “Triune God” (not shown in the diagram). This term refers to the entire collection. Thus, the Shield of the Trinity depicts five “Gods”:

1. “God” the Father
2. “God” the Son
3. “God” the Holy Spirit
4. “God” the Divine Nature – the one *what*
5. “God” the Triune Being – the three *whos*

Furthermore, the diagram shows that “God” #1 (the Father) is not “God” #2 (the Son) is not “God” #3 (the Holy Spirit). However, “God” #4 (the divine nature) *is* identical to “God” #1, “God” #2, and “God” #3.

This then is the incoherent aspect to this diagram. It is self-evident that things which are identical to the same thing (i.e. “God”) must also be identical to one another. That is, if the Father *is* God and the Son *is* God and the Holy Spirit *is* God, then the Father is identical to the Son and the Holy Spirit. Which means: if each Person is God, that collapses the Persons into one and the same thing. Or viewed the other way around: If the three Persons are *distinct*, then it cannot be that all three are identical. This diagram asserts contradictory claims: for each of the Persons, that Person *is*, and *is not*, identical to each of the other Persons.

Moreover, the diagram does not tell the whole story, because God #2 (the Son) has *two* natures. He is both fully “God” and fully “Man”. Also, redeemed humans are called “sons of God” (or “children of God” or “children of the Father”) which is in reference to God #1 (the Father). However, the “God” of the “children of God” is not God #1 (the Father) but God #5 (the Triune Being). In addition, God #2 (the Son) has a “God” which is God #1 (the Father)—as Jesus said in John 20:17, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” We can therefore say that God’s God (or God #2’s God) is God #1. However, the God of the children of God is the Triune God which is God #5. So, in reality, there are five Gods—God, God, God, God, God—and then there is God’s God, and then the God of the children of God which is the fifth God. This is what the diagram truly teaches.

However, for “God” to be one (singularity) as monotheism teaches, God must be a “Who,” “I,” “Me,” “He,” and “Him,” not a “*what*” or an “it”. But Trinitarians insist this is the case, not because God is one Person but because God is one Being. The term “being” in the Trinity doctrine is a synonym for “substance” or “*ousia*” or “nature,” not for Person. And so they insist that God is one “I” because God is one “Being” not one “Person”. So this is a fourth “I” in addition to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Again, this fourth “I” is not a “*who*” but a “*what*” or an “it”. But the whole collective (“Triune God” or God #5) can be either a “He” or a “them” depending on how a Trinitarian chooses to use the term.

Thus, when a Trinitarian refers to God, he could be speaking of any one of the five Gods in his pantheon of deities. They are all separate and all one, all at the same time. They can be 1+1+1 or 1x1x1 depending on the occasion. All completely incoherent, irrational, unintelligible, unteachable, and un-Biblical. This is the most fundamental teaching of the Christian faith—both of Catholic and most Protestants—and it *must* be

believed. To not believe this *absurdity*^[a] makes one a heretic or a participant of a cult and is grounds for excommunication and, by extension, persecution (as detailed in the next section).

From its first formulation (in the days of Athanasius, c. 325 AD) until now, all discussion about the Trinity has been an attempt to define the undefinable and incomprehensible. Untold thousands have been put to death for not professing belief in a formula which even its professors cannot comprehend, nor state in terms that anyone else can comprehend.

Roman imperial influence [\[e\]](#)

Emperor Constantine. The significance of Emperor Constantine (306-337 AD) in establishing various forms of religious practice and dogma in the Catholic tradition cannot be overstated. They include:

1. **Pagan Worship.** Constantine was responsible for initiating a pagan form of Temple worship through Christian basilicas. He began this construction program in 313 AD. This pagan practice is discussed in detail in the article, "[Pagan Worship](#)".
2. **Pagan Sabbath.** Sunday worship was made legal and universal by Constantine's decree of 321 AD. In Latin, the decree reads in part, "*Omnes iudices, urbanaeque plebes et cunctarum artium officia venerabili die Solis quiescant.*" Using Google translator, it reads, "All judges, the common people, and the offices of all arts shall rest on the venerable day of the Sun."
3. **Pagan God.** It was Constantine who ordered and paid the expenses to the First Council of Nicaea (325 AD) where the Trinity doctrine was first formulated, and then enforced. For details, see the resource, "[Council of Nicaea \(325 AD\)](#)". Arianism, the counter-view to the Trinity doctrine, was rejected by this council and outlawed by Constantine a few years later.
4. **Pagan persecution of Arianism.** Through Constantine's edict (c. 333 AD), Arianism was purged across the Roman Empire and ultimately eradicated centuries later in 538 AD. Arianism did not accept that Jesus was Co-Eternal with the Father, teaching instead that he was begotten of the Father and subordinate to Him.

Saint Constantine. Although scholars continue to debate the nature of Emperor Constantine's personal faith and his understanding of Christian doctrine, he is nevertheless venerated as a saint in Eastern Christianity for his decisive role in establishing Christianity within the cultural and polit-

^[a] *absurdity*:—*def.* extremely silly, unreasonable, or incongruous

ical life of the Roman Empire. The Eastern Orthodox Church commemorates him on **May 21**, together with his mother, **Saint Helena**, honoring them both as *Equal-to-the-Apostles* (*ισαπόστολοι*). See: Daily Readings with Catholic Online, “[St. Constantine the Great](#)”.

Arian purge. It should be noted that reconstructing the life and non-trinitarian doctrine of Arius has proven to be a difficult task, as none of his original writings survive. **Emperor Constantine** ordered their burning while Arius was still living, and any that survived this purge were later destroyed by his Orthodox opponents. Those works which have survived are quoted in the works of churchmen who denounced him as a heretic. This leads some—but not all—scholars to question their reliability. As is so often the case, “History is written by the conqueror, not those that are conquered” (Michael Holding). **Emperor Constantine’s edict** (c. 333 AD) on this purge of Arianism reads in part:

“In addition, if any writing composed by Arius should be found, it should be handed over to the flames, so that not only will the wickedness of his teaching be obliterated, but nothing will be left even to remind anyone of him. And I hereby make a public order, that if someone should be discovered to have hidden a writing composed by Arius, and not to have immediately brought it forward and destroyed it by fire, his penalty shall be death. As soon as he is discovered in this offense, he shall be submitted for capital punishment.”
—Wisconsin Lutheran College, “[Part of an edict against Arius and his followers](#),” Ref. nos. Urk 33, Doc 28, CPG 2041.

Prophetic significance

Historically speaking, those who opposed the Trinity doctrine in its early years of adoption became mortal enemies of the established church and were persecuted, exiled and slain. Most prominent of these were the three kingdoms, the **Heruli**, the **Vandals**, and the **Ostrogoths** in the 5th and 6th centuries.

As described by Robert H. Pierson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1966-1979:

[*The Message, January 1948, ‘God the Father’*](#): Perhaps no other truth in all of Holy Scripture comes to us so marked with the blood of controversy as does the Bible doctrine of the Trinity. History records that ancient nations staked their very existence upon their conception of the Godhead. . . . Three kingdoms, the **Heruli**, the **Vandals**, and the **Ostrogoths**, were blotted from existence during the latter part of the fifth and the early part of the sixth centuries because they refused to accept the orthodox teaching of the ruling [*Catholic*]

church concerning this dogma. Clergymen have been persecuted, exiled, and slain as the tide of favor regarding certain aspects of this subject ebbed and flowed in the early church.



The **Heruli**, **Vandals** and **Ostrogoths** were of Arian persuasion. The period between 493 AD and 538 AD is when these three Christian nations were uprooted and destroyed.

“When the Arian Ostrogoths under Theodoric took over Rome in 493 AD they significantly limited the power of the Pope. But the Catholic Emperors of the Eastern Empire managed to help the Pope by eliminating three of the Arian tribes. The Emperor Zeno arranged a treaty with the Ostrogoths in 487 AD which led to the eradication of the Heruli in 493 AD. Later Justinian destroyed the Vandals in 534 AD and crippled the power of the Ostrogoths in **538 AD** thereby eliminating all the powers that had limited the power and influence of the Pope.” —Lineage, *The Roman Empire From 313-538 AD*, [*“The Destruction of the Three Tribes.”*](#)

The date 538 AD is significant in Seventh-day Adventist eschatology because it represents the beginning of the 1,260 year prophecy (of Daniel 7:24-26, et. al) which ended in 1798 AD with the rise of Napoleon, and the exile into captivity of the pope by French general Berthier. Thus, the controversy over the nature of God—i.e. Trinity vs. Arianism—is closely linked to this prophecy of the “little horn” Papal supremacy.

Another significant date of Papal supremacy is 508 AD, when Clovis, the king of the Franks in the region of Gaul (now France), was named honorary consul by a decree of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I, making him the most important Western ally of the Byzantine emperor. Clovis had converted to Catholicism (from Nordic mythology) in 496 AD, and by 508 AD had fully established in all his regions the Catholic religion as the state-sponsored church. The *Pactus Legis Salicae* (Law of the Salian Franks), a written code combining customary law, Roman written law, Roman Catholic ideals, and royal edicts, is believed to have originated with him. As noted in the following:

“Beyond encouraging individual bishops to play a vital role in his kingdom, Clovis sought to use their collective presence as a force to shape a ‘national’ church that would serve under royal direction to institute a common religious life throughout the realm. . . His entire religious policy played an important role in bringing the *[[Catholic]]* Christian establishment into support for the new regime. . . At the same time Clovis played a significant role in establishing a political and religious order which provided a framework in which the Germanic *[[10 horns]]* and Roman *[[Catholic]]* worlds *[[little horn]]* could join hands in shaping a new civilization in western Europe.”
—Encyclopedia, “*Clovis I*” (bracketed portions were supplied).

The eschatological significance of 508 AD. Early Adventists believed that the 1,290-year prophecy of Daniel 12:11 began in 508 AD and concluded in 1798 AD, together with the 1,260-year prophecy mentioned earlier. It was also believed to be the date that fulfilled the prophetic, “taking away of the daily” of Daniel 8:11, in which Pagan (or Imperial) Rome transitioned to Papal Rome (i.e. Roman Catholic supremacy).

Other Arian nations. The **Heruli**, **Vandals** and **Ostrogoths** were not the only nations that were of Arian persuasion in that period. There were in fact a total of seven of these Germanic tribes that were Arian. The other four were the **Visigoths**, **Bergundians**, **Suevi**, and **Lombards**. The **Visigoths** settled in Spain, the **Bergundians** in Switzerland, the **Suevi** in Portugal, and the **Lombardis** in Italy. These four Arian nations converted to Catholicism at a later date. The other three Germanic tribes were originally pagan who converted to Catholicism. They include the **Franks** (France), **Anglo-Saxon** (England), and **Alamanni** (Germany).

Trinitarian *nonsensical* theology on Jesus

Trinitarian theology on Jesus is *nonsensical* in the following ways:

- Jesus is the **eternal** God but died.
- Jesus is the **omnipotent** God but was strengthened by an angel.
- Jesus is the **omniscient** God but did not know the day of his return.
- Jesus has an **omnipresent** spirit (the spirit of Christ, Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17-18), but sends another spirit (the Holy Spirit) to be with us.
- Jesus is **as great as his Father** but his Father is greater than he.
- Jesus is the **begotten Son** and the unbegotten God.
- As the begotten Son, **Jesus has a Father**; but as the unbegotten God, Jesus has no Father.
- As the begotten Son, **Jesus is younger** than the Father, but as the unbegotten God, Jesus is the same age as the Father.
- Jesus is **very God and very man**. As very God, he is 100% God; and as very man, he is 100% man. A 200% being.
- Jesus **left heaven to become man** and yet, as God, was there all the time!
- Jesus was **tempted** in the wilderness (Mt 4:1; Lk 4:2); but Jesus, as God, cannot be tempted (Js. 1:13).
- Jesus **as God**—as one with the Father and Holy Spirit in substance (*homoousia*)—came out from Himself, prayed to Himself, gave power to Himself, thanked Himself, bore witness to Himself, went back to Himself, and sits at the right hand of Himself.

Said to be a *mystery* (unknowable, unproven and unteachable), yet packaged as *dogma* (knowable, proven and teachable). Church members are expected to *believe it* blindly (unquestioning faith), while apostates (questioning believers) must recant or be *excommunicated*. Detractors (or skeptics) are labelled as *heretics*, and are ridiculed, ostracized, and historically persecuted. *Adopted*, not by fringe groups but, by mainstream Christianity, who has made it their *central doctrine* since its formation in the 4th century, following the *traditions of men*.

The Trinity is like an egg and other stupid statements

Many illustrations are used to describe the Trinity that, while creative, are simply stupid. Here are a few:

The Trinity is...

- Like an *egg*: three parts (yolk, white, and shell) with three different forms and functions.
- Like *water*: three states (solid, liquid, and gas).
- Like a *man* who is simultaneously father, son, and husband.
- Like a living person: body, soul and spirit.
- Like a three-leaf clover: three leaves, one clover.
- Like a rope with three strands.
- Like a three-pronged fork.
- Like the universe: space, time, and matter.
- Like a cell: outer wall, cytoplasm, and nucleus.
- Like music: melody, rhythm, and harmony.
- Like a 3-in-1 shampoo: three activities, one substance.

All of these illustrations fall under the heretical teachings of either *partialism* or *modalism*, which were fully rejected by Trinitarians themselves when they formulated the Trinity doctrine.

Partialism. Partialism is the claim that there's one God, but ultimately he is one person made up of three parts. The issue with this is that, if the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are only parts of what make up one God, this means that each person is only 1/3 of God. Yes, theoretically they could each be called God if the entire being is called God, but one individual part cannot be the whole thing.

Modalism. Some of these illustrations (e.g. *water*) veer into *modalism*. Modalism is the belief that God is one God who shows himself in three different ways (or three different *roles*), sometimes as the Father, sometimes the Son, and sometimes the Holy Spirit. With this view, when Jesus was on earth and prayed to his Father, he was really praying to himself. And when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and the heavens were opened and the Father spoke to his Son, he was really speaking to himself. And when Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, he is really sitting at the right hand of himself. Etc. Modalism is yet another example of an incoherent and irrational view of God.

The issue of *materiality* [\[e\]](#)

Most Trinitarians include in their definition of the Trinity a statement on God's *materiality* or lack thereof. Here are a few examples:

- Westminster Confession (used by Presbyterians, Baptists, and others): "God, who is...a most pure spirit, invisible, *without body, parts, or passions...*"
- Methodist: "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, *without body or parts...*"
- Lutheran Augsburg Confession: "there is one divine essence which is called and is God, eternal, *without body*, indivisible..."

The phrase "*without body*" is understood to mean that God is a non-physical, *immaterial* reality, and is formless. This is because Trinitarians understand God to be "*a spirit*," and as such, a spirit does not have a body (Luke 24:39).

"God is spirit" (John 4:24). The idea that God is "*a spirit*" is taken from the sole verse in the Bible which tells us that "God is spirit" (John 4:24). (See "[Notes on John 4:24](#)" for a full discussion.) In summary, "God is spirit" should be understood in the same way that "God is light" (1 John 1:5) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). That is, it is referring to an attribute, a quality or characteristic of God and not his physical makeup.

Persons have bodies. At the risk of repeating what is said in the article, "[Spirit as Essence](#)," God the Father is a person, and the definition of a "person" is that he "has a body." In fact, the Bible goes out of its way to describe God as having a body and body parts. See again the article just mentioned for references and discussion.

Early Adventists view on God's *materiality*. Early Adventists held to this very position: that God the Father is a Person with a body and body parts—i.e. that God the Father is a *material* being, not *immaterial*. James White, EGW's husband, made the following statements which was the commonly held view among Seventh-day Adventists in those days:

- [PERGO 7.4: What is God?](#) He is material, organized intelligence, **possessing both body and parts**. Man is in his image.
- [PERGO 7.5:](#) What is Jesus Christ? He is the Son of God, and is like his Father, being "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." He is a material intelligence, **with body, parts, and passions; possessing immortal flesh and immortal bones**.

In Early Writings, EGW tells us of the conversation she had with Christ in vision as follows:

[EW 54.2](#): I asked Jesus if His Father had a form like Himself. **He said He had**, but I could not behold it, for said He, “If you should once behold the glory of His person, you would cease to exist.”

It is well understood that Early Adventists battled against what they called “*spiritualizers*” who spiritualized away God, Christ, heaven, the heavenly sanctuary, God’s throne, and the coming of Christ. They turned them into either immaterial or non-literal, “spiritual” concepts. Quoting James White,

“This class [[*ref. Jude 3-4*]] can be no other than those who spiritualize away **the existence of the Father and Son as two distinct literal, tangible persons**.... The way *spiritualizers* have disposed of or denied the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ is first using the old unscriptural Trinitarian creed, viz., that Jesus Christ is the eternal God, though they have not one passage to support it, while we have plain scripture testimony in abundance that he is the Son of the eternal God.” —[James White, January 24, 1846, The Day Star](#).

The defense of the Father’s *materiality* occupied a central place in early Adventist apologetics because, if God were not a material being, the need for a literal throne, sanctuary, and heavenly ministry would not be necessary. A spiritualized understanding of the divine would thus undermine the very foundation of SDA theology, creating a domino effect that would ultimately weaken the doctrine of Christ’s priestly ministry in heaven.

SDAs today, however, do not openly declare the Father to be material, at least not in their definition of the Trinity. Therefore, relative to other denominations, Adventists’ position on the Trinity is incomplete.

Triune spirits. The Trinitarian teaching on the nature of God is that “He is a Spirit” and that “God has no body”. As this [Catholic Catechism](#) reads:

- **21. Where is God?** God is everywhere. God is present in everything that He has made: in the farthest star, in the whole world and in every part of it, and in each of us wherever we are. Nor is He divided up so that part of Him is here and part there: but, since He is a Spirit, He is whole and complete everywhere...
- **23. Has God any body?** God has no body; He is a Spirit.

This pertains to not only the Father and Holy Spirit, but also to Jesus. That is, the Father is a Spirit, the Holy Spirit is a Spirit, and Jesus is a Spirit. (The idea that Jesus is a spirit is supported by 2 Corinthians 3:18, “For this comes from the Lord the Spirit.”) Taken together, we have the Father (who is a Spirit) utilizing His Son (who is a Spirit) to send us the Holy Spirit (who is a Spirit). So we have:

- Spirit (the Father)
- via Spirit (the Son)
- sending Spirit (the Holy Spirit)

Thus, operationally, the Triune God is: **Spirit via Spirit sending Spirit**. Once you wrap your head around that idea, here's the next thought: Since one of the properties of the Spirit is to be everywhere, then all three members of the Trinity are everywhere. Even Jesus is everywhere (see #46 of the [Catholic Catechism](#) which says, "As God, Jesus Christ is everywhere").

This leads to the provocative question: If all three members of the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are Spirit and are *everywhere*, then what is the sense of sending the Holy Spirit to mankind when both Jesus and the Father are **already here** by virtue of being Spirit and being *everywhere*?

Kellogg and immaterialism. The "Kellogg crisis of 1903-1907" refers to the controversy within the SDA Church surrounding Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's book, *The Living Temple*. Kellogg's book presented pantheistic views, suggesting God's presence in all things, which was condemned by Ellen White as unorthodox and damaging to the church's teachings. The crisis led to public warnings, a divided response from the church, and Kellogg's eventual disfellowshipping in 1907, although he continued to influence health work within the church. During the crisis, Dr. Kellogg abandoned the Church's antitrinitarian stance, declaring that the doctrine of the Trinity was a better fit with his pantheistic views. Dr. Kellogg's shift in theology was reported as follows:

"He [Kellogg] then stated that his former views regarding the trinity [[i.e. *his former non-trinitarian views*]] had stood in his way of making a clear and absolutely correct statement; but that within a short time he had come to believe in the trinity, and could now see pretty clearly where all the difficulty was, and believed that he could clear the matter up satisfactorily. He told me that he now believed in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and his view was that it was God the Holy Ghost, and not God the Father, that filled all space, and every living thing." —[Letter from A.G. Daniels to Elder W.C. White](#) (Ellen's son) concerning a conversation he had with Kellogg. October 29, 1903.

When EGW was introduced to Kellogg's book, *The Living Temple*, she immediately recognized the assault on the SDA Church's understanding on the personality of God and began to warn against it. In brief, she said,

[ISM 203.2](#): I knew that I must warn our brethren and sisters not to enter into controversy over the presence and personality of God. The statements made in *Living Temple* in regard to this point are incorrect. The scripture used to substantiate the doctrine there set forth, is scripture misapplied.

Among EGW's warnings, she again presented her early vision, as detailed in [Early Writings, p. 54.2](#). This vision made clear that God the Father indeed had a form like that of Jesus. That is to say, that God the Father was a *material* being. This was the position the SDA Church held throughout its early years. The idea of a "God the Holy Ghost" as a deity "that filled all space" was totally foreign to SDA thinking—neither a Trinity God, nor an *immaterial* God was ever taught by the early SDA Church.

Current SDA view on materiality. Although not officially stated in the *28 Fundamental Beliefs*, present-day Adventists hold to an **immaterial** God. You can read about it in the following:

- *AdventistToday*: However, in this instance, the context seems clear to me that the "he" and "him" whom "we will be like" is God the Father, not the resurrected Jesus Christ. The epistle specifically asserts that, as resurrected beings, **we will be like God the Father, who is immaterial** or, as systematic theologians say, "incorporeal." —[What Kind of Bodies Will We Have In the Sweet By and By?](#), AdventistToday.org, March 8, 2022.
- *Handbook of SDA Theology*: In biblical anthropomorphisms, God reveals what He is and what He can do in terms of human realities. For instance, when God says that He has an arm (Ex. 15:16; Ps. 89:13), **He does not mean that He has exactly or univocally what we call an arm.** *The expression signifies* that God's reality is capable of performing all that can be performed by a human arm, and infinitely more. We cannot conceive or imagine the actual structure of God's reality that allows Him to perform these acts. —Fernando L. Canale, [Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology](#), Vol. 12, "Doctrine of God" or [full PDF](#).

When Fernando L. Canale says, "*The expression signifies*," he is telling us that a body part of God (such as "an arm") is simply an *expression*, but not to be understood literally — **"He does not mean that He has exactly or univocally what we call an arm."** That is, we are to understand God's physical reality *metaphorically*, not literally. In other words, it's all pretend and make-believe. God pretends to be like us, but He really isn't. God pretends to have body parts, but He really doesn't. God pretends to be a Father and have a Son, but He really doesn't. God pretends

to sit on a throne, but really doesn't. And so on. The AdventistToday article conveys the same idea—that in heaven, we too will be like God the Father, **immaterial** in nature.

Thus, the early Adventist view, including EGW, on materiality is the complete opposite to the present SDA view.

SDA: Nine “proof texts” examined [\[e\]](#)

Belief #2 (The Trinity) in the [“28 Fundamental Beliefs” \(2020 edition\)](#) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church provides nine (9) “proof texts” in support of the Trinity doctrine. The full doctrinal statement reads as follows:

#2 The Trinity: There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. God, who is love, is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation. (*Gen. 1:26; Deut. 6:4; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; John 3:16 2 Cor. 1:21, 22; 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2.*)

Four assertions. The intent of the nine proof texts, of course, is to give biblical evidence to the four assertions made by the doctrine itself. These four assertions are:

1. **Three-in-one.** That “there is one God...a unity of three coeternal Persons.”
2. **Coeternality.** That these three Persons are *coeternal*.
3. **One substance (*homoousia*).** That these three Persons are immortal, all-powerful (*omnipotent*), all-knowing (*omniscient*), *supreme* above all, and ever present (*omnipresent*).
4. **Incomprehensibility.** That these three Persons are infinite and beyond human comprehension.

Proof texts examined. The nine verses are quoted below from the ESV, except for John 3:16 which is quoted from the NKJV. Our commentary on each of these verses follows.

1. Genesis 1:26: Then God said, “**Let us make man in our image**, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

Commentary on Genesis 1:26: Nothing in this verse implies a three-Person, coeternal God. The plural pronoun “us” which occurs only four times in the Old Testament gives no hint of who the “us” includes. The “us” could have been his divine council which included angels, as some Jewish commentators suggest. EGW believed that the “us” was the Father

speaking to His Son (cf. [EW 145.1](#), “But when God said to His Son...”). This understanding is in harmony with the New Testament concept of God creating the worlds through his Son (Hebrews 1:2).

The four instances of “us” in the Old Testament are Genesis 1:25; 3:22; 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8. None provide support for a triune God. In contrast, the Hebrew word, Yehovah (the most common name for God in the OT), occurs over 6,800 times, all in the singular—that is, they all refer to a single Being.

2. Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Commentary on Deuteronomy 6:4: The term “LORD” is in the original Hebrew, *Yehovah*. Therefore, it literally reads, “Hear, O Israel: Yehovah our God, Yehovah is one.” Trinitarians regard the term “one” (Hebrew, *echad*) to be a compound unity—i.e. that “one” is a *semantic* plural while being *grammatically* singular. This misunderstanding of “compound unity” is discussed in detail in the article entry, “[God of the Bible](#)” under the heading: God as a “compound unity”. Suffice to say, the “one” this verse is referring to is Yehovah, who is unmistakably understood to be one divine Person, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Even Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4 in Mark 12:29 and affirms the scribe’s and the Jewish audience’s understanding of the verse. If this verse meant a plurality, Jesus had the perfect opportunity to clarify its meaning, but he didn’t. He only reaffirmed the Jewish understanding of the verse. In truth, Jesus believed what the Jews believed, that there is only one God (John 17:3, “the only true God”).

In the ancient Aramaic translation of the Torah, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, this verse reads as follows, “[Hear, O Israel, our father, the Lord our God, the Lord is one](#)” (or [full PDF](#)). This expanded version in the Aramaic language suggests the ancients understood the Shema (Deut. 6:4) to be speaking of the Father.

3. Isaiah 6:8: And I heard the voice of the Lord [Hebrew, *Adonay*] saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Commentary on Isaiah 6:8: This is one of the four Old Testament references to “us” as discussed in the above notes on Genesis 1:26. The same commentary applies to this verse.

4. Matthew 28:19: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Commentary on Matthew 28:19: This verse is discussed in detail in the “[Notes on Matthew 28:19](#)” section. There is abundant evidence against the traditional wording of this verse. Its authenticity is questioned on the

grounds of textual, literary and historical criticism. Christian scholars suspect that it is an interpolation. Rather than reading, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the evidence strongly supports the belief that the original reading was, “baptizing them in *my* name,” which refers to Jesus only. All baptisms in the Book of Acts were done in the name of Jesus (e.g. Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). None used the threefold name.

5. *John 3:16* (NKJV): For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Commentary on *John 3:16*: Only two divine Persons are listed here. This is not a triune God proof text.

6. *2 Corinthians 1:21-22*: And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Commentary on *2 Corinthians 1:21-22*: In the above verse there is *one* God. He (God) “establishes us with you in Christ.” This one God has also “anointed us” and “put his seal on us and given us his Spirit.” We are *sealed* by God with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) which God (the Father) *poured* out at Pentecost (Acts 2:18, 33). As the apostle Peter said,

Acts 2:32-33: This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, **and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Again, this verse is speaking of only one God, not a triune God. The spirit is *his spirit* which God *poured* out through Jesus at Pentecost.

7. *2 Corinthians 13:14*: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Commentary on *2 Corinthians 13:14*: In this verse, three powers are mentioned; but notice, only one of them is called God. One is the Lord, and the other is the Holy Spirit through which we have communion or fellowship with God and Jesus. The verse does not say fellowship “*with*” the spirit, but fellowship “*of*” the spirit. It is the fellowship that comes *of* or *by* the spirit such that we can have fellowship ***with*** the Father and ***with*** the Son and ***with*** each other. The spirit is the means by which we have fellowship with others.

1 John 1:3: that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to

you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The problem Trinitarians have is not making a distinction between Persons and Essence. This is what this verse is dealing with. The topic of Persons vs. Essence is covered in detail in the article entry, "[*Spirit as Essence*](#)".

8. Ephesians 4:4-6: There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ **one God and Father of all**, who is over all and through all and in all.

Commentary on Ephesians 4:4-6: This verse clearly states that there is "one God and Father of all." He is not a committee of three Persons. Also, this one God is "over all and through all and in all." He is not coequal with anyone. Not a Trinitarian proof text at all.

9. 1 Peter 1:2: according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Commentary on 1 Peter 1:2: This verse mentions only one God, the Father, not a committee of three Persons. Also, it is not the sanctification "*with*" the spirit, but sanctification "*of*" or "*by*" the spirit. As the spirit is the means by which we have fellowship with others, the spirit is the means by which we gain sanctification.

Concluding thoughts. The Trinity statement found in the Seventh-day Adventist Church's "[28 Fundamental Beliefs](#)" (2020 edition) provides nine Biblical proof texts to support this belief. The statement itself makes a minimum of four assertions (already listed at the beginning). What remains to be answered is the question: Have these four assertions been reasonably and satisfactorily validated from Scripture? The answer is: No, not at all. In fact, by any measure, nothing was validated:

- Not the three-in-one God assertion;
- Not the coeternal assertion;
- Not the same substance (*homoousia*) assertion;
- Not the incomprehensible assertion.

A complete lack of Biblical support for any of these assertions. This is surprising, given the scholarship the Seventh-day Adventist Church is known for. One would expect that the best evidence possible would be given. Yet none was provided. One can only conclude that the reason none was provided is that none is available. Again, NO PROOF texts were given in support of the Trinity by a Christian denomination possessing superb Biblical scholarship.

BRI: Twelve points of biblical evidence examined [[41](#)]

Below are the twelve (12) points of Biblical evidence (containing over 60 Bible verses) proposed by the BRI in support of the Trinity by the use of “theological reasoning”. (Reference: [Biblical Research Institute \(BRI\) Release-9, May, 2015, p. 21.](#))

1. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are **eternal**.
2. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit **created all things**.
3. The Three are each **omnipresent**.
4. The Three are each **omniscient**.
5. The Three are each **true and good**.
6. They each have a **self-regulating will**.
7. They are each the **fountain of life**.
8. They each **sanctify us**.
9. Each fills our souls with **divine love**.
10. Each gives **divine law**.
11. Each **dwells in believers’ hearts**.
12. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are, **each by Himself, the supreme Jehovah and God**: (a) “I am Jehovah thy God”; (b) “Jehovah our God” and “the Highest”; (c) “Jehovah God” and “the Highest”. Yet God is one.

The Biblical evidence on these twelve (12) points is examined below. The “*Scripture references*” were supplied by the BRI.

1. **ETERNAL** (*Scripture references*: Rom. 16:26; John 8:58; Mic. 5:2; Heb. 9:14; Deut. 33:27).

Commentary: Certainly God the Father is eternal; there is ample Biblical evidence for this. The Son is never declared, nor ever declares himself to be, eternal. The proof text often used is John 8:58. However, translation *bias* on John 8:58 is quite evident (see “[Notes on John 8:58](#)”). The other one of interest is Hebrews 9:14,

Hebrews 9:14: how much rather shall the blood of Christ, who, through *the* eternal spirit offers himself flawless to God.

Note that in the Greek text, the article “*the*” is missing from the phrase “*the* eternal spirit”. This verse could easily be referring to God’s spirit, not a Third Entity. A reasonable understanding of this verse is that the “eternal spirit” **of God** was active in Jesus’ life as Jesus offered himself “flawless to God”. Also see the footnote on Hebrews 9:14.

2. **CREATED ALL THINGS** (*Scripture references*: 1 Cor. 8:6; Ps. 100:3; Col. 1:16; Job 33:4).

Commentary: Yes, the Father created all things *through* the Son. God the Father is the Creator and Jesus was His agent in Creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:15-17). Of interest is Job 33:4,

Job 33:4: The spirit [Hebrew: *ruach*; “spirit” or “breath”] of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life

This verse is not speaking of a Third Person, but is in fact speaking of God’s *ruach* (or *breath*). This idea is repeated in the second clause of this verse (“the *breath* of the Almighty gives me life”). It was God’s *breath* which gave life to Man (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 33:6; Ps. 104:29-30).

3. **OMNIPRESENT** (*Scripture references:* Jer. 23:24; Matt. 28:20; Ps. 139:7; Acts 17:28, 29).

Commentary: In the *Scripture references* used, only the Father is omnipresent through his spirit (Psalm 139:7, “Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”). That is, the Father is omnipresent by means of his spirit.

With respect to the Son, it is evident that he is *only* omnipresent by way of the Spirit. After the Resurrection, Jesus went to Heaven (in the Ascension) and came back to the disciples in Spirit. Otherwise, why would he send the Spirit to speak in his place (John 14:16; 15:26)? That is, if Jesus is omnipresent, he would not need a Third Entity to speak for him at all. His presence and the Spirit’s presence (to speak for Jesus) would be redundant.

4. **OMNISCIENT** (*Scripture references:* Acts 15:18; John 21:17; 1 Cor. 2:10; Heb. 4:13).

Commentary: We will consider two of these *Scripture references* (John 21:17 and 1 Corinthians 2:10). John 21:17 reads:

John 21:17: Lord, you know all things.

In this verse, Peter is responding to Jesus’ query, for the third time, of whether he loved him or not. It should be obvious from the context that Peter was not making a universal declaration, but simply giving a personal viewpoint. Peter knew that Jesus knew everything about *him*, not everything about *everything*. In other words, it was not an absolute statement, but a relative one in his relationship to Jesus.

Moreover, we know in fact that Jesus did NOT know everything about *everything* because he grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52) and did not know the hour of his return (Mark 13:32). If Jesus did not know even one thing, which is true, then he is not omniscient.

In addition, the term “all” in the Bible does not always mean “everything in existence”. A simple word search of “all” and you will find

many examples where “all” does not mean “everything in existence” (e.g. Eph. 6:21; 1 John 2:20, 27; John 14:26; 2 Sam. 16:22; Psalm 22:7; Psalm 118:10; Hosea 7:4; Matthew 3:5; John 10:8). Students of the Bible are well aware of this type of overreach when dealing with other terms such as “eternal” as in “eternal fire”. If “eternal” means “forever and ever” then Sodom and Gomorrah would still be burning (Jude 1:7). The fact of the matter is that there is contextual scope for the word “eternal” just as there is contextual scope for the word “all”.

On 1 Corinthians 2:10. The other verse to consider is 1 Corinthians 2:10, “For the Spirit searches all things.” Again, understanding the contextual scope is important here. So let’s read this verse in context:

1 Corinthians 2:9-11 (NKJV): But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” ¹⁰ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches **all things**, yes, the deep things of God. ¹¹ For what man knows **the things of a man** except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows **the things of God** except the Spirit of God.

There is parallel phrasing here. There are “the things of a man” and “the things of God.” The things that man knows he knows by his spirit, and the things God knows is by His spirit (v.11). Then, the things of God that are revealed to man are revealed to men *through* God’s spirit (“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit”). “God” in this verse is “*ho theos*” (literally “the God”) which is understood to mean God the Father. It is the spirit of God the Father communicating to us the things of God. Therefore, contextually, the “Spirit” this verse is referring to is the Father’s spirit. And if God the Father is omniscient, so is His spirit. This verse does not prove the Spirit to be a separate entity with separate omniscience.

5. TRUE AND GOOD (*Scripture references:* John 7:28; 17:17; Ps. 34:8; John 10:11; 14:6; 1 John 5:6).

Commentary: Yes, the Father and Son are true and good. However, the only reference supporting the idea that the Spirit is true and good is 1 John 5:6 (“the spirit is the truth”). Understand that Christ referred to himself as “the way, **the truth**, and the life” (John 14:6) and he declared the Spirit which the Father would send to be the “spirit of truth” (John 14:16-17). The question is *not* whether the spirit is true, but whether the spirit is a separate entity or whether it is the spirit of the Father and/or the Son. This one verse does not address the identity of the spirit at all.

6. SELF-REGULATING WILL (*Scripture references:* Eph. 1:11; Matt. 11:27; John 17:24; 1 Cor. 12:11).

Commentary: No question that the Father has a self-regulating will. It is the Father's will we pray for (Matthew 6:10, "Thy will be done"). And that Jesus has a will. On 1 Corinthians 12:11,

1 Corinthians 12:11: But the one and the same spirit **energizes** all of these, distributing to each one separately as he wills.

It says in this verse that the spirit "energizes" [G1754, *energei*] all of these (gifts, services, and activities), yet in v.6 it says that it is God the Father who does this ("but it is the same God [*ho theos*] who **energizes** all of them in all people"). So who is doing the energizing? Is it God the Father or is it the Spirit? The simple answer is that it is God the Father through his spirit.

7. FOUNTAIN OF LIFE (*Scripture references:* Deut. 30:20; Ps 36:9; John 3:8; 5:21; Deut. 30:20).

Commentary: Yes, the Father is the fountain of life. And, yes, the Son gives life to whom he wills and is also spoken of as "the fountain of life" in the EGW writings. Yet, the Father has life in Himself, while the Son has been *given this life* that he has in himself (John 5:26). Here is how EGW puts it:

DA 21.2: But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. "I do nothing of Myself," said Christ; "the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father." "I seek not Mine own glory," but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth **the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God**, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: **through the beloved Son, the Father's life flows out to all**; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, **representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.**

Thus, the fountain of life originates with the Father, the Father's life then "flows out to all" *through* the Son. The Father is the Source; the Son is the agent or channel.

On John 3:8: John 3:8 reads, "So is everyone who is born of the spirit." This verse does not specify "the spirit" to be a Third Entity. It could very well read, "the spirit" *of God*. After all, God the Father has a spirit and it is through God's spirit that life flows out to all.

8. SANCTIFY US (*Scripture references:* Phil. 4:13; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Pet. 1:2; Jude 1).

Commentary: It is plain that the Father sanctifies us (1 Thess. 5:23) through his Son (Rom. 8:29-30). It is also plain that the Son sets us free (John 8:36) to do works of righteousness. It is also true that we are sanctified in our spirit, *through* the spirit. The question is not the *work* of the spirit, but *who* the spirit is. None of the verses referenced in this declaration answer this question. As Romans 8:9 tells us, it could very well be the spirit of God or the spirit of Christ that is at work in us to sanctify us.

9. DIVINE LOVE (*Scripture references:* 1 John 5:1; 2:15; 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 15:30; Col. 1:8; Jude 21).

Commentary: Yes, the Father and Son manifest divine love; plenty of Bible references speak to this. On Romans 15:30,

Romans 15:30: Now I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf.

The phrase “by the love of the spirit” can be understood to be inclusive of the love shared with the saints of Rome. Meaning that they are together in one spirit and in one love. After all, Paul is desiring for them “to strive together with” him “in your prayers to God” for him. If they have a shared spirit and love for one another, then they “strive together”. Rather than this verse speaking of a Third Entity, it is speaking of the spirit of love shared by the believers. Several commentators on this verse have this same view. Here is one:

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary on Romans 15:30: “and by the love of the Spirit”—not the love which the Spirit bears to us, but that love which He kindles in the hearts of believers towards each other; that is “By that Saviour whose name is alike dear to all of us and whose unsearchable riches I live only to proclaim, and by that love one to another which the blessed Spirit diffuses through all the brotherhood, making the labors of Christ’s servants a matter of common interest to all—I beseech you.”

10. EACH GIVES DIVINE LAW (*Scripture references:* Neh. 8:8; Ps. 19:7; Acts 13:2; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2; Col. 3:16).

Commentary: This is an ambiguous statement and the Bible verses referenced do not help to clarity. So, let’s just list them and give a brief comment on each, and leave it at that.

- **Nehemiah 8:8:** And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.
- **On Nehemiah 8:8:** “The book, the law of God” was understood to mean the Torah—the five books of Moses.

- **Psalm 19:7:** Yehovah's law is perfect, restoring the soul. Yehovah's covenant is sure, making wise the simple.
- **Acts 13:2:** As they were serving the Lord and fasting, the holy spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."
- **On Acts 13:2:** No reference to divine law in this verse. The three places in Acts where the phrase "the holy spirit said/says" occur in Acts 4:8; 13:2 and 21:11. In Acts chapter 13, "Lord" appears 8 times (Acts 13:2, 10-12, 44, 47-49). Out of these, only v.2 seems ambiguous. The others clearly point toward "Lord" being "God". Therefore, in light of the contextual evidence, the "holy spirit" in v.2 refers to the Lord God giving this revelation to the believers at Antioch by way of his spirit.
- **Romans 8:2:** For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.
- **On Romans 8:2:** Understand that "law" (*nomos* in the Greek) has a very wide semantic range. It could include the Mosaic Law; the entire Old Testament; a law, rule, regulation, principle, precept, or injunction; anything that is established in the culture; and, the moral instruction given by Christ. What it means here is a matter of interpretation. How then are we to understand this "law of the spirit of life"? We have the answer a few verses later. In v.9 it tells us that it is the "spirit of God" and the "spirit of Christ" which is the spirit of life, because the "spirit *is* life" (v.10).
- **Galatians 6:2:** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
- **On Galatians 6:2:** The "law of Christ" is most likely referring to loving one another (John 13:34; cf. Gal. 5:14), as the context seems to suggest.
- **Colossians 3:16:** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
- **On Colossians 3:16:** No reference to divine law in this verse.

11. DWELLS IN THE BELIEVERS' HEARTS (*Scripture references:* Eph. 3:17; John 14:17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Col. 1:27; Isa. 57:15).

Commentary: Yes, the Father and Son dwell in believers' hearts. That the *parakletos* (John 14:17) also dwells in believers' hearts is also true. However, the identity of the *parakletos* is what is up for debate. Trinitarians believe the *parakletos* is the Third Person of the Trinity, while non-trinitarians use 1 John 2:1 to prove that it's Jesus Christ ("we have an Advocate [Greek: *parakletos*] with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous").

12. EACH BY HIMSELF, THE SUPREME JEHOVAH AND GOD

(*Scripture references*: Ex. 20:2; Isa. 40:3; cf. Matt. 3:3; Luke 1:76; Matt. 10:11; Ezek. 8:1, 3; Luke 1:35; Deut. 6:4).

Commentary: The reference to Luke 1:35 is discussed separately under “[Notes on Luke 1:35](#)”. Also, the reference to Deut. 6:4 (the *Shema*) is discussed separately in the article entry, “[God of the Bible](#)”.

On *Isaiah 40:3*, “**Prepare the way of Yehovah in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God.**” This verse is quoted in Matthew 3:3 and it is here suggested that the coming of the Messiah and “Yehovah” are equivalent. However, no religious Jew would have thought such a thing. It was the coming of the *Messiah*—Yehovah’s representative—that the people in Jesus’ day were waiting for. They were not expecting Yehovah *Himself* to be coming down the highway. Jesus was not God, but he was God’s *Messiah* (Revelation 11:15). Also, it was customary to attribute the work of a prophet to the work of God. For example, Luke 7:16 says, “and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’” Effectively, the people proclaimed that God had “visited” them by sending a great prophet.

On *Luke 1:76*, “**And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare the way for him.**” The child here is Zechariah’s son, John the Baptist. He would be a prophet of the Most High. The Most High is God the Father (Luke 1:32). He would “go before the Lord to prepare the way for him.” Whether the phrase “the Lord” is referring to Yehovah or the Messiah, there is nothing here that suggests Yehovah and the Messiah to be equivalent.

On *Ezekiel 8:3*, “**and the spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem.**” First of all, this was a vision Ezekiel had that lasted from Ezekiel 8:3 to 11:24, which all happened while Ezekiel was right in the middle of meeting with the elders of Judah that had been taken captive to Babylon. Whether it should be understood that the spirit is Yehovah or it is Yehovah’s spirit which transported Ezekiel into vision is a matter of interpretation. However, nothing about this verse suggests that the spirit was a Third Entity who also was called Yehovah.

► X. Pagan Worship

This article argues that the form of “worship” practiced today in the Catholic Church—and, with variations, in most Protestant churches—was neither instituted by Christ nor observed by the apostolic church. Rather, it took shape in the fourth century, when Constantine’s basilicas provided a new architectural setting for Christian assembly, and was later codified and institutionalized by the Catholic Church.

True worship. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus taught that future worship — “true worship”—would no longer be defined by location or external form, but by worship offered in spirit and in truth (John 4:23–24).

Within Jewish religious practice of the time, worship had largely become formalized and ritualized. Prescribed forms were meticulously observed; yet often failed to produce the *inward transformation* they were meant to achieve. The worship God sought then—and still seeks today—is marked by transformation of the heart rather than ritual observance or outward display.

Vestiges of Rome. Moreover, the communal house-church model introduced in the New Testament—where believers gathered in homes to break bread and edify one another—was largely abandoned centuries later, particularly in the post-Nicene fourth century. In its place emerged patterns drawn from **Jewish temple practice and pagan religious systems**, emphasizing appeasement of God through ritual acts administered by a priesthood within great cathedrals centered on altars.

This **Catholic model** was largely retained within Protestant churches and continues today. In this respect, the Reformation effectively stopped short of reforming the form and style of worship itself.

Executive summary. The major topics covered in this article include:

- The Sanctuary System Superseded
- [The Early Church](#)
- [Constantine’s basilicas](#)
- [Temple worship elements](#)
- [Ecclesia vs. koinonia \(church vs. fellowship\)](#)
- “Worship” usage in the Bible
- [Lord’s Supper](#)
- [God’s presence](#)
- [Restoration of True Worship](#)
- [Adventist “church property” ownership](#)
- [Worship with a Bedlam of Noise](#)

The Sanctuary System Superseded

The Old Testament **sanctuary system** had a dual purpose: (1) it was the earthly place where God dwelt symbolically among His people, and (2) it was a divinely designed object lesson that illustrated the plan of salvation, culminating in the ministry of Christ. The sanctuary was **typological**—a “figure,” “shadow,” or “object lesson” that pointed beyond itself to Christ and his heavenly ministry.

According to Ellen G. White, the sacrificial system was designed to teach faith in the coming Messiah. Every sacrifice pointed to Christ: the lamb represented Christ, the priest represented Christ, the blood represented Christ’s own sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation came only because of the future sacrifice of Christ. Thus, the entire system centered on Christ.

Moreover, the earthly sanctuary was a copy of the heavenly sanctuary. Per EGW, “The sanctuary in Heaven... is the great original, of which the sanctuary built by Moses was a copy” (GC88, p.413.3). **When Christ died, the typical system reached its fulfillment.** “Type met antitype in the death of God’s Son” (DA 757.1). The tearing of the temple veil (cf. Mt. 27:51; Mk. 15:28; Lk. 23:45) demonstrated that: (a) earthly sacrifices had ended, (b) the priesthood of the temple had fulfilled its purpose, and (c) Christ had become the true sacrifice, once for all.

In the New Testament, according to Paul (Ephesians 2:21), **Christ himself becomes the meeting place between God and man.** Consequently, the church—the assembly of believers—is the place where believers meet with Christ as a living, *functioning* body. The key concept here is “*functioning*,” that is, actively participating in and carrying forward the words and works of Christ.

[UL 315.5](#): **God has a church.** It is not the great cathedral, neither is it the national establishment, neither is it the various denominations; it is the people who love God and keep His commandments. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). **Where Christ is** even among the humble few, **this is Christ’s church**, for the presence of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity can alone constitute a church.

Emmanuel (“God with us”) expresses God’s ultimate intention to make His presence known in Christ (Matthew 1:23). The divine presence that God sought to establish with Israel in the Old Testament is fulfilled in His Son, who is the expressed image of the Father. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42), the hour is coming when worshipers will no longer worship *in a temple* on this mountain or in Jerusalem, but true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The Early Church [\[e\]](#)

From the apostolic era through the early fourth century, the Early Church did not describe its meetings as “worship” or as a religious “service.” Rather, believers understood their assemblies as **gatherings**, not as formal or ceremonial events. Christian meetings did not involve ritual **prostration** or the offering of **sacrifices**, for the Levitical system had been fulfilled in Christ and such practices were no longer necessary. Moreover, after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, there was no longer a physical temple at which worship could be conducted.

Christian meetings (or gatherings) were primarily, horizontally-focused for **edification** instead of vertically focused (ceremonial worship and sacrifice). It was for the *work* of “building up” one another. If there was prostration of any form, it was when kneeling in prayer. Yet there was nothing ceremonial or ritualistic in kneeling—i.e. there was no requirement or merit in doing so. All this changed with the introduction of Christian basilicas by Emperor Constantine in the early part of the 4th century and the style of worship that followed.

Biblical church pattern. There were at least four characteristics found in the churches of the apostolic era.

1. *House churches.* They met in homes and were, therefore, numerically *small* churches. Many *small* churches in a given region as compared to today’s large (even mega) churches. Interestingly, the book of Acts begins in a **house** in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 13) and ends in a **house** in Rome (Acts 28:30).
2. *Localized governance.* Local governance and leadership, consisting of elders and deacons. No clergy involved in the churches at all (i.e. no clergy-laity distinction). No hierarchical, top-down, centralized organizational structure.
3. *Full participation.* Everyone was free to participate and contribute. Gifts of the spirit distributed to *all* and therefore, *all* were “ordained” to edify the body. Not one man speaking for the many, but the many speaking for the One Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. No formalities; no liturgy; no structure; no programs; no bulletin. Simple and spontaneous involvement.
4. *Full meal Lord’s Supper fellowship.* The Early Church did not celebrate the Lord’s Supper with a wafer of bread and a sip of wine, but ate a full meal together in Christian fellowship on a weekly basis. We believe this to be the case from Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church’s misuse of the practice as found in 1 Corinthians 11:20-30.

An important characteristic of the apostles' "church" system is that it was easily reproducible and self-sustaining.

Tithes and offerings. In today's churches, the bulk of tithes and offerings collected goes to the salaries of the clergy and staff, and the maintenance of the church and office buildings. Not so in the Early Church, given that there was no clergy, no church staff, and no church and office buildings. Any tithes and offerings collected was for advancing the gospel via **itinerate preachers** (apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers) and for the **care of the poor and needy**.

Temple of believers. To the Early Church, the "temple" was the body of believers. This was particularly true after 70 AD with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. However, after 313 AD, with the building of Christian basilicas by Emperor Constantine, the church of believers became the church *building*, housing believers.

Constantine's basilicas [\[e\]](#)

Emperor Constantine was responsible for initiating the obsolete Jewish or *pagan* form of temple worship through Christian basilicas. Previous to this, Christians congregated in "house" churches, adapted halls, and even catacombs (as the church went underground because of persecution).



The 4th-century Basilica of Constantine at Trier (photo by Thomas Johannes)

Constantine's building program. Constantine began his construction program in 313 AD, building monumental basilicas in the city of Rome including the Church of St. Peter. He also built churches in the Holy Land, most notably the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and he built churches in his newly-constructed capital of Constantinople. All of these, 58 churches and baptisteries and two monasteries, were all constructed at government expense.

Constantine's basilicas. Constantinian basilicas typically included:

- **Nave:** space for the congregation
- **Aisles:** side walkways
- **Apse:** semi-circular end housing the altar and bishop's chair (cathedral)
- **Clerestory windows:** light symbolizing divine presence
- **Atrium:** courtyard for preparation and catechumens

Evolution of temple-like worship practices. Although basilicas were not temples by design, worship practices increasingly **absorbed temple concepts**:

- The **apse/altar area** began to function like a "holy place".
- The **bishop** assumed a role analogous to a high priest.
- The congregation became more **passive observers**.

This marked a shift from earlier Christian emphasis on: shared participation and table fellowship. The emergence of clerical mediation with imperial support followed, where:

- Clergy gained legal privileges and social status.
- Worship became more formalized and professionalized.
- Distinctions hardened between: clergy and laity, sacred and secular space.

The "Eucharist" increasingly emphasized **sacrifice** rather than communal meal. Imperial court ceremony influenced church worship with:

- Processions,
- Vestments,
- Fixed liturgical prayers,
- Use of incense, candles, and sacred music.

The bishop's entrance could resemble an *imperial adventus* (royal arrival).

Sacred time and space. The Constantinian era also reinforced: dedicated holy days, fixed worship locations, and consecrated buildings. This contrasted with earlier Christian theology that emphasized: the community

as the temple, worship “in spirit and truth”, and eschatological anticipation rather than spatial sanctity.

Theological consequences. There is no question that there were gains to Constantine’s involvement in Christianity, including:

- Public legitimacy of Christianity
- Protection from persecution
- Ability to teach and catechize large populations
- Preservation of texts and tradition

However, there were major losses or tensions as well, including:

- Movement away from house-based intimacy
- Increased dependence on ritual and clergy
- Partial re-sacralization of space resembling Old Testament temple patterns
- Risk of external conformity replacing internal transformation

Summary perspective. Constantine’s basilica program:

- Changed Christianity from a persecuted movement to an **imperial religion**.
- Provided architectural forms that **shaped worship for centuries**.
- Encouraged a shift from participatory, community-centered worship toward **ceremonial, priest-centered liturgy**.
- Created enduring tension between: (a) New Covenant theology and **Old Covenant temple imagery**, and (b) spiritual worship and institutional form.

This historical development is crucial for understanding our discussion about true worship, sacred space, clerical authority, and form versus substance—themes that will be touched on in the following.

Temple worship elements [\[d\]](#)

Worship in the ancient world, both Jewish and pagan, meant having the following main elements:

- (1) **Temple building** – large and ornate
- (2) **Priesthood** – supported through tithes and offerings
- (3) **Altar and Sacrifice** – required elements for worship

(1) Temple building

The Jewish Temple became synonymous with the Christian term, “house of the Lord” and “house of prayer”. The church building then became

equivalent to the Jewish Temple, a Holy Place. As there is a Temple in Heaven, so there is a Temple on earth, the church building. Those who enter the church building are entering into a Sacred Place; a Holy Place. Therefore, anyone who enters therein is asked to maintain a level of “reverence” and silent prayer.

Temple terminology. House of God; Sanctuary; House of worship; Worship service. It is not New Testament church terminology in terms of Christian gatherings, but Old Testament Jewish Temple terminology. The question then becomes: Is this a valid way to look at our church buildings?

Purpose of the Temple. (a) The dwelling place of God on earth. (b) The place of sacrifice for sin. It was customary to begin with prostration and prayer when a worshiper entered the Temple grounds. It was typically done at the entrance or gate of the Temple. Songs were then viewed as “sacrifices of praise” into the house of the Lord. The term “holy place” became synonymous with the main meeting place or church auditorium. Hymns that speak to this: “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.” It is **Old Testament symbolism**, when Yehovah’s glory filled the Temple.

(2) Priesthood

Priests. Temple buildings must have those who “minister” in the temple. In the Old Testament, they were called priests, who were authorized to perform the sacred rituals of the sacrificial system in the Jewish Temple. This was also true of pagan priests. They were authorized to perform the sacred rituals of their religion, especially as mediatory agents and *gate-keepers* between humans and one or more of their deities. This was all done in their respective temples.

Few Protestant denominations give the title of “priest” to their temple ministers or clergy. Rather, they go for other (functional) descriptors such as: preacher, pastor, elder, or the more generic “minister”.

Priesthood duties. Besides ministering in the temple services, “priests” are also expected to perform a multitude of other tasks, including: evangelist, preacher, teacher, shepherd (of the flock), counselor, financial manager, administrator, organizer, parliamentarian, building superintendent and more. To say his duties are overextended, is an understatement.

Bishop, your earthly god. By around 390 AD, the bishop’s status in the church was elevated to the role of ruler, governor, king, potentate, and next to God, “your earthly god.”

[Apostolic Constitutions 2.26](#) (c. 390 AD): The bishop, he is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between

God and you in the several parts of your divine worship. He is the teacher of piety; and, next after God, he is your father, who has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. He is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, **your earthly god**, who has a right to be honoured by you.

(3) Altar and Sacrifice

Central to temple worship was a sacrificial system that involved the Altar (or altars) and the Sacrifice (or sacrifices). The Jewish Temple had a Bronze Altar where ritual sacrifices were performed, while the Sacrifice was either a domestic animal (such as a sheep) or a grain offering. In the Christian era, the Altar and Sacrifice was replaced with a ritualized practice of the Lord’s Supper with the emblems of the bread and the wine, representing or bringing to memory the death of Christ. To Catholics the liturgical communion service or **the Eucharist is a sacrifice** ([CCC §1367](#)).

Lord’s supper. The service of the Lord’s supper has become a ritualized, formal practice which Jesus never intended. Rather, Jesus’ intent was to remember him in a familial, home setting, practiced in an informal and regular basis, “as often as you eat this bread and drink this wine.”

Summary table of differences

The differences between the apostolic era and post-313 AD are listed in the following table:

Topic	Apostolic era	313 AD and onward
The Church is	The Body (of believers)	The Building
Meeting locale	Someone’s house; home setting	Auditorium with seats facing an altar (or platform)
Worship model	<i>Edification</i> : The building is functional; the meeting is edifying; the believers are maturing	<i>Worship</i> : The building is holy; the service is beautiful; the worshippers are reverent
Priesthood	<i>All</i> believers are the “anointed”. No <i>clergy</i> vs. <i>laity</i> distinction	<i>Clergy</i> : Trained, ordained and paid priesthood. <i>Clergy</i> vs. <i>laity</i> distinction
Order of service	<i>Spontaneous</i> ; horizontally oriented	<i>Formulaic</i> : liturgical, ritualistic; vertically oriented
Participation	<i>All</i> are free to contribute; gifts of the spirit	Focused on performers: musical, liturgical, theatrical; audience participation is minimal (inactive spectators)

Lord's supper	Regular full meal fellowship	Ritualized, periodic, emblematic ceremony
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Ecclesia vs. koinonia (church vs. fellowship) [4]

Ecclesia, but no koinonia. There are two basic Greek words used for church in the New Testament. One is *ecclesia* which speaks of the structure and government of the church. The other is *koinonia* that is the bonding relationship of the saints, which is loosely translated “fellowship” or “communion.” The *ecclesia* exists for the *koinonia*, not the other way around. The life and power of the church is its *koinonia* not the *ecclesia*. A church needs organization (*ecclesia*), but without true Christian fellowship (*koinonia*) it is weak, sickly, and dead. Without *koinonia* it cannot truly be called a Christian body or family or fellowship. When it comes to *ecclesia*, less is more; *koinonia* is the goal.

The Greek word *koinonia* and its cognate forms occupy a rich and theologically significant place in the New Testament vocabulary. At its core, the term conveys the idea of *sharing, participation, partnership, or communion*. It is not merely a passive association but an active, relational participation in something held in common. The breadth of its usage—appearing as a noun (*koinonia*, 17x; *koinonos*, 10x; *sugkoinonos*, 4x), adjectival form (*koinonikos*, 1x), and verbal forms (*koinoneō*, 8x; *sugkoinoneō*, 3x)—demonstrates its centrality to early Christian thought and practice.

I. Fellowship with the Father and the Son

One of the most profound uses of *koinonia* is found in reference to the believer’s relationship with God Himself. In 1 John 1:3, the apostle writes that the proclamation of the gospel is intended to bring others into “fellowship...with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” Here, *koinonia* signifies more than belief or intellectual assent; it denotes a living, participatory relationship with the divine.

This fellowship is grounded in the incarnation and mediated through Christ. Through him, believers are drawn into a shared life with God—participating in His light (1 John 1:5–7), His love, and His truth. It is both vertical (God and the believer) and transformative, implying a moral and spiritual alignment with God’s character. Fellowship with God is thus inseparable from walking in the light; it demands authenticity, obedience, and continual cleansing through Christ’s atoning work.

II. Communion in the body of believers and the blood of Christ

Koinonia also expresses the communal and sacramental life of the church. In 1 Corinthians 10:16, Paul speaks of the “communion (*koinonia*) of the blood of Christ” and the “communion (*koinonia*) of the body of Christ,” referring to participation in the Lord’s Supper. This use highlights both a vertical and horizontal dimension: believers share in Christ’s sacrificial death while simultaneously sharing with one another as members of one body.

Thus, *koinonia* encompasses the unity and mutual participation of believers. It involves shared worship, mutual edification, and practical expressions such as generosity and the bearing of one another’s burdens (cf. Acts 2:42; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8–9). The early church’s life was marked by this deep sense of common life—spiritual, relational, and even material.

Importantly, this communion is not merely symbolic but participatory: believers are united with Christ and, by extension, with each other. The church becomes a living organism in which each member shares in the life of the whole, reflecting the unity of Christ himself.

III. Communion between Jews and Gentiles

A particularly significant application of *koinonia* in the New Testament is its role in expressing the unity between Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ. This was a major theological and social breakthrough in the early church. In passages such as Romans 15:26 and Ephesians 3:6, *koinonia* language reflects the breaking down of ethnic and covenantal barriers.

Gentile believers are described as “fellow heirs” (*sugkoinōnoi*)—co-participants in the promises of God. This shared participation is not secondary or derivative but equal and full. The collection taken for the Jerusalem church (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4) is itself described as an act of *koinonia*, symbolizing tangible unity between culturally distinct groups.

This dimension of *koinonia* underscores the reconciling power of the gospel. In Christ, former divisions—ethnic, cultural, and religious—are overcome, creating a new humanity characterized by shared identity and mutual participation in God’s redemptive work.

***Oikos* ministry.** Related to *koinonia* is the term *oikos* which can have multiple meanings, including “house,” “household,” and “descendants”.

- *House*: A literal, physical dwelling place.
- *Household*: A family unit that includes men, women, children, and sometimes servants who live together and are under the

family's protection.

- *Descendants*: A line of descent from father to son through generations.

The Early Church viewed a believer's house as a place of ministry. Here are some key features of house ministry:

- *Oikos—where the gospel is shared*. “And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus” (Acts 5:42 ESV).
- *Oikos—where whole families are discipled*. The story of the Philippian jailor illustrates this in Acts 16:30-33.
- *Oikos—where compassion begins*. “But if anyone does not provide for his own relatives, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).
- *Oikos—where elders stand guard*. “so that he [*the elder*] may be able both to encourage others in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9b).

House church service. In today's house church service style, members celebrate Jesus with:

- **Prayer and praise.** Praise may include songs, hymns, reading of Psalms. Prayers may be of all kinds: thanksgiving, supplication, the Lord's Prayer, etc.
- **Sharing and teaching.** Discussion based. One person may talk at the beginning to spark conversation but then it opens up for the others to participate. Jesus taught in parables (and proverbs) which is a good way to start a discussion, particularly when children (and recent converts) are involved. Then there are short stories from Jesus' ministry found throughout the four gospels.
- **Apostles' teaching (optional).** A deeper study (involving “sound doctrine”) may call for a visit from an itinerant preacher (i.e., a pastor-teacher), a video, or a well-written article—followed in each case by Q&A and group discussion. It should be noted that this “second service” is not required, since in some instances during Ellen G. White's time a simple Sabbath School service was the only format practiced (see [RH October 14, 1884, par. 2](#)).
- **Lord's supper full meal fellowship.** Rotation in hosting the meeting may be helpful so as not to burden one family in having so many people in their home each week.
- **Afternoon activities.** Particularly with children and physically

active members, outdoor activities should be scheduled. Going on nature hikes is probably the easiest and the best.

The focus is on service and accountability through relationships instead of accountability to a program or a structure. The meetings are not just another event to fill the week, but is intentional Christianity, relationship based faith and practice. You will find helpful information at:

churchwithoutwallsinternational.org/house-church-101

Again, the problem with large (esp. mega) churches is that there is little to no accountability. The leaders have no idea what and who is sitting in their pews, and the pew “sitters” have no idea of how to hold their leaders accountable. Moreover, large church attendees are more prone to depend on and even worship their leaders than to “prove all things” on their own.

Pastors-teachers. The “gift of teaching” is related to but distinct from the “gift of prophecy” in that the teacher “explains” what the prophet proclaims—by reducing it to statements of doctrine and applying it to the church’s current situation. The teacher offers systematic instruction (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul adds the idea of “pastor” to that of teacher, because a teacher communicates best when he loves (*pastors*) those whom he teaches.

Ministry of the word. To the Early Church the “ministry of the Word” was of paramount importance. So much so that the apostles summoned the congregation and said to them, “It is not proper for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. . . But we will devote ourselves to *prayer* and to the *ministry of the word*” (Acts 6:2-4). The apostles knew their priority was to **prayer** and the **study of God’s word**, followed by preaching and teaching. They knew that they could not let “other things” distract them from these duties, however important they may be. So a division of labor was established, in which the role of deacons was ordained.

Thus, the role of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers is best understood to be “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity in the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13). These roles were then fulfilled through visitation and preaching and teaching in the various home churches (i.e. they were itinerate apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers). They did not preoccupy themselves in local church governance (the role of elders and deacons), but in prayer and Bible study, followed by preaching (i.e. proclaiming) and teaching. It should be noted that local elders were also expected to be “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

“Worship” usage in the Bible ^[e]

The Bible uses five words that are translated or relate to the concept of “worship”. In Greek, these five words are:

1. *Proskuneo* – To prostrate to
2. *Latreia* or *latreuo* – To serve with sacrifice
3. *Leitourgia* (G3009) – To perform a priestly duty in the Temple.
The term “liturgy” comes from this word.
4. *Sebomai* (G4576) – To revere, i.e. adore
5. *Threskeia* (G2356) – Religious observance or ceremonies

The first word, *proskuneo*, is the one most commonly used for “worship” (over 70% of the time), followed by the word, *latreia*. We will only focus on these two words in this study.

1. ***Proskuneo*** (G4352). To do homage or make obeisance by kneeling or prostration. It is generally translated as “worship” in the New Testament. In the Hebrew (Old Testament), it is the word *šāḥā* (H7812). Some variant contextual forms of prostration (or “worship”) include:

- “Fall down and prostrate” (21x OT; 12x NT).
- “Fall on his knees and prostrate” (Mark 15:19; 17x OT)
- “Fall on his face and prostrate (29x OT; 3x NT)
- “Fall on the ground and prostrate” (33x)
- “Fall at his feet, prostrating” (5x OT; 5x NT)
- “Come and prostrate” (43x OT)
- “Prostrate before” (8x)

Here are a couple of examples,

- *Genesis 42:6*: Joseph’s brothers came and **prostrated** themselves before him on the ground.
- *Matthew 2:11*: And after they came into the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary; and they fell down and worshipped [*lit.* **prostrated to**] him.

The actually meaning of *proskuneo* is that it is a physical act, not an emotion. It is also a form of greeting (see below).

***Proskuneo* as a greeting.** In ancient culture, when two equals greeted one another, they kissed each other on the lips. If there was a slight difference in rank, then the cheek was kissed. But if the difference in rank was great, then the person of lower status falls down and prostrates (from Herodotus, c. 430 BC). In the case of “greeting” God, one prostrates himself.

2. ***Latreia*** (G2999) and ***latreuo*** (G3000). To perform the service of God

according to the requirements of the Levitical law. It means to serve deity with **sacrifice**. In Hebrew, it is the word *ʾăbōdā* (H5656).

Dual religious obligations. The Jews had *two* fundamental religious obligations: (1) to appear *before* Yehovah three times a year—at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles—and (2) *not* to appear empty-handed; that is, they were to bring an offering or sacrifice.

This principle is reflected in the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5, “You shall not **prostrate** to or serve **sacrifices** to other gods”).

Jesus himself affirmed this understanding during the Temptation in the wilderness. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus responded to Satan, saying (*paraphrased*), “You shall **prostrate** to Yehovah your God and to him alone you shall **sacrifice**.”

A similar pattern is seen in the account of the Magi who visited baby Jesus. When they saw the child with his mother Mary, they fell down and **prostrated to him**. Then they opened their treasures and **presented to him gifts** of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11).

The same principle applies to Christian worship in a metaphorical sense. As Romans 12:1 states: Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy **sacrifice**, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *latreia* (that is, **prostration** or “worship”).

Of course, this Jewish practice was no longer necessary in the Christian era, since Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial system which pointed to him. Ceremonial **prostration** and physical (animal and grain) **sacrifice** were done away with, along with a temple-style worship. From now on, Christian meetings were focused on **edification**, not “worship” in the ancient Jewish and pagan sense.

Lord’s Supper [\[e\]](#)

It was a supper, not a snack. In the Lord’s Supper, the term “supper” (Greek, *deipnon*) means “supper,” “meal,” or “banquet”. Example usage is found in these verses:

- *Mark 6:21*: On his birthday Herod prepared a **banquet** [*deipnon*] for his nobles, military commanders, and the prominent men of Galilee.
- *Luke 14:16*: Jesus said to him, “A man prepared a great **banquet** [*deipnon*] and invited many guests.”
- *John 12:2*: They prepared a **supper** [*deipnon*] for Jesus there. Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with him.

- *1 Corinthians 11:20-21*: Now when you come together, it is not the Lord’s **supper** [*deipnon*] that you eat. ²¹ For when you eat, some of you eat your own **supper** [*deipnon*] without waiting for others. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk.

It is evident from 1 Corinthians 11:21 (“one person is hungry while another gets drunk”), that the Lord’s Supper was in a setting of a full meal. It was the Lord’s supper (or meal or banquet), not the Lord’s snack. These occasions were full meals with plenty of food and drink, not miniature cups of wine and small wafers of bread.

The Lord’s “supper” was a full meal, a banquet, a dinner; not a memorialized, miniaturized, sacralized, ritual service. It was not a Sacrifice, either literal or symbolic. The Lord’s supper was in fact a “one-another-ing” event. It was a communal fellowship meal together.

Christians came together to eat. When Christians gathered together, they broke bread—i.e., they ate. This is clear from the following references:

- *1 Corinthians 11:33*: So then, my brothers, when you come together **to eat**, wait for one another.
- *Acts 20:7, 11*: ...as the disciples were gathered together **to break bread**... Then Paul back upstairs, and after he had **broken bread and eaten**...
- *Acts 2:46*: Day by day as they continued meeting together with one accord in the temple courts and **breaking bread** from house to house, **they shared food together** with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Differences between the Lord’s Supper in the first century and today:

First century	Today
Simple gathering	Religious service
In a home	In a temple
A supper	A snack
A fellowship meal	A sacralized ritual
Others-focused event	Solo-focused event
An edifying activity	An act of worship

The following picture of wine cups as typically seen in today’s church services was *not* how the Lord’s supper was practiced in the first century.



God's presence [\[e\]](#)

There is within the human heart—especially within the heart awakened to God—a profound longing not merely to *know about* God, but to *host* His presence. This desire is not satisfied with abstraction, doctrine alone, or even outward religious activity; it reaches deeper, seeking a dwelling, a habitation, a reality in which God is not distant but near, not theoretical but manifest.

From the earliest pages of Scripture, this pattern is evident. Humanity was created not simply to exist before God, but to live *with* Him, to walk in fellowship, to be a vessel and environment of His presence. Though that communion was disrupted, the divine intention did not change. God continues to seek a place where He may dwell—not merely in structures made with hands, but in lives, in communities, in a people prepared for Him.

This gives rise to a deep, almost instinctive spiritual impulse: the desire to *build* something that God can fill. Yet **this “building” is not fundamentally about physical construction or external form**. It is the shaping of a life, the ordering of a heart, the forming of a community according to God’s own nature and will. It is the quiet, persistent work of aligning desires, affections, and actions with Him, so that what is formed becomes suitable for His indwelling.

Closely related to this is the desire to *attract* God’s presence. But here a crucial distinction must be made: God’s presence is not drawn by human effort in the sense of performance or achievement, as though it could be earned or compelled. Rather, His presence rests where there is receptivity—where there is humility, openness, and a genuine correspondence to His character. What “attracts” God’s presence is not outward impressiveness, but inward congruity: a heart that reflects His holiness, a spirit that responds to His voice, a life yielded to His purposes.

In this sense, the longing to build something for God's presence becomes a **process of transformation**. The "structure" God fills is one that He Himself shapes. Human participation is real, but it is responsive rather than initiatory—we cooperate with what God is already seeking to do. The deeper the work of inward renewal, the more fitting the dwelling becomes.

Ultimately, this desire finds its fulfillment not in isolated individuals alone, but in a corporate reality—a **people among whom God dwells**. The gathered life of believers, rightly ordered and alive to Him, becomes a living habitation. In such a context, God's presence is not an occasional visitation but an abiding reality.

Thus, the deep desire to build something for God's presence is, at its core, a longing to become—and to be part of—a **living dwelling place for Him**. It is the convergence of divine intention and human response: God seeking a home, and humanity, awakened by grace, learning to become one.

Restoration of True Worship [\[e\]](#)

There is a growing hunger among believers for a deeper, more personal, and transformative experience of faith—one that transcends traditional institutional structures. The following statements collectively illuminate this movement, suggesting not merely a crisis within organized religion, but the possibility of a profound reorientation toward a living, spirit-filled expression of "the church" in preparation for what many understand to be the closing scenes of earth's history.

Here is a relevant quote from Ellen G. White:

[GC 464.1](#): Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth there will be **among the people of the Lord** such a **revival of primitive godliness** as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time **many will separate themselves** from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His word. **Many**, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time to prepare a people for the Lord's second coming. (emphasis supplied)

In 1965 Billy Graham warned,

"Multitudes of Christians within the church are moving toward the point where they may **reject the institution that we call the church**. They are beginning to turn to **more simplified forms of worship**. They are hungry for a personal and vital experience with Jesus

Christ. They want a heartwarming personal faith. Unless the church quickly recovers its authoritative Biblical message, we may witness the spectacle of **millions of Christians going outside the institutional church** to find spiritual food” —*World Aflame: The Inadequacy of Modern Religion*, p. 87. (emphasis supplied)

To quote George Barna (in “[*Revolution*](#),” 2005, p. 39), the *revolutionary* mindset, “is about recognizing that we are not called to go to church. We are called to be the Church.”

In their 2015 book, [*Church Refugees: Sociologists reveal why people are DONE with church but not their faith*](#), Dr. Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope wrote,

- “The dechurched tend to construct church alternatives through political and civic engagements, small groups or **house churches**, or informal but spiritually meaningful gatherings” p. 68 (emphasis supplied)
- “As our society approaches a **post-institutional era** it’s entirely possible the near monopoly that the church has enjoyed over faithful expression and religious connections may be **coming to and end**. The activities of the dechurched may be ushering in a new understanding of what religious activity means. **If this trend continues, it will fundamentally reshape the way Americans experience organized religion**” p. 69 (emphasis supplied)

Adventist “church property” ownership [\[e\]](#)

The original practice (1860-1863). When the Seventh-day Adventists organized in 1860–1863, the concern was **not conference ownership**, but simply **legal ownership**. Prior to organization, many Adventists opposed incorporation, believing it was unscriptural. James White argued that churches needed legal standing so that church property would not be lost. The organization did not say or believe that the conference should own the buildings. It simply instructed each local church to obtain legal ownership.

Ownership in the early years of Adventism. During the 1860s and 1870s, local churches commonly:

- incorporated locally,
- elected trustees,
- held title in the name of the local congregation or local trustees.

Conference corporations largely did **not yet exist** in many places. Thus, the earliest SDA model was **local ownership** with legal incorporation, not conference ownership.

Why the policy changed. As the denomination grew, problems developed. Among them:

- congregations divided,
- ministers or members left the denomination,
- trustees died,
- deeds became legally defective,
- dissident groups sometimes claimed property.

Conference leaders increasingly concluded that conference corporations provided greater legal stability. This change occurred gradually between roughly the 1880s and the 1920s, not by one single vote.

The first Church Manual (1932). The first official Church Manual was published in 1932. By that time the policy had become explicit: “All our church properties should be held by the conference corporations.” It then explains why: “This is the only means of insuring the continuous use of denominational property.”

The Manual also states that conference ownership prevents dissident members from diverting property from the denomination. This is the earliest universal written requirement found in the Church Manual. Notice the language: “**should be held**” rather than “must.”

The 1942 Church Manual. The wording became even stronger. It states: “All our church properties should be held by the conference corporations.” Then adds: “This is the only means of insuring title of ownership to denominational property.” Again, the reason given is protection from schisms and lawsuits.

The 1986 Church Manual. The policy became still more definitive. It states: “Title to all local church properties should be held by the conference corporations.” It explains that “In order to safeguard denominational property it is necessary to have the title vested in a corporation created by a conference organization....” It further instructs that deeds and insurance documents are to be kept in the conference corporate office.

Was it ever made “mandatory”? Historically, there are two answers.

1. In policy. By 1932, the official worldwide Church Manual clearly established conference ownership as the denominational standard. After that point, conferences generally refused to organize new churches unless title complied with conference policy. Thus, while the Manual used the word “**should**,” in practice it became the required policy for recognition of local congregations in most divisions.

2. In civil law. Because property law varies by country:

- some conferences own property directly;
- some use conference corporations;
- some use union corporations;
- a few countries require different legal arrangements.

So, the implementation differs legally, but the denominational policy has remained essentially the same.

The Church's policy on assigning pastors. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently maintained since its early organization that **pastors are conference employees**, not employees of the local church. The current Church Manual states: "Because the pastor is appointed to the position in the church by the conference, the pastor serves the church as a conference employee, is responsible to the conference executive committee..." Likewise: "Appointments in all cases rest with the conference committee." Thus, under denominational polity:

- local churches do **not** hire pastors;
- local churches do **not** dismiss pastors;
- pastors are assigned and reassigned by the conference executive committee.

Ellen G. White on church ownership. No statement from Ellen G. White has been found that instructs local church buildings to be titled in the name of conferences or the General Conference. Her counsel centered instead on why churches should be built, how they should be financed, how they should be used, and the spirit in which they should be maintained — rather than on the legal ownership of the property.

1. She strongly encouraged the building of houses of worship. Ellen White repeatedly urged believers to establish permanent places of worship rather than relying indefinitely on rented halls.

2. She counseled against extravagant and large buildings. A recurring theme in her writings is that churches should be: neat, attractive, but never lavish or ostentatious. She warned against spending excessive sums merely to impress people: "Character is not given to the work by investing means in large buildings..." Her concern was that money devoted to unnecessary architecture reduced funds available for evangelism and missions.

3. She emphasized that church buildings belong to God. She often referred to the meetinghouse as: "the house of God," a sacred place, to be treated with reverence. She objected to careless treatment of church buildings and urged members to maintain them respectfully.

4. She supported legal incorporation. One point that is especially relevant to the earlier question is that Ellen White supported the movement

toward legal organization in the early 1860s. She recognized that churches needed a legal method of holding property so that meeting-houses and other assets would be protected from loss. Her support was directed toward lawful organization, not toward concentrating ownership in conference corporations. This harmonized with James White's advocacy for church incorporation.

Summary on conference ownership of church properties. The above chronology and discussion suggests that the policy of conference ownership of local church property was **an administrative development of the denomination after Ellen White's death**, rather than a policy she explicitly articulated in her published counsel.

In terms of the evolution of Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology and governance, this distinction is historically important: Ellen White endorsed legal organization and careful stewardship of church property, but the specific policy of vesting title in conference corporations was developed later by church administrators in response to legal and organizational considerations, not through explicit prophetic instruction.

Criticisms of the system. Critics argue that conference ownership can create an imbalance of power because:

- local members often donated the money,
- local members built the church,
- local members maintain the property,

yet they possess no legal ownership. Consequently, if conflict develops with conference leadership, the conference can:

- replace locks,
- appoint different leadership,
- assign another pastor,
- or authorize another congregation to use the building.

The Northwest SDA Church (Texas) 2019 case illustrates how such authority can be exercised in practice.

Supporters' response. Supporters of the present system argue that it:

- preserves doctrinal unity,
- protects denominational assets,
- prevents schisms from taking church property,
- ensures property continues to be used for SDA ministry.

This rationale has been consistently reflected in Church Manual language for many decades.

Worship with a Bedlam of Noise [\[e\]](#)

Ellen G. White wrote comparatively little about music, but what she did write relative to the end of time — “just before the close of probation”— is noteworthy. The statement most often cited is found in connection with the Indiana “Holy Flesh” movement of around 1899–1900. She was addressing a movement in which **highly emotional worship services** featured *loud instruments, shouting, dancing, and claims that participants had received the Holy Spirit*. Scholars note that this occurred just before a wider outbreak of Pentecostal-like phenomena nationally.

She wrote:

[2SM 36.2](#): The things you have described as taking place in Indiana, the Lord has shown me would take place **just before the close of probation**. Every uncouth thing will be demonstrated. There will be shouting, with drums, music, and dancing. The senses of rational beings will become so confused that they cannot be trusted to make right decisions. And this is called the moving of the Holy Spirit.

She immediately continued:

[2SM 36.3](#): The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a **bedlam of noise**. This is an invention of Satan... A **bedlam of noise** shocks the senses and perverts that which if conducted aright might be a blessing. The powers of satanic agencies blend with the din and noise, to have a carnival, and this is termed the Holy Spirit’s working.

She further warned:

[2SM 38.1](#): Those things which have been in the past will be in the future. Satan will make music a snare by the way in which it is conducted.

Thus, her warning is that, near the end of time, worship would increasingly rely on **emotionally charged musical experiences** that many would interpret as the work of the Holy Spirit, even though she believed such methods could be used to obscure rather than reveal God’s truth.

► B'. Apostate Adventism

An “**apostate**” is someone who has renounced or abandoned previously held religious beliefs. “**Apostate Adventism**” refers to a system of beliefs that no longer aligns with the fundamental principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as they were established during its first fifty years of existence. What Ellen G. White feared would come true has, indeed, come true.

[*20LtMs, Ms 62, 1905, par. 14*](#): Those who try to bring in theories that would remove the **pillars of our faith** concerning the **sanctuary**, or concerning the **personality of God** or **of Christ**, are working as blind men. They are seeking to bring in uncertainties and to set the people of God adrift, without an anchor.

Executive outline. The major topics covered here are the following:

- [My 20-year journey](#)
- [Heuristic center of Adventism is non-trinitarian](#)
- [Three critical pillars of Adventism rejected](#)
- [Spirit of Prophecy and “Remnant” misused](#)
- [Revisionist History and Books of a New Order](#)
- [Church Governance gone wrong](#)
- [Matters of Conscience](#)
- [The 28 Fundamental Beliefs](#)
- [Summary discussion](#)

My 20-year journey [\[e\]](#)

Start of a journey. Back in 2003, when I was teaching the Adult Sabbath School Lesson at my church, a question came up on the nature of the Holy Spirit. And, as I often do, I asked the members of the class to offer their opinion. To my surprise, the opinions varied widely, and the subject became contentious and confusing, so I tabled the discussion and went on with the lesson itself. Afterward, I expressed my frustration with a brother in the church, who I regarded as a deep student of the Bible. I told him: How is it that the Holy Spirit is so poorly understood, and how is it that there are such varying opinions as to his nature? He sympathized with my frustration and offered me a bit of information that I had not known before and suggested that I look into it. It was this: That the Adventist Pioneers, our founding fathers, did not believe in the Trinity; and that, in particular, they did not believe the Holy Spirit to be a divine person—like the Father and the Son. I was taken aback. I had never heard this before. How could

it be? And, if true, I quickly understood that it had alarming implications. I decided to investigate *immediately*.

Stages of investigation. First, I inquired on the statement that the Adventist Pioneers did not believe in the Trinity doctrine. That statement turned out to be true. Not only did the Adventist Pioneers not believe in the Trinity, but they were adamant antitrinitarians. They wrote about it in their publications. They explained in detail why this was the case. They regarded the Trinity doctrine to be one of the major false teachings of the Catholic church that should be summarily rejected. It is a verifiable fact that the Adventist Pioneers denounced the Trinity doctrine. This fact is unquestioned by Adventist historians.

“That most of the leading SDA pioneers were antitrinitarian in their theology has become accepted Adventist history.” —Dr. Jerry Moon, 2003, (*Associate Professor and Chair, Church History Department, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary Andrews University*).

Second, I began a long study on the “proof texts” of the Trinity doctrine. A 20-year study. My conclusion: There are no proof texts. This conclusion agrees with both Catholic and Adventist scholars. The reader should appreciate what I just said: **There are no proof texts**. If you believe the Bible to be the sole source of your faith, then you have a problem. You cannot “prove” the Trinity doctrine from Scripture. My analysis of the many Bible verses people use to try and prove the Trinity is covered in the article entry, [*“Trinity doctrine examined”*](#).

Third, this led me into a long study on the history of the Trinity doctrine. When was the Trinity doctrine first formulated in Christendom and when was the Trinity doctrine accepted by the Adventist Church? My 20-year study led me to the conclusion that: (1) the Trinity doctrine came about by Church Tradition over some four centuries of debate, which started (in earnest) two centuries after the New Testament Apostles. (2) The Trinity doctrine was accepted by the Adventist Church through a multi-decade transition period, all in the 1900’s, culminating in the declaration and acceptance of the doctrine in 1980 and detailed in its 1988 publication, *“Seventh-day Adventist Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines.”* One more doctrine was officially added in 2005 to make it the present-day, [*“28 Fundamental Beliefs” \(2020 edition\)*](#).

Fundamental implications. The implications of this fundamental change in Adventist theology are profound. They suggest the following:

1. *Early Adventist interpretation of Scripture was flawed.* Not that the Pioneer Adventists overlooked something in their rejection of

the Trinity, but that they committed gross error in their analysis and ultimate understanding of the Scriptures on this doctrine. And, if this is true for the Trinity, what other doctrines were they also mistaken on?

2. *Ellen G. White was a false prophet.* Given that EGW was and is believed to be a prophet of God, but held to a false understanding of the nature of God—that is, non-trinitarian—then her status as a true prophet ought to be questioned.
3. *Modern Adventism has apostatized.* But, if the Pioneer Adventists and EGW had the correct understanding of the Trinity—that it was a false teaching—then where does that leave present-day Adventists who are fully on board with its acceptance?
4. *Trinitarian tentacles.* The Trinity doctrine does not stand in isolation from the other doctrines. It has “tentacles” into a whole host of other Adventist beliefs, from the nature of the Godhead to all aspects of the plan of salvation, even to the understanding of the sanctuary and final judgment.

Adventist theologians fully recognize the implications of its present trinitarian doctrinal position. As stated in the Adventist book, “The Trinity”:

“As one line of reasoning goes, **either** the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, **or** the pioneers were right **and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth.**” —Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, John Reeve: *The Trinity*, 2002, p. 190.

Today’s Adventist theologians also recognize that the church’s founders could not have joined the present church:

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism **would not be able to join the church today** if they had to subscribe to the denomination’s fundamental beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2 which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” —George Knight, *Ministry Magazine*, October 1993.

In all actuality, this would have included *all* of the founders and pioneers of the early SDA church, since they were *all* antitrinitarians. It was only in the latter years of its early history (early 1900’s) that several turned back to a belief in the Trinity, largely influenced by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and his book, *The Living Temple*. This book caused a crisis within the SDA Church which Ellen G. White called the “alpha of deadly heresies” or the alpha of apostasy.

“In the book ‘Living Temple’ there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” —Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 200.

In the context of the alpha crisis, Ellen White describes a vision about the soon coming omega apostasy among Adventists.

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. **Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written.** A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced...” —*Ibid.*, p. 204.

This change in the SDA religion: the Fundamental Principles accounted as error, and a new organization with “books of a new order” is precisely the history that followed, particularly after 1980.

Heuristic center of Adventism is non-trinitarian [↩]

Great Controversy Theme (GCT). The Great Controversy Theme is the principle hermeneutic and worldview of the SDA Church. (In Systematic Theology terms, it is the *heuristic center*.) It is the lens through which they read the entire Bible. Adventists claim it is not something that was discovered by them, but something uniquely given to them, by God, through Ellen G. White. She received this GCT in her famous two-hour “Great Controversy Vision” in Lovett’s Grove, Ohio during a funeral service conducted by her (minister) husband in the local schoolhouse, on Sunday afternoon, March 14, 1858.

Ultimately, the GCT is the glue that binds all SDAs together, regardless of where they may land on the “conservative” and “liberal” spectrum within the movement. The GCT is the paradigm and central hinge of SDA theology and one cannot fully understand Adventist theology without first understanding the GCT. It defines all theological terminology in their system such as the gospel, salvation, justification, sanctification, etc.

GCT is non-trinitarian. What present-day Adventists fail to recognize is that the GCT, at its very outset, presents a non-trinitarian storyline.

Wherein, the three primary characters are God the Father, His Son, and Satan (or “Lucifer”). As the story goes: Satan rebelled against the government of God. There was a divine law that governed the heavenly beings, indicating the order of Heaven, which Satan wanted to change. The order was that God the Father is first, Christ is *made* equal with God, and Lucifer was next to Christ but not equal to the Father and the Son. Lucifer was jealous of Christ’s position; and his goal was to change that order. That order is not an arbitrary setup, rather it is based on the fact that Christ is the only begotten Son of God—begotten in the express image of the Father’s person—who was the “*only being*” (cf. [PP 34.1](#)) that could enter into divine council with the Father.

This GCT is at odds with Trinitarian thought in a number of ways, not the least of which is that the Holy Spirit, as a divine person, is never mentioned, nor takes part in the controversy itself and the initial “war” that took place in Heaven. The other major issue is that the Son of God is declared to be the *literal* begotten Son, and is subordinate to the authority and will of the Father.

According to EGW, God the Father *exalted* Jesus to be His equal. This exaltation made Lucifer jealous and reveals that Lucifer had reason to believe God could have picked him for this exaltation, but didn’t.

When Adam and Eve sinned, this *exalted* Jesus begged the Father to allow Him to come to earth to die for them. The Father finally acquiesced, and:

[EGW, RH July 9, 1895, par. 13](#): The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, gave his only begotten Son, tore from his bosom Him who was made in the express image of his person, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.

In this Great Controversy paradigm, Jesus was *not* the eternal, almighty God. Instead, God *exalted* him to be His equal, at some time in the distant past before the heavenly host. When Jesus came to the earth, He “volunteered to take humanity” so that “in His power, humanity can obey God” ([ST, May 10, 1899, par. 7](#)). Thus, he (Jesus) came in the fallen condition of sinful man.

More can be said on the GCT, but suffice to say, it is very much at odds with Trinitarian orthodoxy which today’s Adventists fail to recognize, even as they say they hold a Trinitarian position. In other words, while they say they are Trinitarian, their GCT theology teaches otherwise.

Summary. The meaning and implications of the Great Controversy Theme (GCT)—the principle hermeneutic and worldview of the SDA Church—is no longer properly understood, accepted and applied in present-day Adventist theology. The GCT is clearly nontrinitarian, and also

presents a unique aspect to the nature of Christ—i.e. not equal with God, but “made equal with the Father” (8T 268.3; 18LtMs, Ms 111, 1903, par. 5; see also, “*The Fall of Satan*,” 1SP ch. 1).

Origin of Species. Coincidentally, the same year Ellen G. White received her famous GCT vision on March 14, 1858, Charles Darwin (and Alfred Wallace), across the Atlantic, presented papers to the Linnean Society of London on July 1, 1858, proposing the theory of evolution by natural selection. This directly led to the publication of Darwin’s “*On the Origin of Species*” the following year.

Although these events occurred independently, both profoundly influenced later thought—Darwin in biology and the natural sciences, and EGW within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition and its understanding of biblical history and eschatology. Both deal with “origins”: one regarding the nature of man (Darwin, to the exclusion of God) and one regarding the nature of God (EGW, regarding His plan of salvation).

It is my conviction that the enemy’s answer to EGW’s Great Controversy Theme was Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. It is directly anti-God, anti-Creation, and anti-Salvation. I present my view against the Theory of Evolution in both “[*The Fallacy of Evolution*](#)” and “[*Evolution’s Fundamental Flaws*](#).”

Three critical pillars of Adventism rejected ^[e]

As quoted earlier, three *critical* pillars of early Adventism concerned the **sanctuary**, the **personality of God** and the **personality of Christ**. These uniquely early Adventist views are no longer held by present-day Adventists, as the following discussion shows.

Begotten or unbegotten. Is the Son of God *begotten* or *unbegotten*? By *begotten-ness*, we are referring to whether the Son of God was *literally* born of God or *metaphorically* given the title of “Son” but in fact not a son—only role-playing as a son. Pioneer Adventists believed the Son was born (or “begotten”) of God, while present-day Adventist theologians believe he is role-playing as a son and not literally a son. For a full discussion on the present SDA position, see the article, “*A Question of Sonship*,” by Angel Manuel Rodriguez from the BRI in which he states,

‘The term “Son” is used **metaphorically** when applied to the God-head.’ —Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “[*A Question of Sonship*](#),” AdventistBiblicalResearch.org.

And, from Gerhard Pfandl of BRI:

“The sonship of Jesus, however, is **not ontological, but functional**. In the plan of salvation each member of the Trinity has accepted a

particular role.” —Gerhard Pfandl, “[*The Trinity in Scripture*](#),” BRI, Silver Spring, Md. June 1999.

Additionally, SDA theologians today regard his Sonship to have begun at the Incarnation, not before.

‘The title, “Son,” refers to **His entry into time** and does not deny at all His eternal origin. There are references in the Old Testament to Sonship, but these are always **in anticipation of the Incarnation.**’ —J. Reynolds Hoffman, “[*Is Jesus Jehovah God?*](#)” *Ministry Magazine*, June, 1982.

By contrast, the SDA pioneers and EGW understood the term literally. When the Bible says, “God gave His Son,” or “God sent His Son” (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10), it is obviously speaking of a pre-incarnate Son. That is, when God *gave* His Son, it means He had a Son to give; and when God *sent* His Son, it means He already had a Son to send. EGW also identifies Jesus’ Sonship to God well before the Incarnation. Here are a couple of quotes:

- “When Christ first announced to the heavenly host His mission and work in the world, He declared that He was to leave His position of dignity and disguise His holy mission by assuming the likeness of a man, **when in reality** He was the Son of the infinite God.” —Ellen G. White, [*18LtMs, Lt 303, 1903, par. 14*](#).
- “Satan was well acquainted with the position of honor **Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God**, the beloved of the Father. And that he should leave Heaven, and come to this world as a man, filled him with apprehension for his safety. —EGW, [*ST April 5, 1883, Art. A, par. 7*](#).

Obviously, these two competing views on Christ being *begotten* or *unbegotten* are polar opposites and irreconcilable. Someone is wrong—either EGW and the Adventist Pioneers or present-day Adventists.

Fatherhood of God. By the same logic, if the Son is not a true son, then the Father is not a true father. He is a *metaphorical* father, just as the Son is a *metaphorical* son. God is playing the role of a father, when in reality he is not. This is what today’s Adventist theologians would have you believe. That you should forget about taking the Bible literally, you must read it metaphorically. It’s all play-acting; it’s all make believe. God is not really “the Father” and Christ is not really “the Son”.

But that’s not what the apostle John tells us. According to John, this is the very sign of the antichrist: he who denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22). Ellen G. White certainly believed in the fatherhood of God. Here is one example in her writings.

[12LtMs, Lt 50, 1897, par. 51](#): The Father, in union and loving sympathy with His Son, **subjected Himself to suffer with His Son**. He spared not **His only begotten Son**, but freely delivered Him up for us all. This gift of Christ is the crowning truth of God's love, and His Fatherhood through all time and through eternity. Here the love of God in **His Fatherhood** is shown. Let us drink in this love, that we may know by experience what a real, tender, joyful, experience there is in a realization of **the Fatherhood of God**. "Let brotherly love continue." [Hebrews 13:1.] By bearing one another's burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ.

Christ's human nature. Past and present Adventists do not agree on the type of *human* nature Christ possessed when he lived on earth. This question on Christ's *human* nature revolves around whether he had a pre-Adamic (*prelapsarian*) or a post-Adamic (*postlapsarian*) nature. Pioneer Adventists clearly did *not* believe in a pre-Adamic (*prelapsarian*) nature, while present-day Adventists do. This changeover occurred in the fifteen-year period between 1940 and 1955, where the words, "sinful" and "fallen," with reference to Christ's human nature were largely eliminated from denominationally published materials. Since 1952, phrases such as "sinless human nature" and "nature of Adam before the fall" have taken the place of the former terminology. An excellent detailed history of this changeover, although we are not in agreement with its conclusions, is found in the article, "[History of the changeover to the Unfallen Nature position](#)," sdadefend.com.

The "second death." Pioneer Adventists did not believe Christ died the "second death," while present-day Adventists do hold to this view. Below is the official statement, which is found here and in other recent Adventist literature:

"The death that Christ tasted for everyone was the second death." — [Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 1988, p. 114.](#)

A discussion on the subject of the "second death" is covered in detail in "[Notes on Revelation 20:14](#)".

The Father killed Jesus. Current Adventist teaching is that the Father killed Jesus, as the December 8, 2023, *Adventist Review* article affirms:

"However, to spare us, God poured out His wrath against the violation of His law (sin), not on the violators of His law (sinners) but on the sinless Jesus, the only way that God could "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). In short, rather than killing us for violating His law, **the Father killed Jesus instead....** Or, to put it crudely, **the Father killed Jesus** so that He

wouldn't have to kill us.” —[Goldstein, C. “Law, Freedom, Love.” *Adventist Review* online edition, December 8, 2023](#) (emphasis mine).

However, this was not the early Adventist understanding, nor did EGW teach it, nor can it be proven from Scripture. The misunderstanding that present-day Adventists have, along with most of Christendom, is that God's law functions like human law—that it is arbitrary and imposed, requiring legal oversight and enforcement. It is the belief that God is the active agent in causing suffering and death. When in reality, sin pays its own wages, and it is Satan who holds the power of death. Consider the following Scripture:

- *Romans 6:23*: For **the wages of sin is death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- *Galatians 6:8*: For he who sows to his own flesh will **from the flesh reap corruption**, but he who sows to the spirit will from the spirit reap eternal life.
- *James 1:15*: And when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And **when sin is fully grown, it brings forth death**.

It is plain from Scripture that it is sin which causes death, not God. And, as Hebrews tells us, it is Satan who holds the power of death:

Hebrews 2:14: Therefore, since the children all have flesh and blood, Jesus himself took on flesh and blood as well, so that through death he might destroy **the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil**,

(See the article, “[God-centric Beliefs](#),” under the sections, “*God's law*” and “*God's justice*,” for a detailed discussion on this subject.)

Christ's death on the cross. What happened at the cross is that God gave His only begotten Son to mankind. But mankind, who is under the power of sin and Satan, was moved by Satan to kill Jesus. This is the plain teaching of Scripture, “Men of Israel. . . this man [Jesus]. . . you took and put to death, having him nailed to the cross by the hands of lawless men.” (Acts 2:23). It is Satan who holds the ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus Christ, not God. God gave us life through his Son, but Satan made and continues to make every effort to extinguish it.

God is the source of life; Satan and sin are the source of death. It was not God who killed Jesus, but Satan, who “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). EGW believed the same thing:

[DA 761.2](#): Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. **He had revealed himself as a murderer. By**

shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted.

The resurrection. The reason the Father could resurrect Jesus was that Satan had no claim on him. Since Jesus had lived a spotless, sinless life while on earth, there was no justifiable reason for Jesus to remain in the grave awaiting the Day of Judgment and second death. Satan, “who has the power of death” (Heb. 2:14), had no legal claim on Jesus as his captive. Because of this, all who take hold of the gift of Christ by faith can likewise escape death. “Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them” (Rev. 20:6). Thus, *Jesus* escaped the second death through his own righteous life, while *we*, as believing Christians, escape the second death through Christ’s imputed righteousness. In *both* cases, the second death is overcome—for Christ through his own merit, and for us through Christ’s.

Sanctuary teaching. The significance of the Sanctuary is in relation to the Atonement, which is debated among Adventists on whether it is *single* or *dual*.

Single vs. dual atonement. For roughly the first 100 years of the Church’s existence, Seventh-day Adventists held to a dual atonement belief. Since the mid-1950s, however, as stated in Questions on Doctrine, Adventists now hold to a single atonement belief. The statements found in the SDA’s Fundamental Beliefs #9 and #24 (2025 edition) also support this view. Thus, today’s SDA Church is squarely in the *evangelical*, “true-gospel” fraternity and has completely abandoned the dual atonement concept of the pioneer SDA Church, Ellen G. White included. Of course, this changes Adventist eschatology, particularly with the teaching of the Investigative Judgment and 1844, as detailed in the article, “[How the Investigative Judgment and 1844 Became Artifacts of the Past](#),” Adventist Today, September 22, 2020.

Single atonement. That Christ’s death on the cross is all the atonement I will ever need. It is “finished atonement”. Nothing more is needed, except my acceptance of that salvation. I am saved by justification alone. It was “finished justification” on the cross. Single atonement denies that Christ is performing a second or “final atonement” in heaven before he comes again.

Dual atonement. That Christ’ death on the cross fulfilled the *daily* sanctuary service typology, but that the *yearly* service (performed once a year on the Day of Atonement) is yet unfulfilled.

Thus, dual atonement teaches that while atonement began at the

cross, it continues until the “work of judgment” is complete. For the **righteous**, it is completed when Christ finishes his high priestly ministry in heaven before he returns as King of kings at the Second Coming. For the **wicked**, this “work of judgment” is completed when the “removal of sin from the sanctuary” is performed in the Final Judgment at the end of the Millennium, when the sins of the righteous are placed on Satan (the scape-goat) and he and his angels, together with the wicked, are destroyed.

More details on this topic and its theological implications are found in the article, “[Atonement](#)”.

Misguided three angels’ messages. Simply stated, the three angels’ messages are about:

- 1st angel’s message: **True God**,
- 2nd angel’s message: **True Doctrine**,
- 3rd angel’s message: and **True Worship**

However, as a consequence of abandoning the central theme of Adventism and its three *critical* pillars of faith, the SDA Church’s mission of proclaiming the three angels’ messages is no longer correctly understood and can no longer be properly proclaimed. The following explains why.

First angel’s message. The first angel’s message is about the **True God**. It reads,

Revelation 14:7: He said with a loud voice, “**Fear God** and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

A person who does not have a correct understanding of who God is and how He is to be glorified and worshiped, will not correctly understand the first angel’s message.

[EW 237.2](#): As the churches refused to receive the first angel’s message, they rejected the light from heaven and fell from the favor of God. They trusted to their own strength, and **by opposing the first message placed themselves where they could not see the light of the second angel’s message**. But the beloved of God, who were oppressed, accepted the message, “Babylon is fallen,” and left the churches.

Second angel’s message and the wine of Babylon. The message of the second angel is about the **True Doctrine**, and reads:

Revelation 14:8: A second angel followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She who has made all the nations drink of **the**

wine of the wrath of her porneia.”

This message is to expose the false doctrines of Babylon, which is referred to as the wine of Babylon. This wine of Babylon was understood by the Adventist Pioneers to include the Trinity doctrine. Then, if one accepts the Trinity doctrine, neither the first *nor* the second angels’ messages can be correctly proclaimed. In the words of the Adventist Pioneer, Roswell F. Cottrell (1814-1892),

“But to hold the doctrine of the **trinity** is not so much an evidence of evil intention as of intoxication from that wine of which all the nations have drunk.” — [*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, p.11](#)

Third angel’s message and worship. The message of the third angel is about **True Worship**. It reads in part:

Revelation 14:9-11: A third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone **worships** the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or his hand, ¹⁰ he too will drink of the wine of the wrath of God that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his anger. . .

The message of the first angel involves a true knowledge of God. This is foundational to a correct understanding of the second *and* third angels’ messages. In the case of the third angel’s message, one who “**worships** the beast and his image” has developed the character of the beast, not the *character* after the divine similitude. Thus,

[*RH March 9, 1897, par. 10:*](#) **Unless men shall know God as Christ has revealed him**, they will never form a character after the divine similitude, and will therefore never see God.

And how did Jesus Christ reveal God? In Jesus’ own words,

John 17:3: And this is eternal life, that they may know you, **the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

Jesus Christ revealed God as the only true God. In the words of EGW:

[*RH March 9, 1897, par. 9:*](#) It is our privilege to know God experimentally, and in **true knowledge of God** is life eternal. The only begotten Son of God was God’s gift to the world, **in whose character was revealed** the character of him who gave the law to men and angels. He came to proclaim the fact, “**The Lord our God is one Lord,**” **and him only shalt thou serve.** He came to make it manifest that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and

cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning.” That which proceeds from the mind of God is perfect, and needs not to be taken back, corrected, or altered in the least. We may ascribe all perfection to God. He holds in his hand the existence of every human being, and upholds all things by the word of his power.

Spirit of Prophecy and “Remnant” misused [\[e\]](#)

When Adventists use the term “Spirit of Prophecy” (often abbreviated as SOP), they are usually referring to the writings of Ellen G. White (1827-1915). Ellen G. White (EGW) was one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church and is regarded by Adventists as a prophet who received more than 2,000 visions and dreams from God, according to her grandson and biographer, Arthur L. White. Her writings, totaling nearly 100,000 pages, are not considered equal to the Bible; nevertheless, they are regarded as highly authoritative within Adventism.

More than a prophet. Not all Adventists understand that while EGW never claimed to be a prophetess, she did claim to be “a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people” (Letter 55, 1905. {[ISM 36.1](#)}). More clearly stated (by her),

“Others have called me a prophetess, but I have never assumed that title. I have not felt that it was my duty thus to designate myself. Those who boldly assume that they are prophets in this our day are often a reproach to the cause of Christ.” {[ISM 35.6](#)}

That is to say, she did not call herself a prophetess out of modesty—i.e. not to boast in the position lest she falter along the way. At least, that’s how I read it. However, the reality is that she considered herself to be *more than a prophetess*. In her own words,

“I am now instructed that I am not to be hindered in my work by those who engage in suppositions regarding its nature, whose minds are struggling with so many intricate problems connected with the supposed work of a prophet. My commission **embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more** than the minds of those who have been sowing the seeds of unbelief can comprehend.—Letter 244, 1906. (Addressed to elders of Battle Creek church.)” {[ISM 36.2](#)}

There you have it. She claimed her work both embraced “*the work of a prophet*” and “*much more*”. This is not a small claim. If present-day Adventists ignore or diminish her work, they are effectively denying her

own testimony and the position of the Early Pioneers. In some SDA circles, this has indeed been the case.

SOP becomes a test of fellowship. HOWEVER, it should be noted that prior to 1951, there was no test of fellowship on the writings or prophetic gift of EGW. Not that the early Adventist Pioneers did not regard EGW as a prophet, but that they felt no need to make it a test of fellowship. It took nearly 90 years (from 1863) for this test to be brought in, using the following wording in the 1951 Church Manual:

“#19. That God has placed in His church the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. That these gifts operate in harmony with the divine principles of the Bible, and are given “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Eph. 4:12. That the gift of the Spirit of prophecy is one of the identifying marks of the remnant church. (1 Cor. 1:5-7; 1 Cor. 12:1-28; Rev. 12:17; Rev. 19:10; Amos 3:7; Hosea 12:10, 13.) They recognize that this gift was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen G. White.” —[1951 Church Manual](#), “*Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists*,” #19, p. 34.

This test of fellowship was carried forward to the present day, in SDA Fundamental Belief #18 (2025 edition), which reads as follows:

#18 The Gift of Prophecy. The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.

Thus, Seventh-day Adventists are made to profess a belief in the ministry of EGW as the way to prove the SDA Church to be the **remnant church**. However, in doing so, they make two major errors in their reasoning, as discussed below.

SDA’s claim to be the remnant church. According to the Book of Revelation, the two identifying characteristics of the remnant people in the last days are that they: (1) keep the commandments of God, and (2) have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17). We are further told that the testimony of Jesus is “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

Adventists use these two verses to make the claim that they are the last-day, remnant church by virtue of the fact that they: (1) keep *all* the commandments of God which includes the 4th commandment (the true Sabbath); and (2) had a prophet in their midst in the person of Ellen G.

White (1827-1915) and her testimony lives on in her writings.

Keep all the commandments. At issue is not whether SDA's keep the 4th commandment (which they do), but whether they keep the *first* and most important of the ten commandments. The first commandment reads as follows:

Exodus 20:2-3: I am Yehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³ **You shall have no other gods before me.**

The first commandment does not say, "You shall have no other gods before *us*," but, "You shall have no other gods before me." The "me" is **Yehovah**, a singularity, as other Old Testament Scriptures testify.

- *Yehovah alone is God.* "Yehovah our God, Yehovah alone" (Deut. 6:4)
- *No other gods besides Yehovah.* "I am Yehovah, and there is no one else. Besides me, there is no God" (Isaiah 45:5).

Even Jesus affirmed this understanding in the Gospels, as discussed in the article, "[God of the Bible](#)" under the section, "*God is one*". The Trinitarian notion that there are *three* gods—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—is not found in the Old Testament and is at odds with the dictates of the first commandment. Thus, those who worship the Trinity are breaking the first commandment.

Yet Trinitarians argue that their three gods (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) are really one God, by way of the ancient Greek philosophical concept of *ousia*, or essence, or substance. The simple answer is that this is a pagan idea with no biblical support. All this is discussed in detail in the article, "[Trinity doctrine examined](#)".

Have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17). As per Revelation 19:10, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." At issue is whether the interpretation of Revelation 19:10 is an accurate one. That is, whether "the testimony of Jesus," which the remnant will possess (Rev. 12:17), also means they have "the spirit of prophecy" (interpreted to mean, having the prophetic gift), and that this prophetic gift is satisfied in having a prophet (namely, Ellen G. White) in their midst.

A detailed discussion of Revelation 19:10 is found in [Notes on Revelation 19:10](#). The conclusion found in the notes is that the saints at the end of time will *all* possess "the testimony of Jesus" and they also will *all* possess "the spirit of prophecy". This is the *literal* interpretation. **There will not be one prophet among them, but all will prophesy.** It will be the second (greater) fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, when God will pour out his spirit on *all* flesh and "your sons and your daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions” (Joel 2:28, cf. Acts 2:17). It will not be confined to one prophet, and it will not be *symbolic* in nature. In EGW’s own words:

1SP 11:1: “The testimony of Jesus,” said the angel to John, “is the spirit of prophecy.” Revelation 19:10. It is the keeping of the commandments of God, and the recognition of **the revival of the spirit of prophecy by the remnant of the church, or the Christians of the last generation**, that stirs the ire of the dragon.

Such a claim, Seventh-day Adventists do not make, nor can make, since there is no evidence of its fulfillment among their ranks. Rather, its fulfillment is yet future, when the outpouring of the spirit of God, “lightens the whole earth with His glory” (RH, July 21, 1896).

“the remnant of the church.” Note also in the above quote (i.e. 1SP 11.1) that it is not “the remnant church” that EGW speaks of, but “the remnant *of* the church.” That is, a true church may exist at the end of time, but only a remnant of that church will go through to the end. As in the parable of the 10 virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), not all waiting for the bridegroom were ready to receive him.

Early Writings, p. 261.1: I saw that God has honest children among the **nominal Adventists** [[i.e. *in-name-only Adventists*]] and the fallen churches, and before the plagues shall be poured out, ministers and people will be **called out from these churches** and will gladly receive the truth. Satan knows this; and before the loud cry of the third angel is given, he raises an excitement in these religious bodies, that those who have rejected the truth may think that God is with them. He hopes to deceive the honest and lead them to think that God is still working for the churches. But the light will shine, and all who are honest **will leave the fallen churches, and take their stand with the remnant**.

Summary on SDA’s claim to be the remnant church. The SDA Church today is not the Remnant Church of Revelation (i.e. Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 19:10) by virtue of the fact that they: (1) break the first commandment (i.e. one God) by their belief in the Trinity (i.e. three Gods), and (2) the ultimate fulfillment of the “spirit of prophecy” of Joel 2:28-32 (cf. Rev. 19:10) is not seen in their midst—i.e. sons and daughters prophesying, old men dreaming dreams, and young men seeing visions (Joel 2:28, cf. Acts 2:17), an end-time phenomenon (“that stirs the ire of the dragon,” 1SP 11:1), is not present in today’s SDA Church. EGW’s own writings make it clear that the remnant will be *called out* of “the nominal Adventists and the fallen churches” (EW 261.1).

Claim that EGW changed her theology. Modern-day Adventists claim that Ellen G. White changed her theology regarding the nature of God by adopting Trinitarianism. Their claim is based on her latter writings, particularly on her book, *The Desire of Ages*.

Desire of Ages – “Paradigm Shift.” Trinitarian Adventists have alleged for quite some time that the publication of the *Desire of Ages* was a “paradigm shift” on our understanding of the nature of God. The two statements often quoted are DA 530.3 and DA 671.2. The first one, DA 530.3 which refers to Christ is discussed in the article “*Christology*” under “[*The works of Jesus*](#),” and DA 671.2 which refers to the holy spirit is discussed in the article, “*Spirit as Essence*” under “[*The might agency of the third person*](#).”

Le Roy Froom is generally considered the principal protagonist of this “paradigm shift” view of the *Desire of Ages*. This topic is discussed further in the section below on Revisionist History.

Revisionist History and Books of a New Order [d]

Trinity adoption. The history of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to adopt the Trinity doctrine and fully reject the staunch anti-trinitarian position (held for well over a century) will depend on who is telling it. A modern-day *revisionist* will emphasize a “Paradigm Shift” in 1898 by the publication of Ellen White’s *Desire of Ages*, while a non-revisionist will emphasize the “Kellogg Crisis” of 1903-1907. Given the polar opposite sides of this debate (each declaring the other in error of its history) and the current official position being Trinitarian, those holding the anti-trinitarian position are typically asked to either remain silent or leave. If they do not comply, they are disfellowshipped.

Pioneer Adventists in error? Seventh-day Adventists pride themselves for advancing in truth from Protestant foundations. They believe that all their unique teachings regarding the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, etc. are advancing truths. All except one—the most foundational of truths—the Trinity. Apparently, God misled the Adventist people and their prophet in adopting the heretical teaching of Arianism for the first 70 or so years of its history, up until 1914 at least. The 1914 Adventist Yearbook still retained the early Adventist Arian view of God (found in the Yearbook’s section, “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists”).

The transition was first noted in the 1919 Bible Conference in which the Deity of Christ was hotly debated. This was followed by the 1931 Yearbook, “Fundamental Beliefs,” which changed the wording to include the terms “Godhead” and “Trinity”. It was not until 1980 when the transition was complete, with the wording that we see today.

Bear in mind, that the Trinity doctrine has been the fundamental belief of most of Christendom for well over 1,500 years. Talk about a misstep and waste of time for the self-proclaimed remnant church. And, if it is true that this gigantic misstep was taken with regard to the Trinity doctrine, what about its other peculiar doctrines? Could they also be in error?

False statements by Adventist *revisionists*. Numerous false statements have been made by the *revisionists* of Adventist history. Here is a sampling of the false statements, as can be found in Jerry Moon's *Adventist Review* article, "[*Heresy or Hopeful Sign? Early Adventists' struggle with the truth about the Trinity*](#)," dated April 22, 1999:

1. **Un-endowed scholars.** Jerry Moon belittles the pioneers as individuals who "weren't endowed scholars with unlimited time for study." Apparently, to arrive at Biblical truth one must be an endowed scholar with unlimited time for study. No doubt Jesus and the apostles were levied the same accusations by the learned theologians of their day.
2. **Alleged late attention to the Trinity doctrine.** Not true. Many of the leading pioneers were non-trinitarian in the early years. One can find many anti-trinitarian comments from James White and Merrit E Cornell in the mid-1850s, from Joseph Bates, JH Waggoner, JN Loughborough and RF Cottrell in the 1860s, etc. It was not an afterthought or late development by any measure.
3. **Alleged eventual acceptance of the Trinity.** Not true. The body of early Adventists never accepted this doctrine. Even well into the 1920's LeRoy Froom was confronted with opposition from the older generation of Adventists regarding his Trinitarian ideas. "You cannot imagine how I was pummeled by some of the old timers because I pressed on the personality of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Godhead" (Letter by LeRoy Froom to Dr. Otto H. Christenson, October 27, 1960).
4. **That EGW never expressed anti-trinitarian views.** Not true. This was attested by a prominent non-SDA scholar, Dr. Walter Martin. He affirmed that Ellen White made many statements that were clearly non-trinitarian and gave many examples in his public discourses on the subject.
5. **Alleged *Desire of Ages* paradigm shift.** The two statements often quoted by Trinitarian Adventists are DA 530.3 and DA 671.2. The first one, DA 530.3, which refers to Christ is discussed in the article "*Christology*" under "[*The works of Jesus*](#)," and DA 671.2 which refers to the holy spirit is discussed in the article, "*Spirit*

as *Essence*” under “[*The might agency of the third person.*](#)” Otherwise, the *Desire of Ages* is replete with non-trinitarian statements, impossible to ignore by the careful reader.

6. **That there were no anti-trinitarian publications after 1898.** Not true. Numerous post-1898 articles and publications by EGW contain non-trinitarian statements.
7. **That EGW “never wrote an article directly confronting wrong views about the Godhead.”** Not true. The most famous was her battle with J. H. Kellogg and his pantheistic and ultimately Trinitarian views involving his book, *The Living Temple*. Another example is Brother Chapman in Letter 7, 1891 (Manuscript Releases, vol. 14, pp. 175-180).
8. **That the Pioneers were more interested in understanding the character of God than His nature.** Not true. First of all, since when does the study of the character of God not involve the nature of God? The two go hand in hand.
9. **Alleged abundant Biblical basis for the Trinity doctrine.** Not true. There are NO PROOF texts. This is admitted by the Church’s very own research branch, the BRI, as cited in the article, “[*Trinity doctrine examined.*](#)” Here is another quote from the *Review and Herald*, July 30, 1891, p. 4, “While no single scriptural passage states formally the doctrine of the Trinity, it is assumed as a fact by Bible writers. . . . Only by faith can we accept the existence of the Trinity.”

Daniells to Froom, 1930. Le Roy Froom (1890–1974) is a key figure in the church’s transition from Arianism to Trinitarianism. Back in the spring of 1930, A. G. Daniells encouraged Le Roy Froom to be,

“a connecting link between past leaders and the present. But, he said, it is to be later—not yet, not yet. . . . Possibly it would be necessary to wait until certain individuals had dropped out of action, before the needed portrayal could wisely be brought forth.” —Le Roy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 17.

As history shows, Froom accepted this assignment. The change was to be made when the last of the leaders holding the pioneer beliefs had passed away.

Books of a new order. In his book, *Movement of Destiny*, in the chapter entitled, “1931 Opens New Epoch of Unity and Advance,” Froom states that the decade from 1931 to 1941 “marked the end of an old epoch, and the beginning of a new day in unification and auspicious witness for us as a Movement” (*Movement of Destiny*, p. 421). The first order of business was to change the *Baptismal Certificate* to be used for new converts.

A new “Baptismal Covenant” and Baptismal “Vow” was written which “was based upon our ‘Fundamental Beliefs’ statement of 1931” (*Movement of Destiny*. p. 420). The next order of business was to change the wording of “standard works.” In Froom’s own words:

Movement of Destiny, p. 422: The next logical and inevitable step in the implementing of our unified “Fundamental Beliefs” involved revision of certain standard works so as to eliminate statements that taught, and thus perpetuated, erroneous views on the Godhead.

SDA Church Hymnal (1985). The SDA Church Hymnal was changed in 1985 to conform to the new 27 Fundamental Beliefs (of 1980). Clearly evident is the inclusion of Trinitarian hymns and other Catholic dogma. Here is the breakdown:

- **Trinitarian:** #2.4, #27.5, #30.3, #42.4, #47.4, #71.4, #72.3, #73, #91.3, #116.3, #148.5, #169.3, #228.4, #234.4, #235.4, #424.5, #429.4, #709 (Scripture Reading).
- **Eucharist:** #242.3, #402.2-3 (the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation)
- **Mariology:** #3.2, #91.2 (“Bearer of the eternal word”)
- **Easter:** #170.3 (the phrases, “queen of seasons” and “the royal feast of feasts” is a reference to the Catholic Easter)
- **Archangels:** #91, #126. (Catholics believe there are seven archangels, while the Bible only speaks of one—i.e. Michael.)
- **Pope:** #471 (Originally dedicated to the Catholic Pope or priest who is administering the Catholic Mass. The reference to “Father” is not God the Father, but the Pope or priest performing the Mass.)
- **Chanting:** #116, 471. (Gregorian chanting is a Catholic practice which in part is a way to commune with the saints in heaven.)
- **Alterations:** #125.1 (Originally read, “Joy to the world, the Lord will come!” changed to, “Joy to the world, the Lord is come!”). #300.3 (Originally read, “When I soar to worlds unknown, see Thee on Thy judgment throne,” changed to, “When I soar to worlds unknown, And behold Thee on Thy throne”), #518 (Fourth verse deleted, which read, “Standing on the promises I cannot fall, listening every moment to the Spirit’s call, Resting in my Savior as my all in all”).

EGW writings manipulation. Froom used partial data presentations, out of context quotations, and ellipses to make Mrs. White seem like she was supporting doctrines that she really was not—i.e. the Trinity, the pre-fall,

sinless flesh, nature of Christ, and single atonement. The best example of Froom's agenda is found in his book, *Evangelism*, published in 1946, which is a compilation from the writings of Ellen G. White. The website ^[a][truthseeker.church/the-book-evangelism](https://www.truthseeker.church/the-book-evangelism) goes into great detail on the distortions found in this book.

False claims regarding pre-1931 Trinitarian wording. It is alleged by revisionists that the *Fundamental Principles* were repeatedly printed in the 1910's, 20's and finally in 1931 with Trinitarian wording. This allegation is false. No **Yearbook** (1883-1930) contains a *Fundamental Principles* or *Beliefs* section with Trinitarian language. No **Church Manual** before 1931 included any such language. No **Review and Herald** articles prior to 1931 reproduce the 1931 wording or any equivalent formulation.

The **1931 Yearbook** explicitly introduces it as a newly prepared statement to give "a brief summary of the faith held by the denomination." Yes, there were very clear Trinitarian sentiments before 1931, but it was the first time formally published in 1931, **yet without worldwide church vote!** So it was not official doctrine yet.

Church Governance gone wrong [↗]

Largely since 1980, elements of Catholic "[*theological imperialism*](#)" have begun to appear within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Hierarchical control. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is structured in a hierarchical system recognized by the U.S. courts as only second to the Catholic Church.

"Church documents that prescribe the church's structure and governance confirm that all parts of the church are parts of a single entity. **Next to the Roman Catholic Church, the Adventist church is the most centralized of all the major Christian denominations in this country.**" —Judge William T. Hart, 1986, in handing down a decision against Derrick Proctor and in favor of the SDA Church, [*Proctor v. General Conf. of Seventh-day Adventist*, 651 F. Supp. 1505 \(N.D. Ill. 1986\)](#).

The SDA Church is a highly centralized system, headquartered in Washington, D.C. The churches are grouped in conferences, the conferences in unions (which may comprise several states or smaller nations), and the unions in thirteen (13) divisions around the world (as of 2024).

Tithes are not retained at the church level, but are passed up the structure, giving the hierarchy considerable flexibility to redistribute

[a] <https://www.truthseeker.church/the-book-evangelism>

funds in order to orchestrate expansion. The hierarchy's control over finances and its voice in the choice of leaders at lower levels also enables it to exercise considerable influence over the whole church, all the way down to the local level. This is so in spite of a system of representation, in which delegates from the constituent bodies choose the committee members who select the officers and department heads at the local (conference) level.

“At the local conference level the Seventh-day Adventist church has a representative form of government, above that level the polity of the Seventh-day Adventist is hierarchical: authority flows downward and members in local congregations have virtually no voice...the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a **closed, self-operating, and self-perpetuating system, similar to the Roman Catholic church**, in which those in authority are not responsible to lower echelons. Above the local conference level, those in authority are not elected by, representative of, or administratively accountable to, local congregations or the membership at large.” —Raymond F. Cottrell, former Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, in *Spectrum* (Journal of Association of Adventist Forums), vol. 14, #4, March, 1984, p. 42.

Thus, the **church leadership** is largely a group of **inbred career Adventist employees, with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo**. This top-down hierarchical control over the finances and choice of pastors and leaders of the church is not without its consequences. The chief concern is that it fosters a division between the *clergy* and *laity*, not unlike the Papal hierarchical system.

Church divided between *clergy* and *laity*. As stated by Douglas Devnich, President of the SDA Canadian Union,

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church follows a model of organizational order in the church **which is modified from the orders of Roman Catholicism**, but it retains the same notions of clerical order which separates the members of the church into two classes - **clergy and laity**.” [Douglas Devnich, *Messenger*, December, 1993, p. 2.](#)

Top-down governance. The powers exercised by SDA leaders are similar to those of the Catholic hierarchy. There is a strict test of fellowship via a creed (*28 Fundamental Beliefs*, as of 2020), and those not complying are excommunicated. Each candidate for baptism must agree to this creed before being baptized. Tithes are sent to regional or general headquarters. Pastors are appointed to churches and paid by the Conference, thereby becoming its employees. The General Conference holds legal title to local church properties and institutions.

All this engenders **spiritual stasis** and **towing the party line** on both

the clergy *and* the laity. No pastor dares to step out of line or question the church and its leadership lest he lose his job, and no church member dares to do likewise lest he be disciplined or disfellowshipped. Sermon material is formulaic, watered down, unchallenging. Its members are unmotivated to study their Bibles when their Creed (i.e. *28 Fundamental Beliefs*) says it all and does it all for them. They give little attention to Sabbath School attendance and Bible study, and those who do come are ill prepared to participate. (At least, that was my experience as a Sabbath School teacher in the SDA Church for well over 30 years; in four different churches over that time.) Thus, for most members, church attendance is reduced to the “Worship Hour” experience, where programmed liturgy is practiced and where the bulk of the time is devoted to a speaker spoon feeding the congregation with generic, feel-good sermons. In many respects, this is also how most Catholics (and Protestants) practice their religion.

Adventist trademarks and lawsuits. The SDA Church holds a tight grip on its brand of religion. The names “Seventh-day Adventist,” “Adventist,” and the church logo, are all registered trademarks, as of 1981. The acronym “SDA” is used with what’s called common-law rights, meaning that the Adventist Church has been using it for a long period of time as a name that identifies the organization. So the Church has rights to that, as well. The Church also has a copyright on the term “haystacks” by a Supreme Court ruling in 2016. The ruling states that while the farming industry may refer to a “singular, large stack of hay as a ‘haystack,’ any use of the plural ‘haystacks’ is now the exclusive domain of the Seventh-day Adventist Church”.

A string of trademark lawsuits on the use of “Adventist” has been ongoing from the early 1980s up to the present time. The SDA church has won most of their cases, so it would be foolish for any splinter group to attempt to use the name “Adventist” to officially identify itself in any way. It would be a costly exercise in litigation when the GC lawyers come after you, even if you win, as the following case demonstrates.

Free SDA. A recent example of trademark lawsuits started by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) is their case against the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists, organized in 1916 (website: FreeSDA.org). The GC filed the lawsuit in September, 2022, to prevent the FreeSDA church from having the right to use its name. In addition, the GC was seeking redress with an award amount of \$350 Million dollars! However, the GC’s trademark was registered in November 10, 1981, while the FreeSDA’s name had been in use since 1916 when it had incorporated. It would seem that the Trademark Office may have overlooked this important detail when granting the GC the rights to the trademark. Namely, that there have been organizations, outside of the

GC, which have used the name “Adventist” and/or “Seventh-day Adventist” for decades prior to the GC’s application of the trademark, not just the FreeSDA organization. (Another example is the Seventh Day Adventist Reform Movement organized in 1925 in Germany.) In any case, FreeSDA had to defend itself at a cost of half a Million dollars in lawyers’ fees, which they are still paying for. In the end, the lawsuit was settled out of court in October, 2023, in which FreeSDA essentially won, in that it is “free” to continue to use the name. Details of the lawsuit can be found on their website: freesda.org/home/gcclawsuit.html.

LGBT groups. Meanwhile, organizations that affirm LGBTQIA+ positions contrary to biblical teachings—such as SDA Kinship International (sdakinship.org)—are permitted to operate without challenge, even while using the names “SDA” and “Seventh-day Adventist.”

Authoritative ironies. In the broadest sense an *irony* is the juxtaposition of what on the surface appears to be the case and what is actually the case. Here are some examples:

1. **Sola Scriptura.** The website, adventist.org/beliefs, has on its front page the following, “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.” Please note that the operative term in the above statement is “*certain* fundamental beliefs”. The Bible may be the “only creed” but only “*certain*” of its 28 fundamental beliefs hold up to biblical scrutiny. **Irony:** Its research branch, the BRI, freely admits regarding the Trinity doctrine that, “No text of Scripture specifically says that God is three Persons” (discussed in the article, “[Trinity doctrine examined](#)”). Thus, “the Bible as their only creed” cannot be used to defend Belief #2: The Trinity.
2. **Church and State.** The SDA church believes in the separation of church and state, yet in at least three areas is very much tied to the government. This is seen in its heavy dependence on government funding for higher education and public health and with its ADRA organization (see below on ADRA).
3. **Ellen G. White.** They accept EGW’s writings as authoritative, and yet ignore its authority when it speaks against their teachings. **Irony:** Today’s Adventists believe and teach *single* atonement theology (as already documented), while EGW’s writings clearly teach *dual* atonement theology.
4. **Peculiar people.** SDAs believe they are a distinct and “peculiar people,” set apart and consecrated to God, separate from the world and false religions. **Irony:** Adventists have a long history of aligning

themselves with Catholic ecumenism. See the section below on “*Ecumenism*”.

5. **Andrews University.** This Adventist university (andrews.edu) is the principal school for the training of its ministers. It was named after the Adventist pioneer, J. N. Andrews, a staunch anti-trinitarian. **Irony:** Yet their School of Theology teaches the Trinity. Also, J. N. Andrews’ biography on their website makes no mention of the fact that he was a staunch anti-trinitarian (see encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=C8VX).

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency). This Adventist run agency is largely funded by the U.S. government (USAID). ADRA is classified as an NGO (Non-governmental organization) that is (essentially) an extension of the U.S. government. To understand the priorities of this agency, just follow the money. In ADRA’s audited financial statement for 2022 they state: “During 2022 and 2021 respectively, **ADRA received 62% and 67% of its total revenue from USAID directly**” ([2022 ADRA Audited Financial Statement, p. 14](#)). For 2022 and 2021 this amounted to \$63,641,624 and \$74,047,534 respectively ([Ibid., p. 21](#)). During the Biden administration (2021-2024), ADRA used this money to assist migrant families via “safe stations” to reach the U.S. border, following the Biden administration’s open border policy^[a]. **Irony:** Ellen G. White was against the SDA Church involving itself in this type of work. In her own words:

“The Lord has marked out our way of working. **As a people we are not to imitate and fall in with Salvation Army methods.** This is not the work that the Lord has given us to do. Neither is it our work to condemn them and speak harsh words against them. There are precious, self-sacrificing souls in the Salvation Army. We are to treat them kindly. There are in the Army honest souls, who are sincerely serving the Lord and who will see greater light, advancing to the acceptance of all truth. **The Salvation Army workers are trying to save the neglected, downtrodden ones. Discourage them not.** Let them do that class of work by their own methods and in their own way. **But the Lord has plainly pointed out the work that Seventh-day Adventists are to do.** Camp meetings and tent meetings are to be held. The truth for this time is to be proclaimed. A decided testimony is to be borne. And the discourses are to be so simple that children can understand them.” —*EGW*, [8T 184.3](#)

^[a] “ADRA Assists Dehydrated, Exhausted, Stressed, and Hungry Migrant Families,” [Adventist Review, April 5, 2022](#). Also of interest is the video, “[Ex-Secret Service REVEALS the TRUTH about Biden’s Border Invasion!](#)” Duration: 30:20, which discusses the use of NGOs to enable government policies.

In other words, the SDA Church was not to become organizationally involved in humanitarian work. Its primary calling was to proclaim “the truth for this time,” while allowing others to carry out charitable efforts without hindrance or discouragement. A **second concern** centered on what was described as “**confederacy with the world.**” On this point, she issued a clear warning:

5LtMs, Lt 28, 1888, par.22-23: Any **confederacy with the world** is strictly forbidden by the Scriptures. God would have His people distinct from all worldly confederacy. **If charity work is to be done, the church is its own almoner.** We do not need to unite with societies of a worldly character in order to visit the sick, clothe the naked, or help the needy. This work we can do through God’s own appointed agencies, and in the name of Jesus Christ. God does not design that we shall be placed in any subservience to the world in this regard, or that any communication shall be made by us to them that will give them an advantage over us.

The term “**almoner**” is an older word referring to a person—or, in this case, the church—responsible for distributing charity to the poor. The counsel given here is that the church need not align itself with worldly organizations to engage in charitable work. Such alliances could place the church in a position of subservience, which was not part of God’s design.

Ecumenism. Although the SDA Church openly states that it resists the movement which advocates full ecumenical integration with other churches, it nevertheless has a long history of *dialogue* with the aim to find some form of common ground and ecumenical unity. In other words, while it states one thing, it practices another. This is well documented in the video, “[The Seventh Day Adventist Church’s Apostasy in Ecumenism](#),” (Duration: 30:04), by *Prepare to Meet thy God*. The following table presents the historical evidence.

SDA Ecumenical Timeline

<i>Year</i>	<i>Event</i>
1948	WCC (World Council of Churches) formed in Geneva, Switzerland, founded to work for the cause of ecumenism.
1955-57	Dialogue and agreement with evangelicals Martin and Barnhouse. “ <i>Questions on Doctrine</i> ” is published (1957) which adopts a new <i>Catholic</i> Jesus.
1962-65	Vatican II in Rome. Four Adventist representatives present.
1965-71	Bert Beach, official SDA liaison to WCC, initiates yearly SDA—WCC meetings in Geneva area.
1968	SDA joins WCC Faith and Order Commission

1968-pre-sent	SDA and CWC (Christian World Communions) yearly meetings.
1973	Bert Beach with WCC writes book, <i>“So Much In Common between the World Council of Churches and the Seventh-day Adventist Church”</i> published by WCC in 1973. One notable quote: “The member churches of the World Council of Churches and Seventh-Day Adventists are in agreement on the fundamental articles of the Christian faith as set forth in the three ancient symbols (Apostolicum, Nicaeno-Constantinopolitum, Athanasium). This agreement finds expression in unqualified acceptance of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Two Natures. ” — Ibid., p. 107.
1976	SDA President Neal Wilson tells court that anti-papal attitude of the church was thrown into the historical trash-heap.
1977	Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International formed. Seeks to minister to SDA gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual people. SDA Kinship has a liaison with the SDA GC. Although not officially sanctioned, SDA Kinship speakers have been invited to speak at SDA colleges.
1977	Bert Beach gives gold medal to the Pope in Rome.
1977-80	Protest of True and Free SDA’s in USSR ignored. Shelkov (83) dies in Siberia.
1980	New 27 Statements—WCC compatible. Ecumenism, Trinity incorporated. No second or third angel’s messages.
1981	“Adventist” trademarked under commercial law.
1981-82	SDA signs Baptism, Eucharist, Mission (BEM) Document with 100 other churches.
1982	Orion Fellowship Alliance formed. Seeks to minister to SDA gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual people.
1983	Walter Martin asks the SDA GC if the 1955-56 agreement is still valid. Reply: Yes.
1984	1,339 Hungarian SDA’s are disfellowshipped by Neil Wilson, SDA President, for protesting the ecumenical involvement of the SDA church in Hungary.
1984-99	Secret Roman Catholic—SDA dialogues begin in Poland. Public Agreement signed—1999.
1985	SDA leaders in England agree with Margaret Thatcher to close businesses on Sunday.
1985	New SDA [<i>Catholic</i>] Hymnal. 13 new hymns to Trinity.
1986	<i>“What I Like About Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Charismatics, Catholics, our Jewish Friends and Adventists”</i> by George Vandeman, Pacific Press.
1990	Cosmic Christ commissioned painting handed out to all SDA GC delegates.
1991	Roy Adams, Adventist Review: “Eucharist fits into ambit of Three Angel’s Messages.”
1993	George Knight: “SDA pioneers would not be able to join SDA church today.”

1995	New Trinitarian SDA logo, replaces the 3 angels logo.
1995	New Catholic encyclical— <i>Ut Unum Sint</i> (Latin for “That they may be one”). Declares the Catholic Church’s full commitment to ecumenism. The Pope becomes the head of the fraternal system of churches.
1995	Vatican flag marches into SDA GC. Sign of Daniel 11:41 fulfilled.
1996	SDA—Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.
1996	Porter SDA Hospital merges with Catholic hospital in Denver, Colorado
1997	Bert Beach works with WCC to determine best time to celebrate Easter.
1994-98	SDA—Lutheran dialogues. Agreement signed on Justification. Obedience to law not necessary for salvation.
1999	SDA clergy welcome the pope to St. Louis, Missouri
1999	Roman Catholic—SDA dialogues in Poland. Public Agreement signed. Unity over Blessed Trinity.
2000	Bert Beach elected vice chair of Meeting of U.S. Church Leaders steering committee.
2000	SDA “ecumenical observers” attend Baptist World Congress.
2000	Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and United Nations attend SDA GC.
2001	SDA—World Alliance of Reformed Churches [WARC] dialogues
2001-03	SDA—Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic) dialogues
2002	Vatican invites Bert Beach (representing SDA’s) to Religious Observance at Assisi.
2003	Questions on Doctrine (QoD) is republished and circulated by Andrews University—pro-trinitarian, pro-unfallen human nature of Christ.
2003	SDA’s seek fellowship with Coptic Pope.
2004-05	SDA—Salvation Army dialogues
2005	SDA’s participate in Global Christian Forum—Lusaka, Zambia
2005	Baptismal Vow revised to read: “Do you accept the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and do you pledge to live your life by God’s grace in harmony with these teachings?” Note: For the first time in Adventist history, membership in the SDA Church is based on a creed.
2006	SDA—Presbyterian Church dialogues (USA)
2006-07	SDA—World Evangelical Alliance [WEA] dialogues, 420 million evangelical Christians. SDA’s want to join WEA.
2007	SDA expands dialogues to World Religions. Council on Inter-church/Inter-religion affairs created.
2007	SDA’s participate in worldwide Global Christian Forum meeting in Kenya.

2008	Greater New York Conference loses millions in the stock market. Forced to sell property and downsize pastors in numbers.
2010	SDA's celebrate 100 th year anniversary of Ecumenical Movement in Capetown, South Africa. Partnership in mission.
2010	SDA dialogue with Universal Society of Hinduism.
2010	Secretaries of the Christian World Communion elect SDA John Gras Secretary for 5th time.
2010	SDA dialogue with Mennonite World Conference.
2013	Revision is made on the fundamental belief in the Gift of Prophecy. Ellen White's authority is diminished. The phrases "as the Lord's messenger" and "a continuing authoritative source of truth" are removed.
2014	Ganoune Diop, GC director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty since 2011, is elected as the new Secretary-General at the annual conference of secretaries of the Christian World Communions.
2014	Voice of Prophecy produces a national Christmas special, October 15th at the Spencerville Adventist Church in Silver Spring, MD. The broadcast goes nationwide Christmas Eve on the ABC network with a message from Shawn Boonstra.
2015	Huntsville First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Huntsville, Alabama begins to offer Sunday morning service on February 8th. This church is less than two miles from the campus of Oakwood University. This is in addition to Sabbath service as an attempt to bring in "unchurched" community members. (Spectrum Magazine, February 6, 2015)
2015	Hollywood SDA church ordained a church elder, a male transgender person as he dresses head to toe as a woman, now known as Rhonda.
2015	Pastor Michael Leno and the Palm Springs California SDA church plays host to Palm Springs gay men's choir to sing in their church for Sabbath worship service on December 19th. Thirty six men in total. Pictured in the background on stage is a fully decorated and lighted Christmas tree.
2016	Ganoune Diop, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, involved in an ecumenical audience with the pope on Wednesday, October 12, 2016 at the Vatican.
2016	Lesbian married to a SDA woman is baptized in Chico, California SDA church. The SDA General Conference is a 501c3 corporation and because of this signed agreement with the U.S. government, the organized SDA church cannot and is forbidden to discriminate against LGBTQ. By doing so, they would lose their tax status and forfeit such benefits, making necessary the repay-ment of taxes to the U.S. government for decades past.
2017	Adventist Hospitals have been performing abortions for years and are finally called out for it thru social media.
2017	Glendale California SDA church members dressed up to celebrate Gay Pride month in June.
2018	United Nations symposium, co-sponsored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The event, held Jan. 22 at the United Nations regarding the

	Role of Religion and Faith-based Organizations in International Affairs.
2019	SDA pastor celebrates Mass with Catholics and Evangelicals
2019	Ganoune Diop presents at the United Nations addressing a diverse range of organizations, including Protestant, Catholic, Islamic and Jewish groups.
2019	Ganoune Diop and Jonathan Duffy, attend the June, 2019 G20 Inter-faith Forum in Japan.
2020	SDA pastor, Roman Catholics and Evangelicals sign a historic “Ecumenical Charter” that Affirms Faith in “One, Holy, Catholic Apostolic Church”
2024	Ganoune Diop, on April 9, 2024, declares Adventists who espouse anti-ecumenical messages as promoters of violence and terrorists. See tinyurl.com/bdza35uw

As the above history shows, far from being exclusivist, the SDA Church has sought ecumenical alignment with Catholics, Evangelicals, and others for decades. The same sentiment among Protestants toward Romanism existed in EGW’s day:

[GC 563.1](#): Romanism is now regarded by Protestants with far greater favor than in former years. In those countries where Catholicism is not in the ascendancy, and the papists are taking a conciliatory course in order to gain influence, there is an increasing indifference concerning the doctrines that separate the reformed churches from the papal hierarchy; the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome. The time was when Protestants placed a high value upon the liberty of conscience which had been so dearly purchased. They taught their children to abhor popery and held that **to seek harmony with Rome would be disloyalty to God**. But how widely different are the sentiments now expressed!

Rebellion in the ranks. The reality today is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is no longer a unified church, even without regard to its doctrinal history. For example, on the subject of women’s ordination, several worldwide divisions (primarily led by the North American Division) have adopted (and practice) the ordination of women, in opposition to the church’s official position (as of 2025). Also, movement toward sexual liberalization (i.e. gay clergy, abortion, divorce, etc.) and ecumenism has increased, particularly in the last few decades.

These issues are not unique to Adventists. Other church denominations have had to deal with them as well. So much so, that many have formally, organizationally split over them, including:

- **Methodist:** United Methodist vs. Global Methodist – over gay marriage issues
- **Lutheran:** Lutheran vs. Evangelical Lutheran – over sexual liberalization, ecumenism and biblical inerrancy
- **Presbyterian:** Presbyterian vs. Presbyterian Church in America vs. Evangelical Presbyterian vs. Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians – over homosexual clergy, women’s ordination, liberalism, reformed theology and ecclesiastical polity
- **Episcopal:** Episcopal vs. Anglican Church of North America – over liberal views

You will note that moral issues (i.e. LGBTQ, women’s ordination, gay marriage, etc.) is a common reason for the splits. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not far behind in this regard.

Unlikelihood of a split. Although a division within the Seventh-day Adventist Church might seem both beneficial and appropriate—given the profound differences between historical and modern Adventists, as well as between liberal and conservative factions—it is unlikely to occur. The primary reason is economic: a split would have significant financial consequences for the denomination. The corporate body not only holds the legal rights to the name “Adventist,” but also owns most of the church’s properties and institutions. Any division would therefore require a complex process of distributing assets, intellectual property, and financial resources—never a simple matter when money is involved.

If a split were to take place, it would likely be wiser to establish an entirely new organization under a different corporate name, one that excludes the term “Adventist” to avoid potential litigation. It appears that “Seventh-day” would still be permissible in a new title, though “Adventist” remains legally protected. Unless the SDA corporate entity voluntarily relinquishes its trademark, or a judicial ruling invalidates it, use of the name “Adventist” will remain restricted.

All this, of course, pertains to retaining its corporate, hierarchical, top-down, organizational structure which is not the ideal and certainly not the one practiced by the Early Church, as discussed in the article, “[*Pagan Worship*](#)“. In other words, the organizational structure of the present-day Seventh-day Adventist Church is a flawed and failing structure that should not be duplicated even if a new entity corrected its *apostate* teachings and practices.

Unrealistic numbers. Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church reports a global membership of nearly 24 million as of 2025, the actual number is likely far lower. This figure represents those listed “on the

books,” but local churches often fail to maintain accurate or up-to-date membership records. As a result, many individuals who are inactive, no longer attending, or who have effectively left the church remain officially counted. Ty Gibson—a prominent SDA author, speaker, and pastor, and Director and Speaker for Light Bearers, an international ministry—has estimated that the number of Adventists who are genuinely present and actively participating is closer to 6–10 million, roughly one-third of the officially reported total (see ^[a]“*Where Do We Go From Here?*”).

When it comes to regular Bible-reading practices among Seventh-day Adventists worldwide, survey data indicate relatively high levels of engagement. According to “[*Global Trends on Bible Reading and Devotional Practices*](#) (2018), 48.3% of respondents reported reading the Bible daily, while an additional 28.1% indicated that they read it more than once a week. That said, my own observations through Sabbath School attendance and participation suggest the picture on the ground may be more modest than these figures imply—perhaps closer to one in three members read Scripture with real consistency.

Matters of Conscience [\[e\]](#)

Legislating morality. Morality in relationship *to man* is how we treat our fellow man (the last 6 of the 10 commandments), and every government today and throughout history has been charged with enforcing this type of morality; it is the main duty of government. By contrast, morality in relationship *to God* (the first 4 of the 10 commandments), and how you worship God; is a religious matter and not for government to intrude upon.

The problem arises when religious traditions not only include the first four commandments into their theology, but also the last six—the moral laws and principles relating to man. But not all religious traditions (whether Christian or otherwise) teach and practice morality (in relationship to man) the same way. *Someone’s* morality will of necessity be enforced by the government at the expense of the others.

So which of the religious traditions concerning (man-related) morality should the government choose?

The SDA Pioneers found nothing wrong with wanting *Christian* moral principles to be enforced. Ellen White’s strong crusade against alcohol is a good example, as is the early Adventists’ opposition to slavery

^[a] Watch the 2025 YouTube video produced by GTHR Urban Ministry Network: <https://tinyurl.com/5yjr6nfv> from minute 12:00 and forward.

and support for the abolition of slavery and, later, their opposition to abortion and support for the physicians' crusade against abortion.

Abortion. The SDA Pioneers unanimously defined the unborn as living human beings. They loudly and publicly condemned abortion as murder. They even condemned other denominations for showing support for abortion, and published non-Adventist anti-abortion sermons in their own official church publications. Moreover, they showed open support for anti-abortion legislation promoted by the American Medical Association. Not once did any Adventist leader express concern that such legislation was violating religious liberty or that it would lead to the Sunday Law. Here is a quote from Dr. Kellogg which was the typical sentiment against abortion by Adventists at the time:

“Every woman who commits or attempts to commit this horrible crime, and every husband who encourages it or even assents to its performance, ought to be treated as a criminal, and ostracized from society. So long as the act of abortion is looked upon as an offense so trifling as to be easily condoned, and hardly worthy of censure, its frequency will increase. Every pulpit in the land ought to send out in stirring and unmistakable tones, warnings against the gross immorality of this practice, drawing vivid pictures of its cruelty and unnaturalness, and pronouncing anathemas upon its perpetrators. The crime should be considered a just cause for church action to dis fellowship, and the nature of the crime should not induce those who may have knowledge of it to keep it secret. The crime must be made odious, and the perpetrators condemned in unstinted terms.” —[John Harvey Kellogg, “Ladies’ Guide in Health and Disease” \(1893\), pp. 365-366.](#)

Here are a few other notable quotes:

- [J. N. Andrews, RH November 30, 1869:](#) One of the most shocking, and yet one of the most prevalent sins of this generation, is the murder of unborn infants. Let those who think this a small sin, read Ps. 139:16. They will see that even the unborn child is written in God’s book. And they may be well assured that God will not pass unnoticed the murder of such children.
- [J. H. Waggoner, Pacific Health Journal and Temperance Advocate, “Infanticide,” April 1, 1886:](#) Almost any mother would be shocked at the thought of putting her child to death after it was born. And it seems passing strange that the same women will feel little or no compunction of conscience in destroying or killing the little innocents *before* they are born. It is just as truly murder to take life in the one condition as in the other.

- [Uriah Smith, “Fashionable Murder,” RH June 25, 1867](#): As to guilt, I want all to know that, in the sight of God it is willful murder. “The willful killing of a human being, at any stage of its existence, is murder.” It is quenching immortal existence,—it is destroying what, in a few months or weeks, would bear God’s image: and if anyone thinks she can do it without the guilt of murder, she is greatly mistaken.
- [Dr. J. H. Kellogg, The Health Reformer, February 1, 1878](#): life begins before birth, and the mother is the cradle of the unborn child. The mother should be, as such, a sacred person, and her offspring protected by all skill and care, while all the diabolical arts of abortion and feticide should be made infamous and criminal.

You would think that such a clear anti-abortion stance held by the SDA Pioneers would have continued forward, but that is not the case. Today’s official SDA Church position on abortion is non-existent. Or, more accurately, the decision to abort or not abort is “left to the conscience of the individuals involved and their families.”

[Gerhard Pfandl, “The Issue of Abortion,” Perspective Digest, July 1, 2023](#): But apart from the statement that “the Seventh-day Adventist Church considers abortion out of harmony with God’s plan for human life,” and some counsels on how “to follow the example of Jesus in loving and supporting those facing difficult decisions regarding abortion,” no guidelines are given for hospitals and doctors as in the previous 1971 and 1991 statements. **Now it is left to the conscience of the individuals involved and their families.**

Basically, as an SDA member you are on your own when it comes to the issue of abortion. The Church neither condones it, nor outright condemns it as the SDA Pioneers would have. And don’t bother asking your Adventist pastor on the ethics or on how to proceed with your particular situation, since he’s not authorized to guide you either way.

Abortion as Religious Freedom. Within the SDA Church today there is ample discussion and support for the idea that a woman’s right to choose an abortion is a protected *religious* right that governments should not interfere with (see, for example, *Jack Hoehn MD, “Abortion, Amputation, and Votes,”* AdventistToday.org, 2024-09-12. This stance implies that women’s *moral* authority—regarding decisions about abortion—is positioned above divine commandments and governmental legislation. This perspective endows women with the power of life and death over the unborn to the level of a divine right. It conflates *religious* beliefs (our relationship to God) with *moral* beliefs (our relationship to our fellow man).

The overarching problem and consequence is that nothing else—not the Bible or ethical considerations—holds authority over personal conviction. Such a stance raises profound ethical dilemmas, not the least of which is outright social anarchy, where every woman is a law unto herself. Yet this is where many Adventists even in leadership lean today.

Vaccination mandates. On the other side of the spectrum were the vaccination mandates legislated by the government during the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. You would think that when it comes to what gets put *into* your body, you have a choice in the matter. But apparently that was not what the GC believed and established in their policies. They stipulated that the vaccination mandates were a necessary process that should be followed, and no religious liberty exceptions would be offered. Their official statement back in 2021 read in part:

[General Conference Statement on COVID-19 Vaccinations and Mandates, Oct. 2021](#): The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in consultation with the Health Ministries and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty departments of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is convinced that the vaccination programs that are generally being carried out are important for the safety and health of our members and the larger community. Therefore, **claims of religious liberty are not used appropriately in objecting to government mandates** or employer programs designed to protect the health and safety of their communities.

Three years later (as of 2024), it became abundantly evident that these so called “safe vaccines” were neither conventional, nor safe. Indeed, countless hundreds of thousands if not millions of people were adversely affected or irreparably damaged by these experimental, untested and unproven, gene-altering *therapeutic* technologies, dubbed as “vaccines.” Those who refused to take them were proven right.

For example: The article “**Determinants of COVID-19 vaccine-induced myocarditis**” (2024) by McCullough and colleagues analyzes reports of myocarditis using the U.S. Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and compares them with historical vaccine data. The authors argue that reported myocarditis cases increased sharply following the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, noting a much higher number of reports in 2021 compared to prior decades. They identify patterns suggesting higher reported risk among **younger individuals (especially under 30), males, and after the second vaccine dose**, with many cases involving emergency care or hospitalization.

Flawed policies. So, on the one hand—the abortion issue—the GC would rather that the government stay out of it; that it *is* a religious liberty issue;

while, on the other hand—vaccination mandates—where experimental, untested, unproven pharmaceutical drugs are used—is not a religious liberty issue. It is evident from the prior discussion that both of these policies are ethically flawed, to say the least.

EGW on vaccines. The SDA Church leadership brought up EGW as supporting vaccines. But it is abundantly clear that EGW never advocated vaccination, nor even wrote about vaccination—she was certainly never given a vision or a divine message regarding vaccination.

Where it is believed she approved of vaccination comes from the recollection of one of her secretaries, D. E. Robinson, in 1931 (sixteen years after her death), where he remembered her taking the smallpox vaccine and urging her helpers to do the same. Even if true, however, there is a world of difference between a “sterilized vaccine” for smallpox and an experimental mRNA drug dubbed “vaccine” in 2021 for COVID-19. The first eradicated smallpox from the planet, while the latter (COVID-19) has done nothing of the sort, nor likely ever will with the endless present and future COVID-19 variants showing up.

Moreover, even in her day, the smallpox vaccine did more harm than good.

[*The Present Truth, London, March 20, 1902, p. 189.16*](#): Of eighty deaths from small-pox in London the week before last, forty-eight were those of vaccinated people, and twenty-eight of the unvaccinated people, the remaining four being unaccounted for. The Asylums Board authorities explain the fact that **“there are generally more deaths in recent numbers among the vaccinated patients”** than the unvaccinated, by saying that the vaccinated “outnumber the unvaccinated patients **by four or five to one.**”

Thus, even in her day, the odds of dying from the smallpox vaccine had a 4 to 5 times higher probability than if the person were unvaccinated. So much for safe vaccines.

Liberty of Conscience and the GC. In a sermon titled *Entropy*, published on YouTube on June 26, 2026, Dr. Conrad Vine contends that the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventists has undermined the church’s historic doctrine of liberty of conscience through two related institutional actions taken decades apart: (1) its 1985 acquisition of consultative **NGO status** with the United Nations’ Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and (2) two subsequent GC statements affirming the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**. Vine contends that these actions, taken together, quietly redefined liberty of conscience from an inherent, God-given right into a conditional allowance—and that this redefinition became consequential in October 2021, when the GC issued a

“reaffirmation statement” during the COVID-19 pandemic that he reads as telling members their conscientious objections to vaccination were not a legitimate basis for exemption. He characterizes this trajectory as a shift toward the very “papal spirit” of controlling conscience that Adventism has historically opposed.

Argument 1—The NGO Status and the UDHR Commitment

Vine’s first argument traces a chain of institutional decisions that, in his reading, changed the theological nature of the right itself:

1. In 1985, GC leadership secured consultative NGO status with the UN’s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This status required agreeing to support the UN’s spirit, goals, and objectives—a real and verifiable condition of ECOSOC consultative status, both then and since.
2. Over the following decades, the GC twice issued statements formally affirming support for the UDHR: a November 1998 GC Administrative Committee statement marking the Declaration’s 50th anniversary, and a September 1999 GC Executive Committee statement on “Religious Minorities and Religious Freedom” expressing support for Article 18 of the UDHR.
3. Vine points to a tension within the UDHR itself: Article 18 guarantees freedom to choose, change, hold, or practice a religion, but Article 29 subordinates that freedom to “the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society” and bars exercising any right “contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.”
4. His conclusion: by endorsing the UDHR, the GC effectively re-defined liberty of conscience from an inherent right into a conditional one—something an institution grants, and can therefore also revoke when it judges circumstances require. Vine likens this to Esau selling his birthright.

Vine’s documentation on this point holds up under scrutiny. The GC’s own June 1985 statement in the Review and Herald reported the ECOSOC recognition in real time, and GC quadrennial reports to ECOSOC describe an active relationship—the 1999 report told ECOSOC that the GC “supports and promotes the United Nations mission in favor of justice, peace and liberty” and noted plans to expand its UN presence through a UN Liaison Office. Both UDHR-affirming statements are genuine, dated, and traceable to official GC records—not loose paraphrases.

Argument 2—The Statements Are Linked, Not Isolated

The significance of Argument 1, in Vine's framing, is that it is not a standalone historical episode. He presents the NGO status and UDHR affirmations as the doctrinal groundwork that made the second action possible: the GC's October 2021 COVID-19 "reaffirmation statement." The statement's own concluding line—that claims of religious liberty are not appropriately used in objecting to government mandates or employer programs designed to protect community health and safety—is a real, verifiable sentence, and Vine treats it as the first concrete exercise of the conditional logic he says the GC adopted in 1985–1999.

Vine's source material shows the actual statement is more internally mixed than a bare denial of conscience: it affirms members' right to state and defend their own conviction on whether to be vaccinated, while separately declining to treat employer or government mandates as a religious-liberty matter warranting institutional backing for exemption claims. Vine and other critics (including a multinational group of SDA professionals who published a parallel rebuttal) argue this is precisely where the line was drawn wrong—not that conscience doesn't matter, **but that the GC would not back conscience claims against mandates specifically.**

When Vine's January 2022 sermon challenged this, the GC's Office of General Counsel published a public defense ("Concerns Regarding COVID-19, Church Governance, and Liberty of Conscience") grounding ADCOM's authority in Section 4.1 of its governing rules. Vine offers four rebuttals: vaccine mandates by private employers are not an internal GC administrative matter; the GC has no jurisdiction over the employment relationship between secular employers and SDA members; the statement was posted publicly rather than distributed through internal channels to world church entities; and ADCOM has never been granted authority to counsel non-SDA employers or governments. He cites a retired Navy flight surgeon's report that the Pentagon relied on the statement to presumptively deny Adventist service members' religious exemption requests in October 2021 as evidence of real-world harm.

Why This Is Significant. Vine frames the core issue as a shift in the nature of the right itself. Historically, Adventists have taught that liberty of conscience is inherent and God-given—not something a government or institution grants and can therefore revoke. He argues the UDHR endorsement quietly converted that inherent right into a conditional one, subject to an institutional "general welfare" standard borrowed from a secular human-rights framework. The 2021 statement, on this reading, was that conditional logic's first real-world application.

The Underlying Question. If Vine's framing is accepted, the debate is no longer really about vaccines. It becomes a question of **which authority gets to decide when a conscience claim is valid**—the individual believer under the spirit's leading, or an institutional body applying a welfare standard borrowed from secular human-rights law.

Vine closes his argument theologically rather than merely administratively, applying Ellen White's warning in *The Great Controversy* about religious leaders who "exalt human authority to rule the conscience" (drawn from her discussion of the scribes and Pharisees) to present-day GC and conference leadership. For Adventists, this cuts especially deep: the church's historic self-understanding is that it is not supposed to be the institution that controls conscience and defines heresy—that is the error Adventist eschatology assigns to the papacy. Vine's argument is that the GC has become structurally capable of the very thing it has always warned against.

Future Repercussions. Vine argues in his fourth line of reasoning that the sequence—issuing the reaffirmation statement, then formally defending ADCOM's authority to issue it once challenged—was a deliberate assertion of control, not an accident, and that it now stands as a legal and administrative precedent available for future use. Because the GC's Section 4.1 defense of ADCOM's authority was never withdrawn after the 2021 controversy, the same justification remains available without requiring a new debate about whether ADCOM can issue such statements. Concrete scenarios he draws out include:

- **Future public health or civil mandates.** A new pandemic, vaccination campaign, or public health order could see the same precedent invoked to characterize a member's religious objection as illegitimate, with an SDA institutional statement lending that characterization credibility.
- **Employer and government reliance on GC statements.** The Navy flight surgeon anecdote illustrates the risk directly: a statement intended (per the GC's own defense) as internal administrative guidance was read externally as the denomination's official position, leaving individual members with less leverage in exemption proceedings they had no part in shaping.
- **Expansion beyond health mandates.** Vine warns the *precedent* is not a one-off. The same "administrative guidance" authority could be cited in future GC-level statements on other contested civil-liberty issues, such as conscription, mandatory participation

in state programs, or professional licensing requirements that create ethical conflicts.

- **A theological identity question.** If the GC is now structurally capable of controlling conscience and defining what counts as a legitimate religious claim, the concern shifts from any single policy to the denomination's institutional trajectory—and to how that trajectory relates to Adventism's historic critique of centralized religious authority.

Why to care now rather than later. Vine's practical point is one of timing: institutional *precedents*, once set and successfully defended, are inexpensive to invoke again and difficult to unwind. He urges members to weigh the 1985–1999 groundwork and the 2021–2022 sequence together, as a single trajectory, rather than treating each episode as an isolated administrative matter.

The 28 Fundamental Beliefs [\[4\]](#)

The SDA Church officially affirms the Bible as its sole authority. Yet, its *28 Fundamental Beliefs*—a set of humanly constructed, theological summary of its doctrines—effectively the church's creed, are the **binding test** for its members. Crafted in fallible human language, this summary inherently lacks the divine inspiration and supreme authority belonging solely to Holy Scriptures. Yet in church practice, they functionally supplant the Bible itself.

Contradict the Fundamental Principles. Moreover, the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* is freely admitted by Adventist theologians to contradict and, at least in one instance, omit the original Fundamental Principles of the SDA Church (of its first 50 years) in several key areas. As already quoted:

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism **would not be able to join the church today** if they had to subscribe to the denomination's fundamental beliefs. More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2 which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity.” —George Knight, *Ministry Magazine*, October 1993.

It is not just belief #2, but a few others that are at odds with the original faith of the SDA Pioneers. In brief,

#2. **The Trinity.** The original SDA Church expressly rejected the Trinity doctrine, for at least its first 50 years of existence.

#4. **The Son.** The terms, “God the Son” and “God the eternal Son,” are not biblical terms, nor were they used by the original SDA

Church. Moreover, the concept of an “eternal Son” is a self-contradiction—you cannot have an *eternal* son when a son is known to have a beginning. Indeed, for J.N. Andrews “the Son of God ... had God for His Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have beginning of days.” Also, the concept of an “eternal Son” goes against the concept of a “begotten Son”.

#5. ***The Holy Spirit***. The terms, “God the Spirit” and “God the eternal Spirit,” are not biblical terms and were not used by the original SDA Church. The Spirit was not understood as a “Person” but as a “Personality”, effectively an Essence, as discussed in detail in the article, “[*Spirit as Essence*](#).”

#13. ***The Remnant and Its Mission***. As discussed in the subsections, “[*Three critical pillars of Adventism rejected*](#),” and “[*SOP and Remnant misused*](#),” the SDA Church is not the remnant and its mission is focused on ecumenism rather than the three angels’ messages.

#14. ***Unity in the Body of Christ***. This belief includes the statement, “This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.” This is an unbiblical statement and not a belief of the original SDA Church. Moreover, as discussed in the article, “[*Trinity doctrine examined*](#),” the “triune God,” as defined by Trinitarians, is not a “who” or a “him” but an “it”.

#18. ***The Gift of Prophecy***. The ministry of Ellen G. White and her identity as a prophetess was not originally a test of faith in the early Seventh-day Adventist Church. Arguably, the SDA pioneers’ belief in Ellen G. White as a prophetess was stronger in their time *without* an official declaration than it is today *with* one. Moreover, the church cannot truly claim to uphold *sola Scriptura* if belief in a modern-day prophetess is added as a doctrinal requirement. Either the SDA Church adheres to *sola Scriptura* or it does not. This belief became a formal test of faith in 1951—thirty-six years after Ellen G. White’s death in 1915 (see [*1951 Church Manual*](#), “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” no. 19, p. 34).

Omission of principles regarding the Papacy. Of special importance is the *omission* of any reference to the “man of sin” or the Papacy in the current, 2020 edition, [*28 Fundamental Beliefs*](#) of the Church. Yet it is quite prominent in Principle #13 (XIII) of the 1889 Fundamental Principles as quoted below.

[*FP1889 150.1*](#): XIII. That as the man of sin, **the papacy**, has thought to change times and laws (the law of God, Daniel 7:25), and has misled almost all Christendom in regard to the fourth commandment,

we find a prophecy of a reform in this respect to be wrought among believers just before the coming of Christ. Isaiah 56:1, 2; 1 Peter 1:5; Revelation 14:12, etc.

Again, no such belief in the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* of today's SDA Church. It vanished without a trace or explanation. Where it might have appeared would have been in the belief on the millennium, as in the 1889 Fundamental Principle #8 on the millennium, which reads,

[*FP1889 148.6*](#): VIII. That the doctrine of the world's conversion and a temporal millennium is a fable of these last days, calculated to lull men into a state of carnal security, and cause them to be overtaken by the great day of the Lord as by a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:3); that the second coming of Christ is to precede, not follow, the millennium; for until the Lord appears, the **papal power, with all its abominations, is to continue** (2 Thessalonians 2:8), the wheat and tares grow together (Matthew 13:29, 30, 39), and evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, as the word of God declares. 2 Timothy 3:1, 13.

Yet, while a belief in the millennium *does* appear in the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* of today's Seventh-day Adventist Church (specifically Belief #27), it *makes no reference* to the "papal power" or to "all its abominations." It seems that the present SDA Church has little interest in identifying the Antichrist power as it was understood by early Adventists and by much of Protestantism during its first several centuries. This "anti-papal power" perspective is certainly not reflected in the Church's official doctrinal beliefs.

Unity rooted in the Bible. The unity God desires is a unity of reliance upon His word as the ultimate authority, unity in the fundamental truths essential for salvation and present truth, unity in love, and unity in mission—even while allowing for differences in understanding on less central matters.

This unity, rooted in the Bible as the sole standard, has been a hallmark of the Seventh-day Adventist experience. They have forged remarkable unity in their understanding of Scripture, from which their fundamental beliefs arise, not through a human creed but through a divine gift of guidance. Ellen White wrote, "I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. **By that word we are to be judged.** God has, in that word, promised to give visions in the 'last days'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, **and to correct those who err from Bible truth**" (Early Writings, p. 78). This guidance anchors their unity in the Bible alone as the ultimate authority.

The church's *28 Fundamental Beliefs* stand as a collective attempt

to articulate key doctrines purported to be drawn from Scripture. As an acknowledged **human synthesis**, while sometimes referenced as a summary helpful for outlining a common identity or mission focus, they possess no inherent authority. They must ever remain strictly subordinate to the Bible, functioning only as descriptive statements of a general understanding within the church, recognized always as being framed in language, and perpetually subject to re-evaluation and correction by the clearer light revealed through ongoing, prayerful study of the Bible itself.

The Creed as Enforcer. Yet, rather than functioning as a shared commitment to Scripture, the Creed (i.e., the *28 Fundamental Beliefs*) has come to serve as the primary instrument of doctrinal enforcement within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The authority of the Creed is treated as absolute: questioning it is neither allowed nor tolerated, and genuine dialogue is discouraged.

Within this theologically imperialistic framework, Scripture is interpreted through a predetermined doctrinal lens; dissenting interpretations are dismissed as “heretical” without serious engagement; and theological conclusions are maintained not through open exegetical inquiry but through institutional authority and mechanisms of ecclesial governance, including denominational bodies such as the Biblical Research Institute (the BRI) and official publications like *Adventist Review*, often reinforced by broader political and institutional alignments within the church.

The result is a human constructed synthesis of biblical teaching that has come to function as the doctrinal foundation of the SDA Church. In practice, it is treated as fixed and virtually unalterable—almost as though it carried the authority of the Decalogue itself. Yet, as already noted, it contains serious weaknesses and stands far removed both from the original *Fundamental Principles* of the SDA Church and from a faithful adherence to Scripture.

Thus, the Creed itself bears witness that the present-day Seventh-day Adventist Church has departed from its original theological foundations and can rightly be described as “Apostate Adventism.”

Summary discussion [\[e\]](#)

The SDA Church of the Adventist Pioneers (up through the early 1900’s) is not the SDA Church of today. Today’s SDA Church has lost its way *theologically*, lost the primary objective of its *mission*, and is flawed *organizationally*.

(1) Adopted false *theology*. By their own admission, had the SDA Pioneers been living today, they could not join the church, because of their doctrinal differences—i.e. regarding the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the nature of the Atonement, etc. Over the mid to late 1900’s, especially after 1980, a new organization was founded, with books of a new order, that changed the pillars of the faith of the SDA Pioneers.

(2) Adopted a false *mission*. Today’s SDA Church has also lost sight of its primary missionary objective—the proclamation of the three angels’ messages—as a consequence of a false understanding of God, having drunk the wine (the false doctrines) of Babylon and, rather than proclaim a “come out of her” (Rev. 18:4) message, has pursued ecumenism.

(3) Adopted a false *organization*. Today’s SDA Church is organizationally patterned after the Catholic Church (recognized by both the church and civil courts), which lives unto itself: exalting its priesthood (via central authority and finances), promoting dogma and tradition (via creedalism), protecting its assets via civil lawsuits, and actively censoring anything deemed heresy (via church discipline and/or disfellowship). All this resulting in spiritual stasis on the part of *both* the clergy and the laity.

Summary of *differences*.

Topic	Adventist Pioneers (pre-1915)	Apostate Adventism (post-1980)
Creed	Bible alone	28 Fundamental Beliefs
God’s nature	Father and Son—personal, material beings; Spirit is not a being but an essence	Trinity—three, co-equal beings; Father and Holy Spirit are <i>immaterial</i> beings
Christ’s nature	<i>Literal</i> begotten Son of God	Unbegotten God; “Son of God” is a metaphor
Christ’s human nature	<i>Post-Adamic</i> and, therefore, becomes our Example in all things	<i>Pre-Adamic</i> and, therefore, is not our Example in all things
Christ’s death	Jesus <u>did not</u> partake of the second death; the Father <u>did not</u> kill Jesus, but Satan	Jesus <u>did</u> partake of the second death; the Father <u>did</u> kill Jesus
Atonement	<i>Dual</i> atonement; relational	<i>Single</i> atonement; penal substitution

The Ten commandments	The 1 st commandment (God's nature) is the basis of the 4 th	The 1 st commandment is falsified by the Trinity and corrupts the 4 th
EGW writings	EGW is a true prophet and authoritative; the "pillars of faith" in the first 50 years did not change	EGW <i>pseudo</i> -authoritative; her teachings changed with "advancing truth"; Desire of Ages is a "paradigm shift"
Three angels' messages	<i>Central mission</i> and clarity as to its meaning	<i>Loss of mission</i> due to adoption of Babylonian teachings and ecumenism
Apostasy	<i>Alpha</i> of apostasy during the Kellogg crisis (1903-1907)	<i>Omega</i> of apostasy fully revealed post-1980; "books of a new order"; change in the pillars of Adventist faith
Ecumenism	<i>Unaligned</i> with Babylon and her daughters. Babylon's false teachings actively exposed	<i>Aligned</i> via ecumenism with Babylon and her daughters, and has <i>adopted</i> some of her false teachings
Governance	<i>Bottom-up</i> : members owned and ran the church; clergy were evangelists and itinerate preachers	<i>Top-down</i> : Corporate entity owns and runs the church; clergy are employees and "hover" over the churches
Abortion	Adamantly <i>anti</i> -Abortion.	<i>No policy</i> —other than women having the right to choose.

Adventists "In-Name-Only." One cannot go by name and lineage to determine what constitutes a true Seventh-day Adventist. It is very much analogous to the Jewish nation at the time of Christ. They had name and lineage—claiming to be the sons of Abraham—while at the same time rejecting Christ as the Messiah and ultimately responsible for his death on a cross.

[8T 247.2 \(1903\)](#): In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence: "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged.

► A'. Daughters of Babylon

The term “Babylon” is a family name. It does not refer solely to a single religious organization, but to a religious *kingdom*—that is, a Mother Church and her daughters. As Revelation tells us,

Revelation 17:5 (KJV): And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, **BABYLON** THE GREAT, THE **MOTHER OF HARLOTS** AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

This is how EGW defined the term “Babylon” in reference to the second angel’s message in Revelation 14:8, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!”—

[4SP 232.2](#): The term Babylon, derived from Babel, and signifying confusion, is applied in Scripture to the various forms of false or apostate religion. But the message announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to some religious body that was once pure, and has become corrupt. It cannot be the Romish Church which is here meant; for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries. **But how appropriate the figure as applied to the Protestant churches**, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects. The unity for which Christ prayed does not exist. Instead of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there are numberless conflicting creeds and theories. Religious faith appears so confused and discordant that the world know not what to believe as truth. God is not in all this; it is the work of man,—the work of Satan.

“Daughters” defined. The “mother of harlots” has daughters which are religious groups who follow the teachings and practices of its mother. They have drunk the “wine of Babylon” (Rev. 14:8), which represents her false teachings and practices. This wine is described in some detail in the articles, “[Teachings of the Antichrist](#),” “[Trinity doctrine examined](#),” and “[Pagan Worship](#).” Like the Mother Church—the Catholic Church—her daughters believe in a:

- **False worship.** Worship the wrong God (Trinity/Tritheism), on the wrong day (Sunday), in the wrong way (Temple worship).
- **False foundation.** Elevate Church Tradition (creeds and traditions) above the Bible, and consider many of the stories in the Bible to be *metaphorical* (*i.e. non-literal*)—e.g. Creation, Noah’s Flood, the Exodus, “Son” of God, etc.
- **False authority.** Ordain a priesthood (or ministers or apostles) to hold exclusive Authority and *interpretive* power over Bible

teaching and revelation, and *mediatory* power over the laity.

- ***False salvation.*** Treat church membership, ritual practice, and human works to be *necessary* for salvation. The principle that man can save himself by his own works lays at the foundation of every pagan religion, and is the basis of the Romish Church. Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin (cf. DA 35.2).

A religious organization does not need to meet *all* the above criteria to be considered a daughter of Babylon, but only a select few of its characteristics would suffice.

Daughters exercising the power of the mother. As per EGW:

[SpM 1.4](#): I saw that the two-horned beast had a dragon's mouth, and that his power was in his head, and that the decree would go out of his mouth. Then I saw the Mother of Harlots; that the mother was not the daughters, but separate and distinct from them. She has had her day, and it is past, and **her daughters**, the Protestant sects, were the next to come on the stage and act out the same mind that the mother had when she persecuted the saints. I saw that as the mother has been declining in power, the daughters had been growing, and **soon they will exercise the power once exercised by the mother.**

The power that is spoken of here is the power of the state. It is the enforcement of the church's religious beliefs through civil laws and powers. It is the union of church and state.

Executive outline. This article examines several religious groups. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but to illustrate how the teachings and practices of the "daughters of Babylon" are manifested.

- Phariseeism
- [Jehovah's Witnesses](#)
- [Mormons](#)
- [New Apostolic Reformation \(movement\)](#)
- [Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement](#)

Phariseeism

Many of the religious principles of Babylon (and her daughters) can be found in modern-day Judaism, particularly in the sect of Phariseeism (or Pharisaism in British English). In the following five principles of modern-day Phariseeism, note the similarities:

1. **Two Torahs.** Belief in two Torahs: the written Torah (i.e. the books of Moses) and the oral Torah (the teachings of the rabbis).

2. **Absolute authority of the rabbis.** The absolute authority of the rabbis to interpret Scripture. God has no say in it, only the rabbis do.
3. **Irrational interpretation.** Midrashic (or rabbinic) interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, in which the Bible is “coded”, requiring rabbinic deciphering through the use of paraphrase, parable or allegory. This is in contrast to a straight or direct interpretation, aimed at the original literal meaning.
4. **Sanctified Tradition.** Many examples, such as the wearing of the *kippah*—a brimless Jewish skullcap; the ritual washing of the hands, etc.
5. **Commandments of men.** The *takkanot* (which means “improvement”) which are rabbinic decrees or ordinances that are designed to promote the Jewish way of life.

Not much has changed with Judaism since the days of Christ:

[DA 397.2](#): “But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the **commandments of men**.” The words of Christ were an arraignment of the whole system of Pharisaism. He declared that by placing their requirements above the divine precepts the rabbis were setting themselves above God.

Jehovah’s Witnesses [\[e\]](#)

The Jehovah’s Witnesses is an example of a daughter church, which holds the following “wine of Babylon” teachings:

- **anti-Christ.** A diminished view of the roles of both the Father and Son in the plan of salvation (discussed below). Christ is a mere man, “no more and no less,” while the Governing Body, “the anointed class,” is “the *visible* theocratic organization” which speaks for “the *invisible*” Christ on earth.
- **anti-Interpreter.** As the Catholic’s *Magisterium* has the final say on infallible truth [[CCC §100](#)], so does JW’s Governing Body. “Jesus has appointed the ‘faithful slave’ [the Governing Body] to be the *only* channel for dispensing spiritual food.” (*Watchtower* 2016 Nov p. 16). Thus, denying the teaching of 1 John 2:27.
- **anti-Salvation.** An element of faith *and works* is evident in their religion. Preaching is said to be one of the works “that can result in our own salvation” (*Watchtower* 2006 May 15, p. 29). “During the great tribulation, Christians will need to obey instructions from God’s Word **and organization**... We will be saved only if we obey the instructions we receive at that time” (*Watchtower*

2012 Apr 15, p. 26).

- **anti-Baptism.** Baptism is “a vital step toward gaining salvation”, and people are saved by identifying with God’s organization. (*Watchtower* 2016 Mar 4). Salvation is *through* baptism and the church, for both Catholics and JWs.
- **anti-Creation.** JWs do not believe in a literal Creation, but have adopted evolutionary views on the age of the earth and related topics.

JWs on the Atonement. JW’s believe that (at some point in eternity past) the “Son of God” was *created* as Michael the archangel (and not *begotten* as the Son of God). They also believe that Jesus Christ was “no more and no less” a *created* (perfect) human being, not divine. This leads them to have a *diminished* view of the Atonement, as they explain in the following quote.

“Jesus, no more and no less than a perfect human, became a ransom that compensated exactly for what Adam lost—the right to perfect human life on earth. So Jesus could rightly be called ‘the last Adam’ by the apostle Paul, who said in the same context: ‘Just as in Adam all are dying, so also in the Christ all will be made alive’ (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). The perfect human life of Jesus was the ‘corresponding ransom’ required by divine justice—no more, no less. A basic principle even of human justice is that the price paid should fit the wrong committed. If Jesus, however, were part of a Godhead, the ransom price would have been infinitely higher than what God’s own Law required (Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19-21). It was only a perfect human, Adam, who sinned in Eden, not God. So the ransom, to be truly in line with God’s justice, had to be strictly an equivalent—a perfect human, ‘the last Adam.’ Thus, when God sent Jesus to earth as the ransom, he made Jesus to be what would satisfy justice, not an incarnation, not a god-man, but a perfect man, ‘lower than angels.’ “ —*What Does the Bible Say About God and Jesus?* (watchtower.org/library/ti/article_05.htm)

There are several problems with this teaching, not the least of which is God’s role in the matter. If God *created* the “Son of God” (an archangel) and God *created* Jesus (a perfect man, “no more and no less”), who’s to say God couldn’t create another “Son of God” and another Jesus, if the first one failed to do the job? Indeed, God would have had an infinite number of opportunities to redeem mankind through the *creation* of an infinite number of Christs. No big sacrifice to God in sending *his* son, when he could have created “sons” without end, by simply speaking them into existence.

The matter of God's law being something less than his divinity (as implied in the above quote) is another issue. What JW's fail to understand is that God's law defines God's character, and God's character is love, which is infinite. So, the ransom for breaking God's divine, eternal law, required a divine, eternal price, which no created being can satisfy.

And so, JW's view of the Atonement diminishes the value and attributes of the Giver (God the Father) and the value and attributes of the Gift (Jesus Christ). According to John, this is the very sign of the anti-christ: he who denies the Father and the Son (1 John 2:22). In JW's case, a denial of the Father and Son is not a denial of their *existence*, but a denial of their *worth*.

Governing Body. Jehovah's Witnesses' Governing Body is patterned after the Catholic Church's *Magisterium*, in that it holds exclusive *interpretive* power over the Scriptures, and should be the only one "*directly involved in preparing and dispensing spiritual food.*" Further, they believe that to follow the lead of the Governing Body is "**in fact following their Leader, Christ.**" (The full quotes are given below.)

The idea of the powers of the Governing Body is taken from the parable in Matthew 24:45-47 and Luke 12:42-44 of "the faithful and wise servant" or in their NWT Bible, "the faithful and discreet **slave.**" To them it represents:

"In keeping with Jesus' pattern of feeding many through the hands of a few, that slave is made up of **a small group of anointed brothers** who are directly involved in preparing and dispensing spiritual food during Christ's presence. Throughout the last days, the anointed brothers who make up the faithful slave have served together at headquarters. In recent decades, that slave has been closely identified with the **Governing Body** of Jehovah's Witnesses. Note, however, that the word "slave" in Jesus' illustration is singular, indicating that this is a composite slave. The decisions of the Governing Body are thus made collectively." —*Watchtower*, 2013, July 15, p. 22

This Governing Body or composite "faithful and discreet slave" has varied in size over the years between seven and eighteen "anointed" men (essentially the organization's *priesthood*). When the Watchtower says to follow the "faithful and discreet slave," the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses (i.e. its members or laity, which are called "the domestics" or "body of attendants") understand this to mean following the dictates and spiritual insights of the Governing Body (i.e. the faithful "anointed class"), as only these members direct the Organization.

- "When the time comes to clarify a spiritual matter in our day,

holy spirit helps responsible representatives of ‘the faithful and discreet slave’ at world headquarters to discern deep truths that were not previously understood. (Matt. 24:45; 1 Cor. 2:13) The Governing Body as a whole considers adjusted explanations. (Acts 15:6) What they learn, they publish for the benefit of all.” *Watchtower* 2010 July 15 pp. 22, 23

- “The anointed and their other sheep companions recognize that by following the lead of the modern-day Governing Body, **they are in fact following their Leader, Christ.**” *Watchtower* 2010 Sep 15 p. 23

Anonymous leaders. According to JW’s, this select group of individuals is the voice of Christ on earth and is *anonymous*. In 2011, it was claimed it is not even necessary to know who these anointed men are.

“We thus have no way of knowing the exact number of anointed ones on earth; **nor do we need to know.**” *Watchtower* 2011 Aug 15 p. 22

Exclusive power. An extreme level of trust and obedience is demanded of its members to the “faithful slave” (the Governing Body).

- “Today Jehovah leads the earthly part of his organization by means of ‘the faithful and discreet slave.’ ... We show that we trust in Jehovah’s way of doing things by heeding the direction we receive from the organization and the elders.” *Watchtower* 2022 Feb p. 4
- “Some may feel that they can interpret the Bible on their own. However, **Jesus has appointed the ‘faithful slave’ to be the only channel for dispensing spiritual food.** Since 1919, the glorified Jesus Christ has been using that slave to help his followers understand God’s own Book and heed its directives.” *Watchtower* 2016 Nov p. 16
- “That faithful slave is the channel through which Jesus is feeding his true followers in this time of the end. It is vital that we recognize the faithful slave. Our spiritual health and our relationship with God depend on this channel.” *Watchtower* 2013 July 15 p. 20

Baptized into the “slave”. In order to gain approval for baptism and join the organization, a series of 60 questions (as of 2019) is asked of the candidate by two elders. Of interest is the following question:

Question #14: Do you believe that the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses is “the faithful and discreet slave” appointed by Jesus?

Obviously, your answer needs to be in the affirmative, if you intend

to join the organization. Once you pass this series of questions, you are ready for baptism, which is done at an assembly or convention of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the conclusion of the baptism talk, the speaker will ask the baptism candidates to stand and answer the following two questions in a loud voice (wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1102014954):

1. "Have you repented of your sins, dedicated yourself to Jehovah, and accepted his way of salvation through Jesus Christ?"
2. "Do you understand that your baptism identifies you as one of Jehovah's Witnesses **in association with Jehovah's organization?**"

Understanding that you become part of an organization is important to them. This "identifies you" or marks you as a Jehovah's Witness. As such, you are "*in association with Jehovah's organization*," an entity, whose Governing Body, you are expected to follow with unquestioned loyalty. If not, you may be excommunicated or labelled a "disapproved associate," which results in being shunned by the congregation, totally and completely. Indeed, the congregation is instructed not to associate with you at all, or talk to you, and you are instructed not to talk to them.

The "slave" is master. Jehovah's Witnesses regard their organization as *theocratic* ("Jehovah's Theocratic Organization Today," *Watchtower*, 1952 Feb 1, pp. 79–81). Definition of a *theocracy*: a system of government in which priests rule in the name of God. In the case of JW's, the *priesthood* is "the anointed class" who make up the Governing Body. Indeed, the Governing Body is understood by them to be "the *visible* theocratic organization." And, as already mentioned, its powers are quite exclusive.

Further, the Organization instructs its members to "avoid independent thinking", claiming such thinking "was introduced by Satan the Devil" (*Watchtower* 1979 Feb 15 p. 20; 1985 Nov 1 p. 5). So where should their thinking come from? The Governing Body, of course. Its church (or "Kingdom Hall") meetings are described as "catechistical" question-and-answer sessions in which questions and answers are both provided via their *Watchtower* literature. Not tolerated is dissidence over their doctrines and practices. Dissenters are condemned as "apostates" who are "mentally diseased" (*Watchtower* 2011 July 15, p. 12).

JW Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses have their own Bible, the New World Translation (NWT). This Bible was translated by five Jehovah's Witnesses in 1950. (Information supplied by a former Governing Body official, Raymond Franz—*Crisis of Conscience*, 1983.) Initially, they created the New Testament entitled "New World Translation of the Christian

Greek Scriptures”, with the Old Testament being released in 5 parts between 1953 and 1960. Their latest revision was published in 2013.

JW Bible is *biased*. The claim that the New World Translation (NWT) is *biased* is demonstrably true. However, the same can be said of most other Bible translations, including my own. All translations involve interpretive decisions, and therefore reflect certain theological or doctrinal perspectives and biases.

If Bible translators were more transparent about this reality, they would openly acknowledge the presence of such biases. In that case, discussions would shift away from attempting to prove whether a particular translation is biased or incorrect, and instead focus on understanding the nature of those biases and the reasons behind them. In the case of the NWT, much of the bias appears to stem from an effort to support specific theological positions, as illustrated in the selection of biblical passages listed below.

Here is a sampling of verses comparing *The Chiastic Word* with the NWT. In the case of Colossians, it is noteworthy to see that a diminishing of Christ’s divine nature is expressly intended.

Ref	The Chiastic Word	NWT (2013)	Notes
John 1:1	In the beginning was the word and the word was from God and the word was divine .	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god .	See below.
John 17:3	And this is eternal life, that they may know you , the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.	This means everlasting life, their coming to know you , the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.	See below.
Col. 1:16	For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things were created through him and for him.	because by means of him all <u>other</u> things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All <u>other</u> things have been created through him and for him.	NWT inserts “ other ” which is not found in the Greek, nor is it implied.
Col. 1:19	For in him all the fullness [<i>of God</i>] was pleased to dwell	because God was pleased to have all fullness to dwell in him	NWT completely changes the meaning

Col. 2:9	For all the fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ	because it is in him that all the fullness of the <u>di-vine quality</u> dwells bodily	See below.
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On John 1:1: NWT’s rendering of John 1:1c, “and the Word was a **god**,” is probably the clearest example of translation *bias* found in their Bible. See our commentary on this verse for a detailed explanation of its true meaning. Suffice to say, the literal translation of the Greek phrase in 1:1c, *kai ho logos en theos*, is, “and the word was God,” which uses the term “God” in a *qualitative* sense. That is, “the word” is not (the) God, or a god, but God-like or **divine**. Even the authors of the NWT recognize and state this in their commentary on this verse and include the (correct) alternate reading, “was **divine**,” in the margin.

On John 17:3: The NWT (2013) version, “their coming to know you,” is a change from the NWT 1984 edition which had, “their taking in knowledge of you” (which is now in the margin of the new edition). Nevertheless, both editions slant the meaning of the translation to the idea that a knowledge *about* God (i.e. *factual*) is what is meant, rather than to know God (i.e. *relational*). The true sense of the Greek word, *ginosko*, is “to know”, not “knowledge”. And, given their promotion of and heavy reliance on their *Watchtower* literature to advance their understanding *about* God, this choice of words is not surprising.

On Colossians 2:9: The term *theotēs* [G2320], as is found in this verse, is typically translated as: deity, God’s nature, or “Godhead” (an archaic English word). However, the NWT translates it as “divine quality” (i.e. “a quality of divinity”) which is a mistranslation. Note the difference in the Greek,

- *theotēs* [G2320] (in Col. 2:9) means “*that which God is*”.
- *theiotēs* [G2304] (in Rom. 1:20) means “*that which is of God*”.

Colossians 2:9 is not speaking of a “quality” of God (*theiotēs*, “that which is of God”) but of the very “nature” of God (*theotēs*, “that which God is”). Said another way, Christ is a divine person, not simply having divine attributes. JW theology accepts the latter, but rejects the former.

Christ’s resurrection and return. Two other teachings that diminish or distort the plan of salvation are as follows.

1. **Christ’s resurrection.** The *Watchtower* teaches that Jesus was “raised from the grave, not a human person, but a spirit” (*Let God Be True*). After the resurrection he again became Michael the archangel. Thus, no bodily *resurrection* of Christ and no bodily *return* of Christ (see next item). And, if we are to believe that we will be like Christ when he returns (as in 1 John 3:2), then neither

will *we* have a bodily resurrection.

2. **Christ's return.** That Jesus began his “invisible presence” on earth in 1914. “Since no earthly men have ever seen the Father...neither will they see the glorified Son” (*Let God Be True*). So, the idea that at the Second Coming “every eye will see him, including those who pierced him” (Rev. 1:7) is not in their eschatology; at least, not *literally*.

JWs on Creation. Basically, JWs are *anti*-Creation in the sense that they do not take the Creation story to be literal. Rather, the Creation days are understood to represent “epochs” and the age of the earth is believed by them to be billions of years old, as evolutionary scientists claim it to be. A quote from one of their publications:

Age of the earth. “Jehovah’s Witnesses have no objection to credible scientific research that indicates the earth may be billions of years old.” (jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/creationism-belief)

JWs acknowledge the fossil record of billions of years to be scientifically valid, but fail to explain how death and suffering (which is plainly evident in the fossil record) could have occurred when God created a perfect world with a perfect, and sinless, Adam and Eve.

Mormons ^[4]

Mormonism is a religious movement started by Joseph Smith in the 1820s. After Smith’s death in 1844, the movement split into several groups following different leaders; the majority followed Brigham Young. The term *Mormon* typically refers to members of “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (LDS Church), as today, this branch is far larger than all the other branches combined.

Mormons self-identify as Christian, and believe that Christ’s church was *restored* through Joseph Smith and is guided by living prophets and apostles. The term “restored” refers to the idea that the original Christian religion is obsolete, and Mormons alone are practicing true Christianity.

The following are a few reasons why the LDS Church can be rightfully regarded as a daughter church of Babylon.

False concept of God. To Mormon’s the concept of God is not monotheistic, but polytheistic. Not only is there a Godhead of three distinct divine persons (God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost), but there is a Heavenly Mother (or Mothers)—who is married to God the Father. The term Heavenly Parents is used to refer collectively to God the Father (or Heavenly Father) and his wife (or wives), the Heavenly Mother(s). Jesus Christ, the firstborn Son, is also referred to as Jehovah. Lucifer (i.e. Satan)

is also a Son of God the Father, and a brother of Jesus. According to Joseph Smith, God the Father was once a man on another planet before being exalted to Godhood. The term “Exaltation” is the Mormon belief that we too can become the God of another planet in the afterlife. It should be noted that God the Father also had a Father, and a Father before him, *ad infinitum*. Obviously, this concept of Gods and Godhood is nowhere taught in the Christian Bible. It’s about as pagan as any polytheistic religion can get. According to Rodney Turner (a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University when the following was published):

“Mormonism is simultaneously monotheistic, tri-theistic, and polytheistic.” —Rodney Turner, “[*The Doctrine of the Firstborn and Only Begotten*](#),” in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God*, ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 91–118.

False scriptures. The Mormon scriptures consist of two primary sources: (1) a highly altered translation of the KJV by Joseph Smith—the Joseph Smith Translation (JST), and (2) the Book of Mormon, also written by Joseph Smith. Other revelations and writings by Joseph Smith, also considered inspired, include the “Doctrine and Covenants” and “Pearl of Great Price”. Mormons, however, regard the term “scripture” as *anything* spoken or written by a prophet, while under inspiration. And, given that Mormons believe in a living prophet, who they consider to be the current president of the church, the church continues to be directed by God through the inspired words and writings of the living prophet. Moreover, inspiration and scriptures is a *progressive* term. It is possible that newer revelation can override prior revelation, as is the case with some of the doctrines of the church such as polygamy and black people being cursed.

The corrupt Joseph Smith Translation. In the LDS Church’s Articles of Faith 1:8, it reads,

“We believe the Bible to be the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly*; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” —Articles of Faith, 1:8, LDS Church.

With respect to the Protestant Bible, Mormons are taught that it is corrupt. It was Joseph Smith who undertook the task to “correct” some of the “mistranslations” found in the Bible. Joseph Smith’s rationale for doing this is well documented:

“From sundry revelations which had been received, it was apparent that many important points touching the salvation of man, had been taken from the Bible, or lost before it was compiled....I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original writers.

Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.” —*Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 245 and vol. 6, p. 57).

Joseph Smith’s translation (or “corrected” version), the JST, is also called the Inspired Version of the Holy Scriptures (IV). It is not a new translation from original Hebrew and Greek sources, but a *derived* translation of the KJV Bible. It should also be noted that Joseph Smith never completely finished this new translation. With this version, Joseph Smith freely and intentionally added and altered its reading. Furthermore, some portions are from other Mormon sources such as The Book of Moses, also written by Joseph Smith. A free PDF copy of this version can be accessed at: www.centerplace.org/hs/iv/inspiredversionbible.pdf.

Here are the main issues with the JST—the Mormon Bible:

1. Long insertions that interrupt the biblical narrative and have no obvious textual source (defined as belonging to Smith’s revelatory, self-serving, intent).
2. Theological corrections.
3. Interpretive additions and alterations.
4. Harmonization, particularly in the Synoptic gospels.
5. Grammatical changes including technical clarification and the modernization of terms largely derived from Adam Clarke’s commentary which Smith is known to have used.

On number 1, the most glaring, self-serving insertion is found in Genesis chapter 50. In the KJV, chapter 50 ends with Genesis 50:26. Not so with the JST. It ends with v.38, an additional twelve verses. This added portion points to the coming of a “seer” who would also be called Joseph. In v.33, it reads as follows:

Genesis 50:33 (JST): And that seer will I bless, and they that seek to destroy him shall be confounded; for this promise I give unto you; for I will remember you from generation to generation; **and his name shall be called Joseph, and it shall be after the name of his father**; and he shall be like unto you; for the thing which the Lord shall bring forth by his hand shall bring my people unto salvation.

Notice that Smith adds that a descendant of the Genesis Joseph, whose name will also be called, “Joseph,” will be a prophet (a “seer”), who is to come. Joseph Smith’s first name is “Joseph” and his father’s name was also “Joseph”. Get the connection? Joseph Smith was the fulfillment of the prophesy! How convenient is that?! Bear in mind that there is not a shred of physical evidence from antiquity to support this insertion. It was made up out of whole cloth.

On number 2, Joseph Smith was clearly intent on introducing his version of theology. For example, on 1 Corinthians 15:20, the KJV reads as follows:

1 Corinthians 15:20 (KJV): There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial differs from that of the terrestrial.

Now, here is the JST on the same verse (*the italics show the changes*):

1 Corinthians 15:20 (JST): There are **three degrees of glory in the Resurrection**. Also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, **and bodies telestial**; but the glory of the celestial, one; and the terrestrial, another; **and the telestial, another**.

In keeping with Joseph Smith's theology, the above translation takes the two realms from Paul's letter, the *celestial* and the *terrestrial*, and then adds a third realm, what he calls the "*telestial*." In Mormon theology, the resurrected will dwell in one of three realms: *celestial*, *telestial*, or *terrestrial*. The highest, according to Mormonism, is the *celestial*—in which the resurrected become gods of new worlds. The term "*telestial*" is a made up word by Joseph Smith. Also, note how Joseph Smith misunderstood the meaning of the text. The apostle Paul was *not* referring to the Resurrection consisting of two realms, but of one realm, the *celestial*. As 1 Corinthians 15:54 tells us, "and this mortal (or *terrestrial*) shall put on immortality (or *celestial*)." The Mormon three-levelled afterlife is nowhere found in Scripture.

On Numbers 3 through 5, they appear to be frequently influenced by Adam Clarke's commentary. (This commentary was a mainstay for Methodist theologians and biblical scholars alike, and was one of the most widely available commentaries in the mid-1820s and 1830s in America.) In fact, Clarke's commentary appears to be the primary source used by Joseph Smith to make these types of changes. (Reference: "*A Recently Recovered Source: Rethinking Joseph Smith's Bible Translation*," March 16, 2017, Brigham Young University, Journal of Undergraduate Research.)

While not an exhaustive treatment, there is enough here to suggest that the JST is a *corrupt*, self-serving translation.

Book of Mormon. You would think that basing one's religion on a corrupt Bible translation—namely, the JST—is bad enough, but in the case of the LDS Church it gets worse. Joseph Smith also wrote a 531-page book called, "The Book of Mormon," that is regarded by Mormons as equal to the Bible, *if not greater*. This book is the keystone of their religion. It is the basis for their belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet, Christ

appeared in the Americas 2,000 years ago, and that the true Christianity has been *restored* by the LDS Church, which includes its Priesthood, Ordinances, Teachings, and continuing Revelation.

However, by any measure, the Book of Mormon is a novel^[a], a fanciful book of fiction, and a fabrication by an imaginative mind. There is no historical or archaeological basis for any of the stories written in it. Moreover, it is so poorly written that it has gone through seven major editions since it was first published in 1830, with an estimated number of changes approaching 4,000. Here are just five areas of major criticism:

1. Lack of archeological proof
2. Issues with how it was translated
3. Anachronisms
4. Plagiarism
5. Shifting stance on Native American history

On number 1, there is no archeological evidence supporting any of the people, places, or epic battles mentioned in the Book of Mormon—not in the Americas or anywhere else on the planet.

On number 2, we are told that the Book of Mormon was a translation of a set of gold plates, unearthed and translated by Joseph Smith. However, the actual translation involved a seer stone that Joseph Smith placed in a hat, then buried his face in the hat to read whatever “words” appeared, while an assistant wrote down the words he spoke. Only recently has the LDS Church openly acknowledged this process, releasing photos of the stone in 2015.

On number 3, the book is full of anachronisms (*def.* “a thing belonging to another period of time”). For example, the Book of Mormon mentions things like horses, goats, iron weapons, chariots, and even elephants—none of which existed in pre-Columbian America.

On number 4, Joseph Smith borrowed ideas from Ethan Smith’s book, “*View of the Hebrews*,” which was published in 1823, a few years before the Book of Mormon. Such ideas include theories, stories, and even plot elements that echo throughout Smith’s book. For example, the claim that Native Americans were descendants of ancient Israelites. Also, around 30% of the Book of Mormon contains passages straight out of the Bible, down to specific phrasing and even punctuation from the KJV.

On number 5, a key part of Mormon theology is the teaching that Native Americans descended directly from a group of Israelites who sailed from Jerusalem to the Americas. But now DNA science has shown

^[a] novel:—*def.* a fictitious prose narrative of book length, typically representing character and action with some degree of realism

that Native Americans are actually more closely related to populations in East Asia. It is now believed that the origins of Native Americans can be traced back to people who migrated from Asia to North America across a land bridge that once existed over the Bering Strait during the last Ice Age. This has resulted in the LDS Church changing their doctrine to the belief that the ones mentioned in the Book of Mormon is another group which was “among” the Native Americans of the time—conveniently, a group of Native Americans that no longer exist.

False atonement. It is well-known that the LDS Church has Masonic roots. Joseph Smith himself became a Mason in March 1842 and soon after introduced the **temple endowment** (a Mormon temple ceremony) which has similarities to Masonic ceremonies. During Mormon temple ordinances, men and women covenant with God to obey His laws for the purpose of gaining exaltation (i.e. Godhood) through the atonement of Jesus Christ. The ceremony itself includes washing (i.e. sprinkling of water) and anointing with oil, and receiving a “new name” which they are not to tell anyone, and temple undergarments, which Mormons are to wear day and night throughout their life. Participants are taught symbolic gestures (i.e. hand and arm motions) and passwords considered necessary to pass by angels guarding the way to heaven, and are told not to reveal them to anyone. Mormons also practice proxy endowments for the dead in order to give the deceased who never heard the gospel an opportunity to hear it and accept it in the afterlife.

The covenant portion of the temple ceremony involves entering into five covenants, which largely represent salvation by works:

1. **Law of Obedience**, which includes *striving* to keep God’s commandments.
2. **Law of Sacrifice**, which means *doing all that is possible* to support the Lord’s work.
3. **Law of the Gospel**, which includes baptism, repentance, and being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.
4. **Law of Chastity**, which means living a chaste life until legally and lawfully married, according to God’s law.
5. **Law of Consecration**, which means *dedicating time, talents, and everything* the Lord has blessed an individual with to build up the church.

The one receiving the endowment must be considered “worthy” through a “temple recommend” by church leadership. A “worthiness interview” is performed to determine if the person has been faithful in church attendance, is not affiliated with apostate groups, pays tithe, is morally upright and chaste, has confessed serious past sins, etc.

A male member of the church must hold the Melchizedek priesthood to participate in the endowment. The Melchizedek priesthood is only given to male members of the church at age 18. He is ordained through the laying on of hands. As such, the Melchizedek priesthood gives the man the power and authority of God to perform miracles, heal the sick, and give blessings. His authority is recognized by God and is binding in heaven, on earth, and in the afterlife. The ordination by the laying on of hands is also performed when a man is called to a particular office, such as priest, elder, deacon, or teacher. He may be ordained repeatedly to numerous offices during his lifetime.

Mormon testimony (or witness). A Mormon believer is encouraged to develop and share a “testimony” of his belief in Mormonism. It includes the following five elements:

1. I know that God is our Heavenly Father and He loves us.
2. I know that His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Savior and Redeemer.
3. I know that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God. He restored the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth and translated the Book of Mormon by the power of God.
4. I know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the Lord’s Church on the earth today.
5. I know that this Church is led by a living prophet who receives revelation.

It should be understood that a Mormon’s testimony on the truth of Mormonism is founded on a false (polytheistic) conception of God and Jesus Christ, a fiction-writing “prophet” in Joseph Smith, a fanciful novel in the Book of Mormon, and a salvation based on human works through the practice of Masonic-like rituals and covenants established by the Church and its Leadership. Notice that there is no mention of the Christian Bible in all of this. The Mormon’s belief system has no basis in the Christian Bible. It is as man-made as any pagan religion can be.

Conclusion. In summary, the LDS Church is a daughter of Babylon in that they are:

- **anti-God.** Mormons hold to a false concept of God. It is polytheistic and pagan, through and through.
- **anti-Scripture.** Mormons use a *corrupt* translation of the Bible in the JST. Also, they elevate the Book of Mormon as equal to the Bible, which is itself a fanciful novel at best. Moreover, they elevate the other writings of Joseph Smith to the level of Scripture. All told, the authority of the Bible is subverted through the writings of Joseph Smith.

- **anti-atonement.** Salvation through the practice of “temple endowment” is nowhere found in the Christian Bible.
- **anti-Priesthood.** The concept of elevating men to the level of Christ’s Melchizedek priesthood ministry is unbiblical.

Ultimately, belief in Mormonism comes down to believing that Joseph Smith was the greatest of the prophets, greater than Moses and, in some respects, even greater than Jesus Christ. It is not unlike the religion of Islam in which the Quran is their substitute Bible written by their great prophet Muhammad. The chief difference between Mormonism and Islam, however, is that Mormons believe themselves to be Christians, while those who practice Islam do not.

New Apostolic Reformation (movement) [\[4\]](#)

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) originated in the late 1980s and 1990s and was formally described by C. Peter Wagner, a missiologist at Fuller Theological Seminary. The **movement** grew out of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity and is based on the belief that modern apostles and prophets are being restored to the church, which will bring about a new reformation in Christianity. The NAR is a theological **movement** rather than an organization, lacking formal membership.

Christian supremacist. Although not the movement’s founder, C. Peter Wagner coined the term *New Apostolic Reformation*, and described it as “the most radical change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation” (C. Peter Wagner, 2006, *Apostles Today: Biblical Government for Biblical Power*, p. 138). This movement combines elements of Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and the Seven Mountain Mandate^[a] to advocate for spiritual warfare to bring about Christian dominion over all aspects of society and **end or weaken the separation of church and state**. Regarding dominionism, in 2007 Wagner stated:

Our theological bedrock is what has been known as **Dominion Theology**. This means that our divine mandate is to do whatever is necessary, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to retake the dominion of God’s creation which Adam forfeited to Satan in the Garden of Eden. It is nothing less than seeing God’s kingdom coming and His will being done here on earth as it is in heaven. —[Holvast 2009, ch. 4](#).

^[a] Seven Mountain Mandate: — a dominionist conservative Christian ideology within evangelical Christianity, particularly independent Charismatic groups. It holds that there are seven aspects of society that believers seek to dominate: family, religion, education, media, arts and entertainment, business, and government.

The NAR's prominence and power have increased since the 2016 election of Donald Trump as US president. Theology professor André Gagné, author of a 2024 book on the movement, has characterized it as "inherently political". Religion scholar Julie Ingersoll states the movement is "often...now the public face of Christian Nationalism." (Julie Ingersoll, [*From Christian Reconstruction to Christian Nationalism*](#)).

NAR beliefs. The NAR emphasizes experience over Scripture, mysticism over doctrine, and modern-day "apostles" over the plain text of the Bible. Of particular distinction in the NAR are the role and power of spiritual leaders and miracle-workers, the reception of "new" revelations from God, an over-emphasis on spiritual warfare, and a pursuit of cultural and political control in society. The seeking of signs and wonders in the NAR is always accompanied by blatantly false doctrine. The beliefs that unity the movement can be summarized as follows:

- **Union of church and state.** The Kingdom of God is advanced on earth through the church gaining "spiritual" dominion over culture and society.
- **Authoritarian oligarchy.** Apostles, aided by prophets, constitute the church's strategic spiritual leadership. Not an authoritarian pastor but a "spiritual oligarchy" shared by apostles and prophets.
- **Earthly kingdom.** The end-times church will be the complete manifestation of Jesus on earth. It is a postmillennialist establishment of God's kingdom on earth through the actions of obedient Christians, ultimately leading to the Second Coming.
- **Spiritualism.** A strong focus on prophetic insight and supernatural manifestations—i.e. characterized by signs and wonders.
- **Spoken word above the Bible.** New revelation and casual use of the Bible. The "spoken word" (God speaking to you directly, or via prophets living today) is above the Bible.

Some have given the NAR movement the descriptive title "Third Wave of the Holy Spirit."

Apostles and prophets. The NAR teaches that God's intended form of church governance is apostles and prophets, holding leadership over evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Apostles are seen as the highest of all spiritual leaders, being specially empowered by God. **True maturity** and unity, per the NAR, *is only found in those who submit to the leadership of their apostles*. According to this teaching, as the church unifies behind the apostles, these leaders will develop greater and greater supernatural powers. Eventually, this will include the ability to perform great miracles

and mass healings. These signs are meant to encourage a massive wave of converts to Christianity. These apostles are also destined to be recipients of a great wealth transfer, which will enable the church to establish God's kingdom on earth.

Prophets in the NAR are almost as important as apostles. These "prophets" have been empowered to receive "new" revelations from God that will aid the church in establishing dominion. According to the NAR, only prophets, and occasionally apostles, can obtain new revelations. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers cannot. The prophets' new revelations are crucial to overcoming the world, and the success of the church depends on the apostles following through on the information prophets provide.

Spoken Word. The term *spoken word* refers to the oral proclamation of God's message, in contrast to the Bible, which is the written and recorded form of that message. In the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) movement, the "spoken word" is often elevated to a status equal to—or, in practice, even higher than—the written word of God. This stands in sharp contrast to traditional evangelical and Protestant theology, which upholds Scripture as the sole, final, and sufficient authority for faith and life (*sola Scriptura*). Consequently, the NAR movement tends to place the pronouncements of its apostles and prophets above the authority of Scripture.

Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement [\[4\]](#)

Introduction. The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement has grown from a small early-twentieth-century revival into one of the largest and most influential streams of global Christianity, shaping worship style, spiritual expectation, and religious experience for hundreds of millions of believers. Its emphasis on the immediate, felt presence of the Holy Spirit has drawn many toward a vibrant sense of God's nearness. **But vitality of experience is not the same thing as fidelity to Scripture**, and a movement's size and enthusiasm do not exempt it from theological scrutiny. This critique examines five recurring and well-documented problems within the movement: the claim of continual, Scripture-equaling revelation; a track record of specific prophecies that failed to come to pass; manifestations and "signs" without clear biblical warrant; a pattern of prioritizing experience over the authority of the text; and a persistent, structural inability to hold leaders accountable when doctrine, practice, or character go wrong. None of these criticisms is speculative. Each is drawn from the movement's own public record—named leaders, dated events, and their own later admissions—and each, examined against Scripture, points to the same underlying failure: a system that has untethered spiritual authority from the test God himself established for it (Isa. 8:20; Deut.

18:22; 1 Cor. 14:29).

1. Continual revelation. The theological problem here is really about the *sufficiency* and *closure* of the biblical canon. Historic Protestant theology (and certainly SDA theology) holds that special revelation closed with the apostolic writings—**Scripture** is “able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15) and **needs no supplement**. The charismatic movement’s language of “God told me,” “I sense in the Spirit,” or “I need a fresh word” functionally treats the Bible as a floor rather than a ceiling—a foundation on which new, personal, binding revelation is continually built. The practical effect is that subjective impression gets equal or superior authority to the text: a leader’s “word from the Lord” can direct someone’s marriage, finances, or ministry decisions in ways the Bible never authorized anyone to claim for their own impressions. Critics have long argued this collapses the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* and re-opens exactly the kind of extra-biblical authority structure the Reformation existed to close.

2. Failed prophecy. This point has the richest documentary record, because it played out publicly and repeatedly around the 2020 U.S. election. A large cluster of charismatic “prophets”—Jeremiah Johnson, Kris Vallotton, Kenneth Copeland, Paula White, Cindy Jacobs, and others—declared with confident, specific language that Trump would win a second term, some citing dreams, visions, or direct prophetic words alongside other prominent charismatic figures who predicted a Trump win. When the prophecy failed, the aftermath is instructive about accountability as well: Johnson posted a public apology and then withdrew from the ministry partnerships and followers who kept pressing him to defend the political prophecies, but rather than being received graciously, he says he was called “a coward, sellout, a traitor to the Holy Spirit,” was cursed out roughly 500 times, and lost ministry partners “every hour”. He eventually shut down his ministry entirely, warning that “if we do not wake up, if we do not humble ourselves, there is greater judgment to come” for the charismatic-prophetic world. Meanwhile most of the other prophetic voices who made the same failed prediction never retracted it publicly at all—a Skeptical Inquirer analysis of the episode observed that prophetic-movement preachers generally “aren’t rated by their batting averages,” since their followers celebrate the hits and quietly overlook the misses. That asymmetry—one honest man pays an enormous social cost for admitting error, while the rest of the guild pays no cost for silence—is itself a strong argument for: **the system has no real mechanism for holding “prophets” accountable** to Deuteronomy 18:22’s test.

3. False signs and wonders. Todd Bentley’s “Lakeland Outpouring” (2008) is probably the single most documented case study for this point,

because it combined tongues-adjacent ecstatic phenomena with claimed physical miracles that later proved false or exaggerated. Bentley claimed to raise people from the dead and regularly converse with an angel, and used acts of violence like kicking people in an effort to supernaturally heal them—including a widely reported “Grandma slapping healing,” where he said God told him to slap an elderly woman in the face. Investigative follow-up found no verifiable list of the healings he claimed occurred at the height of the revival. Prominent apostolic figures publicly validated him in the moment—Peter Wagner declared, “I take the apostolic authority that God has given me and I decree to Todd Bentley, your power will increase, your authority will increase”—which is worth noting, since it shows the movement’s own leadership structure lending institutional legitimacy to manifestations that collapsed within weeks. More broadly, phenomena like being “slain in the Spirit,” uncontrollable laughter (the “Toronto Blessing,” 1994 onward), and falling/barking/animal-sound manifestations have no clear exegetical basis in the biblical descriptions of the Spirit’s work, and critics argue they function experientially rather than doctrinally—they produce a felt sense of divine encounter without any content that could be tested against Scripture the way Paul instructs the Corinthians to test prophecy and tongues (1 Cor. 14:29).

4. Prioritizing experience over Scripture. The Bentley case doubles as evidence here too: one pastor who visited the Lakeland meetings wrote that watching the broadcast, he was outraged by Bentley’s “complete disregard for Scripture,” his disregard for what the Bible teaches about the miraculous gifts and about maintaining order in worship services (a direct echo of 1 Corinthians 14:40). The pattern critics point to is that emotional intensity—*being “slain,” weeping, ecstatic laughter*—becomes treated as self-authenticating proof of the Spirit’s presence, such that theological content and biblical order become secondary or even obstacles to “not quenching the Spirit.” This inverts the biblical test, where experience is supposed to be judged by the word (Isa. 8:20; Acts 17:11), not the word validated by experience.

5. Lack of accountability. Beyond the Jeremiah Johnson contrast already noted, Bentley and Benny Hinn are the two clearest documented examples.

Bentley: After the Lakeland scandal—credible allegations of adultery, sexting, and substance abuse spanning fifteen years—a panel of six charismatic leaders led by Michael Brown formally concluded in 2020 that Bentley was “not qualified to serve in leadership or ministry today,” citing a “steady pattern of ungodly and immoral behavior” confirmed by an independent investigator’s interviews from 2008 through 2019. Yet within about a year, Bentley was preaching again, and by 2022–23 he was

expanding his ministry with revival events across multiple states and an overseas mission trip, and even publicly announced he'd be present at the 2023 Asbury revival—with no functioning enforcement mechanism to actually stop him, because charismatic/independent Pentecostal polity generally lacks the kind of binding denominational discipline structures that could revoke credentials.

Hinn: On the financial side, Benny Hinn has publicly “repented” of prosperity-gospel fundraising tactics multiple times over roughly two decades—in 2019 telling his audience he didn’t want to “get to heaven and be rebuked” for it, and again in 2024 calling it one of his “2 biggest regrets” from ministry—yet each time the apology was followed by a return to the same fundraising appeals. His own nephew, Costi Hinn, a critic of the movement, has said publicly that what’s missing is any real structural accountability: “a board of outside overseers would go far... towards ensuring this change is real,” and financial watchdog Rusty Leonard of MinistryWatch noted there was no independent corroboration of the claimed change of heart. That’s the pattern your point is naming: repeated moral or financial exposure, a public statement of contrition, and then—absent any external body with actual authority to remove or discipline—a quiet resumption of the same practices.

Conclusion. Taken individually, each of these five problems might be dismissed as an isolated excess—a bad actor here, an overzealous claim there. But taken together, they form a coherent picture. The claim of ongoing revelation supplies the theological permission; failed and unretracted prophecies show what happens when that permission goes unchecked against Scripture; false signs and wonders reveal a movement willing to authenticate itself through experience rather than the text; the elevation of experience over Scripture explains why so few within the movement felt compelled to test any of it; and the absence of real accountability structures explains why none of it has been reformed. This is not a case of a few flawed individuals within an otherwise sound system—Jeremiah Johnson’s costly honesty stands out precisely because it was the exception, not the rule. It is a case of a system that, by its own theological commitments, has largely disabled the mechanisms Scripture provides for correcting error. For those who hold Scripture as the final and sufficient rule of faith, these are not incidental critiques of style or excess. They are reasons to test the movement’s central claims against the very word it professes to honor, and to be sober about the difference between an authentic move of the spirit and a movement that has learned to speak in the spirit’s name.

Resources

► Doctrines, Dogma, and Creedalism

In theological discourse, a key distinction exists between **doctrine** and **dogma**, centered on *authority, certainty, and obligation*. **Doctrine** refers to *teachings* that express and explain the faith of a religious community, whereas **dogma** refers to those doctrines that have been *authoritatively defined* as essential and therefore binding upon believers. Put another way, doctrine may develop and remain open to discussion, whereas dogma consists of doctrines that has been formally and definitively established—binding and non-negotiable.

Bible-based faith. In Protestantism, **doctrine** is understood to be founded on, derived from, and continually tested by the Bible itself. This conviction grows out of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*, “Scripture alone.” The Bible alone stands as the supreme authority for Christian faith and practice, a principle that was the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation as it opposed the prevailing Catholic doctrines founded on Church Tradition and the overbearing authority of the Magisterium—the pope and bishops. The Church, in other words, its teachings and its authority, is neither equal to nor above Scripture and reason. The standard of truth is not what the Church merely *declares* to be true, but what it can *demonstrate* as true from the plain teaching of Scripture and sound reasoning.

The accepted composition of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, follows a specific textual foundation. The **Old Testament** is the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, preserved in the Masoretic Text. The **New Testament** is the Christian biblical canon made up of twenty-seven books, originally written in Koine Greek. Of the two principal Greek manuscript families, the *Majority Text* is accepted as the authentic copy, over and against the Alexandrian, or Critical, Text. The Septuagint is rejected as authoritative, as are the Apocryphal books found within it.

All Bible translations—those rendered in languages other than the original—are subject to error due to factors such as interpretive difficulties, theological bias, or the desire to promote certain cherished ideas through paraphrasing. For this reason, every translation, including my own, should be examined critically. A diligent student of Scripture will consult tools that aid in understanding the original languages when questions arise; two useful online resources are blueletterbible.org and biblehub.com.

Creedalism. Creedalism is the theological view that the Christian faith should be defined, interpreted, and safeguarded by authoritative creeds or confessions—formal statements that summarize biblical doctrine and mark the boundaries of orthodox belief.

In practice, this elevates *extrabiblical* formulations to a level of authority functionally equal to Scripture itself, placing them beyond question. Church authorities typically use such creeds to enforce theological uniformity and to discipline or disfellowship those who dissent. This function is rarely stated openly, but it operates nonetheless. The deeper problem is one of *misplaced authority*: disagreements over belief should be settled by what the Bible teaches, not by what a creed declares.

The doctrine of the Trinity offers the clearest example of creedal authority displacing biblical authority. It is widely acknowledged, even among Trinitarian scholars, that the doctrine is not explicitly taught in Scripture (see “[Trinity doctrine examined](#)“ for a detailed treatment). Despite this, it functions across most Christian denominations as the principal test of fellowship and orthodoxy. When a doctrine without direct biblical warrant becomes the standard by which fellowship is granted or withheld, *tradition* has been placed above the plain teaching of the Bible.

Doctrine vs. Dogma

The key differences between doctrine and dogma may be summarized at a glance in the table below.

Key differences at a glance:

Category	Doctrine	Dogma
Meaning	Teaching	Authoritative decree
Scope	Broad	Narrow
Authority	Scriptural	Institutional / confessional
Flexibility	Can develop	Fixed
Obligation	Persuasive	Binding
Function	Instruction	Boundary-setting

DOCTRINE comes from the Greek *didachē*, meaning *teaching or instruction*. It is **any teaching** derived from the Bible, and it can be **descriptive**, **explanatory**, or **systematic**. Doctrine may develop, mature, or be refined over time, and it can vary in clarity and importance. In the Bible, doctrine refers broadly to what is taught: Jesus’ doctrine (Matthew 7:28), apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), and sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 2:1).

Doctrine can include core truths, such as the resurrection; secondary interpretations, such as the timing of eschatological events; and practical instruction, such as church order. One can hold doctrine without claiming absolute, final authority for it.

DOGMA, by contrast, comes from the Greek *dogma*, meaning *a decree, decision, or authoritative ruling*. It is a doctrine that has been **formally defined and fixed**, declared **non-negotiable** by an authority such as a church, council, or confession. Dogma is binding on those within that authority's community and is often connected to boundaries of orthodoxy. In early Christianity, **dogma** arose when the church formally defined doctrine in response to controversy, as with the Trinity at Nicaea or the full divinity and humanity of Christ at Chalcedon. Rejection of dogma often implied **exclusion** or **heresy**. All dogma is doctrine, but not all doctrine is dogma.

Theological implication. Doctrine, then, answers the question of *what Scripture teaches*, while dogma answers the question of *which teachings are required, settled, and enforced*. This is why doctrine is essential for **understanding**, while dogma is essential, and used, for **identity and boundary-keeping**.

In the Catholic tradition, a dogma is a doctrine **solemnly defined** as divinely revealed. It requires the **assent of faith**, is considered **irreformable**, and is **defined by the Magisterium**, the church leadership, either through ecumenical councils or through *ex cathedra* papal definitions. Protestants often avoid the term “dogma” due to its association with infallible authority and ecclesial coercion. However, when the term is used, it usually refers to core doctrines essential to the gospel and to non-negotiables for Christian identity. The teachings often treated as “functional dogma” in Protestant circles include the **Trinity**, the Incarnation, justification by faith, and the resurrection of Christ.

How dogma functions within creeds

Creeds became *the primary vehicle for dogma*, especially in the period of ecclesial and doctrinal development beginning in the fourth century. Creeds are **dogmatic summaries**, not full theological systems. They state *what must be believed*, they do not explain *how everything works*, and they draw clear lines between orthodoxy and heresy. Creeds express the *unchanging dogma of the Church*, and while Protestants often avoid the word “dogma,” they still functionally use it: to Protestants, creeds define *core, non-negotiable beliefs*—effectively, *dogma*.

Creeds as dogmatic boundaries. Creeds do not aim to explain everything or exhaust “the *mystery*.” Rather, they aim to exclude false teaching,

fix the Church’s confession, and unify worship and belief. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, the intention was to **rule out Arianism**. **Creeds are minimalist rather than maximalist** in their dogma: they use precise language, say **only what must be said**, and refuse further speculation. This is why creeds often feel compressed, contain technical terms, and resist paraphrase. **Dogma**, in this sense, **draws a fence rather than a map**.

Creedal structure and dogma. Creeds often show a triadic structure of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each section fixes identity, defines relationship, and establishes worship legitimacy. Dogma thus functions to **protect salvation theology** as understood and defined by the church. In summary, **doctrine teaches, dogma binds, and creeds unify** the church community through dogma. **Doctrine** arises wherever Scripture invites understanding and growth, while **dogma** emerges where error threatens the church’s orthodoxy. **Creeds** function as the means by which that orthodoxy is articulated, preserved, and safeguarded.

Creed vs. Confession. Creeds establish **orthodoxy** and are recited in worship, while confessions explain doctrine, apply theology, and can be revised. This distinction is summarized in the table below.

Aspect	Creed	Confession
Scope	Universal	Denominational
Purpose	Dogmatic	Doctrinal
Length	Brief, fixed	Extensive, expandable
Use	Liturgical	Didactic

Blurred distinction. In practice, the distinction between creed vs. confession often blurs for several reasons.

- a. **Confessions often include creeds.** Many confessions explicitly affirm the ecumenical creeds, treating them as baseline orthodoxy. In such cases, the confession extends the creed rather than replacing it.
- b. **Creeds arose from confessional moments.** Historically, creeds themselves were produced during controversies. The Nicene Creed, for example, is a **confessional response** to Arianism that later achieved universal status. What began as a *local or situational confession* became a universal creed.
- c. **When confessions function dogmatically.** In some traditions, confessions are treated as binding tests of orthodoxy rather than instructional guides. When this happens, a confession begins to function like a creed.

- d. **Modern doctrinal statements compress the distinction.** Contemporary churches often produce short “statements of faith” that are: (a) too brief to be full confessions; and (b) too specific to be universal creeds. These hybrid documents confess doctrine while creed-like in brevity.

Historic Protestant confessions. Many Protestant denominations derive their theology from a handful of historic confessions, among them the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the Book of Concord of 1580, both Lutheran; the Scots Confession of 1560, Reformed and Presbyterian; the Belgic Confession of 1561 and the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, both Reformed; the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1571, Anglican; the Canons of Dort of 1619, Reformed; the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646, Presbyterian; the Savoy Declaration of 1658, Congregational; and the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, Reformed Baptist. These documents continue to define the theology of many churches today.

Beyond this list, the major traditions and their formal *confessional* documents are set out in the table below.

Denomination	Confessional statements
Roman Catholic	Nicene Creed, Apostles’ Creed, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), Council decrees
Eastern Orthodox	Nicene Creed, decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, Orthodox catechisms
United Reformed Churches in North America	Three Forms of Unity
Christian Reformed Church in North America	Three Forms of Unity; Belhar Confession
Reformed Church in America	Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort, Belhar Confession
Anglican Church in North America	Thirty-Nine Articles, Book of Common Prayer
Church of England	Thirty-Nine Articles, Book of Common Prayer
Southern Baptist Convention	Baptist Faith and Message (2000)
Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America	Second London Baptist Confession (1689)
Conservative Baptist Association of America	Various doctrinal affirmations

Assemblies of God (USA)	Statement of Fundamental Truths (16 Fundamentals)
Church of God	Declaration of Faith
International Pentecostal Holiness Church	Articles of Faith
United Methodist Church	Articles of Religion; Confession of Faith; Book of Discipline
Global Methodist Church	Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline
Church of the Nazarene	Articles of Faith
The Wesleyan Church	Articles of Religion
Seventh-day Adventist	28 Fundamental Beliefs
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	Articles of Faith; Standard Works
Jehovah's Witnesses	Official doctrinal teachings published by the Governing Body (not a single historic confession)

Churches that are less confessional. Some denominations intentionally avoid binding confessions and instead use shorter statements of faith or broad doctrinal guidelines. Examples include many independent Bible churches, many non-denominational churches, numerous charismatic churches, and some Congregational churches. These churches often affirm that **the Bible alone is their doctrinal authority**, while adopting concise statements of faith for organizational purposes rather than detailed confessions.

From Covenant to Creed to Coercion: An Adventist History

Introduction. In the autumn of 1861, in a modest meeting hall in Battle Creek, Michigan, a small group of Sabbatarian believers faced a question that would echo through Adventist history for more than a century and a half: how does a movement organize itself without losing its soul? Most delegates agreed the church should formally organize; the disagreement was over *how*. Would they bind themselves with a creed, as nearly every surrounding denomination had done? Or was there another way—one that preserved order while leaving room to keep searching the Scriptures as new light emerged?

It was in the middle of this debate that John N. Loughborough, then not yet thirty, offered a warning that would outlive the moment that produced it. Drawing on what he and his fellow pioneers saw in the long arc

of church history—from the fourth-century councils through the machinery of the Inquisition—Loughborough laid out five steps by which a body of believers slides from simple faith into coercive religious control: a creed is written; the creed becomes a test of fellowship; members are tried by it; dissenters are branded heretics; and, finally, persecution begins.

What makes the warning striking is its context. Loughborough spoke not against organization but in its defense, arguing that the *covenant* James White proposed that day was categorically different from a *creed*, since it bound believers only to Christ and Scripture rather than to a fixed human formulation of doctrine. The distinction mattered to men and women who had themselves been disfellowshipped from Methodist, Baptist, and Christian Connexion congregations for embracing beliefs their former churches' creeds could not accommodate. Charles Fitch, Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen White each voiced, in their own way, the same conviction: that the Bible alone must remain the standard, and that any fixed creed—however well-intentioned at its founding—carries within it the seed of the coercion its authors meant to escape.

What follows traces the origin, context, and logic of Loughborough's five steps—not as a slogan detached from history, but as a reasoned sequence in which each step makes the next possible, until doctrine hardens into a weapon. It is a warning the pioneers issued to themselves, and to every generation of Adventists that would follow: organizing carries risks worth naming, watching, and guarding against.

Loughborough's Warning Against Creedal Apostasy. Between 1844 and 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church resisted adopting a fixed creed—a stance rooted in a pattern the pioneers believed they saw in the Roman Catholic Church: five sequential steps by which it departed from apostolic simplicity into hierarchical control and coercion:

1. To get up a creed.
2. To make that creed a test of fellowship.
3. To try members by that creed.
4. To denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed.
5. To commence persecution against such.

The statement traces to Elder John N. Loughborough (1832–1924), spoken at the Battle Creek meetings of October 5–6, 1861, where the Michigan Conference—the first Adventist conference—was organized. James White reported the proceedings in the *Review and Herald*, October 8, 1861 (vol. 18, p. 148), a record consistently preserved in denominational sources including the Ellen G. White Estate and the Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (ESDA).

“The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such.” —John N. Loughborough, Review and Herald, Oct. 8, 1861, p. 148

Covenant, not Creed. The 1861 meeting was not a debate over whether to organize, but the moment Michigan’s Sabbatarian congregations formally did so—a step James White had long urged and some delegates resisted. White proposed **a covenant, not a creed**: “We, the undersigned, hereby associate ourselves together, as a church, taking the name Seventh-day Adventists, **covenanting to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.**” When the first vote fell short of unanimous, White drew out the room’s unspoken objection—that they might be “following after Babylon.” It was in answering this concern that Loughborough, himself favoring the covenant, explained why a simple covenant of consecration differed fundamentally from a creed. The covenant then passed unanimously on a second vote.

Historian David J. B. Trim, of the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, notes in a 2021 Adventist Review article that Loughborough’s statement is often misread as resistance to organization itself. “The opposite is true,” Trim writes: Loughborough’s point was that the steps being taken that day were unlike those of the churches remaining in “Babylon.” His five steps stood as a warning to guard against, not a description of what was then occurring—the **covenant bound believers only to obedience to God and Christ**, not to a fixed, enforceable statement of doctrine.

Why the Pioneers Feared Creeds. This conviction grew from two sources: a reading of church history in which the fourth-century creeds (Nicaea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Chalcedon, 451) became tools for defining orthodoxy and excluding dissenters; and the pioneers’ own recent experience of being disfellowshipped from Methodist, Baptist, and Christian Connexion churches for beliefs—the imminent Advent, the seventh-day Sabbath, conditional immortality—that conflicted with those bodies’ creeds.

Millerite preacher Charles Fitch voiced the sentiment in 1843: “By their creeds ye shall know them. If a man subscribes to an orthodox creed . . . he may after this serve the devil with both hands, and yet be regarded as a good Christian.” James White repeatedly linked creed-making to denominational “infidelity” and to Rome’s mechanism for suppressing dissent, writing in 1853 that “the Bible is sufficient” and, at the same 1861 meeting, that “making a creed is setting the stakes, and barring up the way

to all future advancement.” Joseph Bates argued as early as 1847 that creeds froze doctrine at a single point in time, obstructing the “progressive” unfolding of Bible truth central to Adventist self-understanding. Uriah Smith wrote in 1874 of “Romish errors” surviving even among Protestants who retained Rome’s creedal mechanism while rejecting its doctrines. Ellen G. White expressed the same concern: “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union.... Do not carry your creed to the Bible and read the Word in the light of your former opinions.”

The Logic of the Five Steps. Read together, these sources present the five steps not as an abstract slogan but as a historically observed sequence—how doctrinal formalization, in the pioneers’ reading of Christian history and Roman Catholicism especially, escalated by predictable stages into coercion and violence:

#	Loughborough’s wording	The Underlying Mechanism
1	Get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe.	Doctrine is formalized into a fixed, written statement, detached from ongoing Bible study.
2	Make that creed a test of fellowship.	Assent to the creed—rather than Christian character—becomes the condition of membership.
3	Try members by that creed.	The creed becomes a juridical instrument; members are formally examined against it.
4	Denounce as heretics those who do not believe it.	Dissent is reclassified from disagreement into heresy—a moral and spiritual offense.
5	Commence persecution against such.	Institutional or civil power is enlisted to punish the “heretic”—exclusion, defamation, or worse.

Each step depends on the one before it: a creed becomes dangerous only once enforced (step 2); enforcement turns cruel only once dissenters are recast as “heretics” (step 4); and that label supplies the moral justification for persecution (step 5). The pioneers found their clearest illustration of where this path leads in Rome’s own trajectory—from the Nicene-era definition of orthodoxy to the medieval Inquisition.

From Covenant to “Fundamental Principles”

Through the 1860s the movement continued to organize—the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association in 1861, the Michigan Conference the same year, and the General Conference itself in 1863. As the church

grew and became more visible, it faced increasing public misrepresentation. Outsiders confused Seventh-day Adventists with other Adventist bodies holding views the newly formed organization rejected, and critics circulated false or garbled accounts of what the denomination taught. By the early 1870s, church leaders judged that some published, if informal, summary of belief had become necessary—not to bind the conscience of members, but to correct the record for the public and to give a reasoned answer to honest inquiry.

1872: The Declaration of the Fundamental Principles. It was in this climate that a “*Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists*” was printed at Battle Creek in 1872, its twenty-five propositions drafted largely by Uriah Smith with James White’s involvement. Crucially, the document was never formally adopted by a General Conference session as binding denominational legislation; it appeared without an identified author or committee, as an anonymous public synopsis. Its preamble is the clearest surviving statement of how the pioneers reconciled this publication with their long-standing rejection of creeds, and it opens by disclaiming exactly the authority a creed would carry:

“In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but is a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them. We often find it necessary to meet inquiries on the subject, and sometimes to correct false statements circulated against us, and to remove erroneous impressions which have obtained with those who have not had an opportunity to become acquainted with our faith and practice. Our only object is to meet this necessity.”

—Preamble, *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists* (Battle Creek, 1872)

The preamble goes on to explain the document’s purpose in strictly practical terms: to answer inquiries about Adventist belief, to correct “false statements circulated against us,” and to remove “erroneous impressions” held by those unfamiliar with Adventist teaching. It closes its opening remarks by distinguishing Seventh-day Adventists from other Adventist groups on points such as the unconscious state of the dead, the final destruction of the wicked, the perpetuity of the Ten Commandments, and, distinctively, the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Later reprints of the document—in the *Signs of the Times* (1874), the *Review and Herald* (1874), and subsequent pamphlet editions through the 1880s—

carried a similarly worded assurance that Seventh-day Adventists “*have no creed but the Bible; but they hold to certain well-defined points of faith, for which they feel prepared to give a reason.*”

In the pioneers’ own logic, then, the 1872 Declaration was not a creed in the sense Loughborough had warned against in 1861. It carried no ecclesiastical authority, was not voted by the church in session, was not imposed as a test of fellowship, and was explicitly framed as a description of existing, voluntary unanimity rather than a prescription binding future belief. It functioned as an apologetic and informational document—a reasoned answer “to every man that asketh,” in the language later editions used—rather than as ecclesiastical law.

1889: Expansion in the Yearbook. The 1872 propositions were reprinted repeatedly through the 1870s and 1880s with only minor wording changes and the same disclaiming preamble. The first appearance of the statement inside an official denominational publication came in 1889, when the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook printed a revised and expanded version, still titled “*Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists*,” now enlarged from Smith’s original twenty-five propositions to twenty-eight. The first two articles, concerning the doctrine of God, were carried over essentially unchanged from 1872, and the document continued to be reprinted in the Yearbooks of 1905, 1909, 1913, and 1914 without substantive alteration.

Even in its expanded 1889 form, the statement retained the same disclaiming character as its 1872 ancestor: it was presented as a summary for public information rather than as a creed carried authority over conscience, and it was still not adopted by vote of a General Conference Session as official denominational doctrine in the way later twentieth-century statements of belief would be. That step—an action of the General Conference in session formally endorsing a statement of belief—would not occur until 1980.

Historic Reasoning: How the Pioneers Squared the Circle. Taken together, the record from 1861 to 1889 shows a consistent internal logic rather than a contradiction. The pioneers drew a firm line between two categories: a creed, which they defined as an authoritative test of fellowship used to try, denounce, and ultimately persecute those who dissented from it; and a covenant or a synopsis of faith, which described a relationship of obedience (in 1861) or an existing, voluntary unanimity of belief offered for public information (in 1872 and 1889).

Test of Fellowship

“Test of fellowship” was the historic Adventist expression for what today would be called a test of membership. How did the early Adventist Church apply this concept, and what conditions did it impose on those seeking fellowship?

The historical record from 1861 lets us watch the denomination work through these questions in real time. In the same publication that would soon carry J. N. Loughborough’s warning against creeds, church leaders drew a practical distinction between doctrines that enjoyed near-universal acceptance and doctrines formally enforced as conditions of membership—the difference between what the church collectively believed and what it was willing to try, denounce, or exclude a member over. The Sabbath was treated as a legitimate test because it rested on the expressed command of God; other teachings, even nearly universal ones, were not elevated to that status.

The Sabbath: An Acknowledged Test. The clearest illustration of the pioneers’ distinction between belief and enforced fellowship appears in an 1861 issue of the *Review and Herald*. A reader asked whether the paper regarded the seventh-day Sabbath as a test of fellowship. The editor’s response was unequivocal:

“QUESTION. Do you make the Sabbath a test of fellowship? ANSWER. God has made it a test. If the law of the great God be not a test, what can be a test? or what use have we for the word?”

— *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, vol. 18, no. 8, July 23, 1861, p. 60

The editor noted that the Seventh Day Baptists, at their Genesee, New York, Association that same year, had likewise voted to restrict communion to those “who live in obedience to the **Ten Commandments** of the Lord”—evidence, in the editor’s view, that this was not a uniquely Adventist position but one shared among Sabbatarian Christians.

The rationale was straightforward: because the Sabbath rests on the Fourth Commandment, its authority derived from the law of God, not denominational interpretation. The church saw itself not as creating a test but as acknowledging one God had already established.

The Non-Immortality of the Soul: A Non-Test. The same column turned to a second question: was the teaching that the soul is not inherently immortal likewise enforced? The editor answered just as directly:

“QUESTION. Do you make the belief in the non-immortality of the soul a test of fellowship? ANSWER. We do not. Our people, with

hardly an exception, are all right on that subject. Those who reject our views of this question, generally stand far off from us. The truth, not we, does the testing.”

— Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, vol. 18, no. 8, July 23, 1861, p. 61

The contrast is striking: although conditional immortality was accepted by nearly the entire body, the editors explicitly refused to make it a condition of fellowship. Agreement was widespread but not enforced; dissenters were “far off,” not subjects of discipline. James White described the paper, in the same issue, as “the only regular preacher of the Seventh-day Adventists from Maine to Minnesota.” Its closing sentence captures the governing principle: “The truth, not we, does the testing.” The church did not claim authority to compel agreement on every conclusion it believed Scripture taught; it distinguished between proclaiming biblical truth and enforcing that understanding as a condition of fellowship.

The Underlying Logic. The two editorial responses are complementary, not contradictory: the distinction rests not on a doctrine’s importance or the degree of agreement it enjoyed, but on the source of its *authority*. **The Sabbath** was an explicit command of God; **conditional immortality**, though taught in Scripture and accepted near-unanimously, was reached through *Bible study* rather than resting on an explicit command. No member was tried or excluded for rejecting it; dissenters were simply “far off”—a relational observation, not a disciplinary judgment.

Fellowship was maintained not by enforcing a comprehensive statement of doctrine but by allowing unity to develop through shared conviction under *Scripture’s authority*—a principle later echoed in the 1872 Declaration of the Fundamental Principles, whose preamble likewise insists the document carried “no authority” and was not intended “to secure uniformity.”

The Trinity: Is It a Test or Not? Applying this principle to the Trinity, the question is not whether the doctrine is true, but whether it belongs with the Sabbath—settled directly by Scripture—or with conditional immortality, reached through study but declined as a test.

Modern Adventists generally regard rejection of the Trinity as incompatible with official belief; *Fundamental Belief No. 2* affirms the doctrine, and public deniers are commonly regarded as **heretical**. Mark Finley, Assistant to the President of the General Conference since 2010, said as much in a sermon titled *The Unpardonable Sin, Part 1* (broadcast April 30, 2026):

*“There are many people, Christians included, that believe that the Holy Spirit is simply an influence, not the third person of the Godhead. And I want to be very open with you: **that’s a heresy.**”*

Since the church officially adopted a Trinitarian statement in 1980, Finley has been a prominent advocate, and numerous documented cases show members disfellowshipped for openly rejecting the doctrine—a significant departure from 1861. The question is not merely whether the doctrine is now officially taught, but whether enforcing it as a condition of fellowship is consistent with the pioneers’ own principle.

Historical Fact: The Early Adventists and the Trinity. The early pioneers were not merely non-Trinitarian by circumstance; several leading figures explicitly criticized the doctrine, using the same language they used to warn against creeds and ecclesiastical authority. James White provides the clearest example: the same man who, at the 1861 conference, warned that creed-making was “setting the stakes, and barring up the way to all future advancement” had, fifteen years earlier, described the Trinity as “the old unscriptural Trinitarian creed.”

Uriah Smith expressed the same conviction even more directly, rejecting the Trinity by name in 1856, denying the personality of the Holy Spirit, and describing Christ as begotten rather than self-existent. Opposition to the Trinity was neither peripheral nor accidental within early Adventism—it was part of the theological outlook of several of its most influential leaders. Given that the pioneers traced “creeds” back to the fourth-century councils, **there is an irony worth noting:** Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) were, to the pioneers, *the very* events that produced Trinitarian orthodoxy in the first place, so James White’s description of the Trinity as a “creed” was a claim about its historical origin, not rhetorical exaggeration.

Does this mean the pioneers regarded **the Trinity as a violation of the First Commandment** and therefore a legitimate test of fellowship? The evidence points the other way. The Sabbath qualified as a test because it rested on an explicit biblical command rather than theological inference. By contrast, whether Trinitarian theology constitutes belief in “another god” is itself an interpretive conclusion about biblical monotheism, not a proposition stated directly in Scripture. Trinitarians, of course, reject the “another god” characterization, maintaining that classical Trinitarianism’s one *ousia* preserves rather than compromises monotheism. The Trinity, then, involves competing interpretations of Scripture rather than a direct command, placing it in the same category as conditional immortality—and the historical evidence suggests this is precisely how the early Adventist church treated the issue.

My own position, however, is that Trinitarians have *no biblical proof* for their belief (as their own scholars admit) and therefore have no basis for establishing it as a doctrine, much less as a creed.

Where the Issue Actually Lands. The central issue is not the Trinity itself but the *process* by which it came to function as a test of fellowship—whether the church has remained faithful to the principle by which its founders distinguished doctrines to be taught from doctrines to be enforced.

The pioneers' informal but widespread non-Trinitarian consensus gave way over time, culminating in the 1980 General Conference session, when the denomination formally adopted a Trinitarian statement and, in practice, made adherence to it a condition of fellowship—the very pattern Loughborough warned against, reversed: a belief left outside enforced fellowship became an institutional requirement. The strongest historical argument, then, is not that the pioneers should have disfellowshipped Trinitarians in 1861, but that the 1980 action transformed a matter left outside enforced fellowship into an authoritative test of membership—an issue of *process* rather than theology.

Conclusion. The pioneers distinguished between doctrines they believed Scripture itself had settled and doctrines they believed Scripture taught but that required theological reasoning to establish. The former could function as tests of fellowship because the church understood itself to be recognizing what God had already declared; the latter, however strongly held, were not made conditions of membership. The Sabbath was a legitimate test because it rested on an explicit command of God; conditional immortality, though nearly universally accepted, was declined as a test: “The truth, not we, does the testing.”

The Trinity belongs, historically, on the latter side of that distinction—a theological conclusion reached through interpretation rather than a direct scriptural statement. What changed was not simply the denomination's theology but its understanding of *ecclesiastical authority*: the 1980 adoption of a Trinitarian statement transformed a doctrine the pioneers had left outside enforced fellowship into an institutional requirement.

The question raised is not whether the pioneers were correct in rejecting the Trinity, or the modern church correct in affirming it, but whether the church remained faithful to its own founding principle: the concern lies not in the doctrine's content but in the decision to make it a **creed**—a *test of fellowship* the pioneers deliberately declined to establish.

► The Two Covenants

Yes, there are more than two covenants in the Bible. When the entire canon is read as a unified whole, one encounters a series of covenants that structure salvation history. A commonly recognized list includes **seven major covenants**:

1. Adamic Covenant (Genesis 1-3)
2. Noahic Covenant (Genesis 6-9)
3. Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15, 17)
4. Mosaic (Sinai) Covenant (Exodus 19-24 and onward)
5. Priestly Covenant (Exodus-Leviticus; Numbers 25:10-13)
6. Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89)
7. New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-28)

Why, then, speak of “only two” covenants? The “two-covenant” model functions as theological shorthand (a heuristic or synthetic framework) rather than a denial of this complexity. It groups the biblical covenants into two overarching categories:

- Everything before Christ → “Old Covenant”
- Fulfillment in Christ → “New Covenant”

These two overarching covenantal orders may be described as the Covenant of Law (conditional, external, and temporary) and the Covenant of Promise (fulfilled in Christ). This framework closely reflects Paul’s theology in *Galatians* and *Romans*, as well as the argument developed in the letter to the Hebrews.

In **Galatians**, Paul explicitly contrasts two covenantal orders, allegorically represented by Hagar and Sarah, corresponding to Sinai and the promise (Gal 4:21–31). Likewise, Paul distinguishes between the law, which came 430 years after the promise and does not annul it (Gal. 3:17–18), and the promise itself, which is fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:16, 22–24). A similar contrast appears in **Romans**, where righteousness based on the law is set over against righteousness based on faith (Rom. 3:21–22; 10:4–6).

The letter to the **Hebrews** develops this distinction further by contrasting the “first covenant” with the “new covenant” (Heb. 8:6–13). The former is characterized as provisional and anticipatory, associated with the Levitical priesthood, repeated sacrifices, and an earthly sanctuary (Heb. 7:11–19; 9:1–10). The latter, by contrast, is established on “better promises,” mediated by Christ as the superior high priest, and enacted through a once-for-all sacrifice (Heb. 8:6; 9:11–14; 10:1–18). *Hebrews* explicitly affirms the obsolescence of the former covenant in light of the

latter (Heb. 8:13).

The “Everlasting Gospel”. In addition to the framework of the two covenants, Scripture introduces the concept of the “everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6). This raises an important theological question: Is the gospel a *new* reality inaugurated in the New Covenant, or is it an *eternal* (or *everlasting*) message that finds its fullest expression therein? This too needs further careful examination.

Executive summary. It is this two covenant model and the concept of the everlasting gospel that is discussed in greater detail in this article.

- The two covenants in Galatians
- [The two covenants in Hebrews](#)
- [EGW on the Everlasting Gospel](#)
- [Reframing the two covenants](#)

The two covenants in Galatians

In Galatians 4:21–31, Paul sets **two covenants** in contrast through the allegory of Hagar and Sarah. One is associated with **Mount Sinai**, slavery, and the present Jerusalem; the other is associated with the **Jerusalem above**, freedom, promise, and sonship. Paul elsewhere calls the latter the **New Covenant**. Revelation does not use that exact phrase in Paul’s way, but many Bible scholars connect Revelation’s “**everlasting gospel**” with the same divine promise fulfilled in Christ.

The covenant from Mount Sinai. This is the covenant God made with Israel through Moses at Sinai after the Exodus. It included the law, commandments, ordinances, priesthood, sacrifices, and the national order of Israel as a covenant people. Bible scholars use several overlapping names for the covenant made at Mount Sinai, such as: **Mosaic covenant**, **Sinai (or Sinaitic) covenant**, **Horeb covenant**, and **Old Covenant**. A helpful way to sort the terms is this: Mosaic covenant emphasizes the mediator (Moses); Sinai/Sinaitic covenant emphasizes the place; Horeb covenant reflects Deuteronomic vocabulary; and Old Covenant is the theological contrast-term used in the New Testament. The main features include:

- given through Moses
- centered on the written law
- tied to the earthly nation of Israel
- connected with the earthly Jerusalem
- marked by circumcision, priestly regulations, sacrifices, and covenant obligations
- conditional in its administration: blessing for obedience, curse for disobedience

Paul's emphasis in Galatians. Paul does not deny that the Sinai covenant came from God. His point is that, **when treated as the basis of justification and inheritance**, it results in **bondage** rather than freedom. In Galatians 4, he links it with:

- Hagar
- Mount Sinai in Arabia
- the present Jerusalem
- children born into bondage

Why bondage? Because the law can command, expose sin, and condemn the transgressor, but it cannot give life or make sinners righteous by itself. In Galatians, Paul especially opposes relying on the law for justification, identity, or inheritance.

So the Sinai covenant, in Paul's contrast, represents a covenant order characterized by:

- law written on stone
- external regulation
- fleshly descent
- servitude
- inability of the law to produce the promised inheritance

The heavenly covenant / New Covenant. Paul contrasts Sinai with the **Jerusalem above**, which he says "is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). This is the covenant of promise fulfilled in Christ. Elsewhere Paul calls this the **New Covenant**. Its main features include:

- established through Jesus the Messiah
- grounded in God's promise to Abraham
- inaugurated by Christ's death and resurrection
- mediated not by Moses, but by Christ
- characterized by the spirit rather than the letter
- associated with the heavenly Jerusalem
- entered by faith, not ethnic descent or works of law
- marked by freedom, sonship, and inheritance

Why "heavenly"? Because its source, citizenship, and fulfillment are above. Paul ties it to the **Jerusalem above**, not the present earthly Jerusalem. Hebrews speaks similarly of the **heavenly Jerusalem** and of Jesus as mediator of a better covenant.

Why "New Covenant"? Because it fulfills the prophetic promise of a covenant in which God would:

- write His law on hearts

- forgive sins
- establish direct covenant knowledge of Himself
- give His spirit and inward transformation

Paul presents believers in Christ as ministers of this New Covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit.

Revelation’s “everlasting gospel”. Revelation 14:6 speaks of the **everlasting gospel**. Strictly speaking, Revelation uses the term **gospel**, not **covenant**. But the connection is understandable: The “everlasting gospel” is the enduring good news of God’s reign, judgment, salvation, and call to worship Him through the Lamb. It is “everlasting” because it is rooted in God’s eternal purpose, not in a temporary national administration. So many interpreters see the everlasting gospel and the New Covenant as closely related, because both refer to God’s final and universal saving purpose fulfilled in Christ. Still, it is best to say:

- Paul explicitly calls it the New Covenant
- Revelation proclaims the everlasting gospel
- these are deeply related, though not identical labels in wording

Contrasting covenants. The deepest contrast between the two covenants is shown in the following tables:

The Two Covenants in Galatians	
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Based on the Mosaic law administration	Based on God’s promise fulfilled in Christ
Mediated by Moses	Mediated by Jesus
Connected to the earthly Jerusalem	Connected to the Jerusalem above
Identified with Hagar in Paul’s allegory	Identified with Sarah in Paul’s allegory
Produces bondage when relied on for righteousness	Produces freedom
Defines transgression but does not remove sin decisively	Brings forgiveness, sonship, and transformation by the spirit
Inheritance is not obtained through law	Inheritance comes by promise through faith
Linked with the flesh and external ordinance	Linked with new creation and inward transformation

We find the same contrast described by Paul in **2 Corinthians 3:3-18** as follows:

The Two Covenants in 2 Corinthians 3:3-18	
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Written with ink (v.3)	Written with the spirit
Tablets of stone	Tablets of heart of flesh
Letter (v.6)	Spirit
Letter kills	Spirit gives life
Ministry of death (v.7)	Ministry of the spirit
Ministry of condemnation (v.9)	Ministry of righteousness
Vanishing glory (v.10)	Glory that surpasses it
Fading away (v.11, 13)	Permanent
Veil remains (v.14)	Veil taken away
Slavery (cf. Gal. 4:24)	Freedom (v.17)

The role of Abraham. This is one of Paul's main points in Galatians. The New Covenant is not an afterthought. It is the fulfillment of the earlier **Abrahamic promise**. So, in Paul's theology:

- the promise to Abraham is prior
- the law came later
- the law had a temporary purpose
- Christ fulfills the promise
- those in Christ become Abraham's descendants and heirs

That is why the heavenly covenant is superior: it is tied to promise, fulfillment, and sonship, not merely to a temporary legal administration.

The provisional Old Covenant. It is not to say that God made one bad covenant on Mount Sinai and then later made a good one in the New Covenant. Paul's point is subtler than that. The Sinai covenant had a real divine purpose, but it was:

- temporary in function
- preparatory
- unable to bring final righteousness
- fulfilled and surpassed in Christ

So the contrast is not between a bad or evil covenant and a good covenant, but between:

- a provisional covenant administration centered on law
- the final covenant fulfillment centered on Christ

The superior New Covenant. Under the Sinai order, the covenant people were under a guardian-like system with commandments, boundaries, and ceremonies that could not perfect the conscience or create the inheritance. But under the New Covenant:

- Christ has come
- the spirit has been given
- believers are sons, not minors
- righteousness is by faith
- access to God is open
- the people of God are defined by union with Christ, not by Sinai boundary markers

The two covenants in Hebrews [\[e\]](#)

Hebrews presents one of the clearest and most sustained comparisons between the old covenant and the new covenant in the New Testament. Its argument is not that God changed His purpose, but that the earlier covenant was provisional, anticipatory, and incomplete, while the new covenant is definitive, effective, and climactic in Christ.

Main idea in Hebrews. Hebrews argues that the old covenant was real, divinely given, and meaningful, but it was not the final form of God’s redemptive arrangement. It functioned as a shadow, copy, and anticipation of something greater. The new covenant, established through Jesus, brings the reality toward which the old covenant pointed.

The key passage is Hebrews 8, especially the quotation of Jeremiah 31:31–34 in Hebrews 8:8–12. That quotation becomes the interpretive center for the book’s covenant theology.

Terms Hebrews uses. The book of Hebrews does not define the concept of “covenant” in abstract terms. Rather, the author contrasts the two covenants through their mediators, priesthoods, sacrifices, sanctuaries, and resulting effects. The following table compares the key features associated with each covenant.

The Two Covenants in Hebrews	
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Good but provisional (8:13)	Better and final
Earthly and symbolic—copy and shadow (8:5)	Heavenly and real
Mediated by mortal priests (ch.7)	Mediated by the eternal Son
Maintained through repeated	Established by a once-for-all

sacrifices (ch.10)	sacrifice
Unable to perfect the conscience	Effective in cleansing conscience
Limited in access (ch.9)	Granting direct access to God
Anticipatory and passing	Enduring and complete
Moses as mediator	Jesus as the superior mediator
Levitical priesthood	Melchizedek priesthood
Blood initiated—by animal blood	Blood initiated—by Christ’s own blood
Regulates externally (9:9–10)	Transforms inwardly
Exposed sin but did not finally remove it (10:3–4, 17)	Full forgiveness

The old covenant was deficient. Hebrews does not say the law itself was sinful. Rather, it says the covenant was not final because of human weakness and because God intended something greater. Hebrews 8:7 says that if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need for a second. The “fault” in context is not that God made a bad covenant, but that the first covenant did not accomplish the full goal of perfected access, inward transformation, and definitive forgiveness. In other words, the old covenant was good for its appointed purpose, but its appointed purpose was preparatory, not ultimate.

The role of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews. Hebrews’ longest Old Testament quotation is Jeremiah 31:31–34. This matters because it shows that the promise of a new covenant is not a later Christian invention. Hebrews argues from Israel’s own Scriptures that a new covenant was always part of God’s plan. The features of the new covenant in that quotation are:

- God’s law written on hearts
- a direct covenant relationship
- universal knowledge of God among covenant members
- definitive forgiveness of sins

Hebrews then explains that all of this is realized through Christ’s priesthood and sacrifice.

EGW on the Everlasting Gospel [\[↩\]](#)

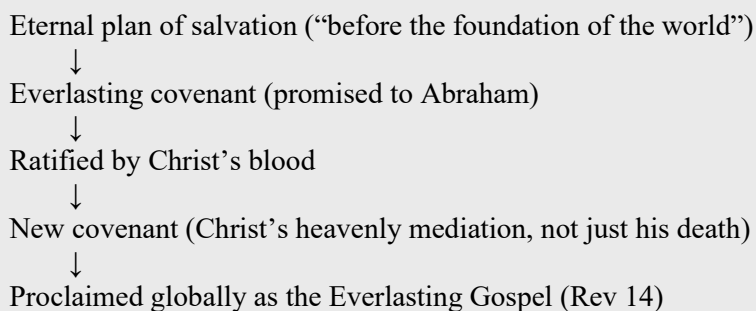
Ellen G. White frequently explained that the “everlasting gospel” in Revelation 14:6 is the same gospel of salvation through Christ that has existed since the fall of humanity, but proclaimed in a special way for the last days. In her writings, several key themes consistently define what she believed this gospel means within the first angel’s message.

The everlasting gospel is the same gospel given since Eden. EGW emphasized that the gospel is not new, but eternal—the plan of redemption established from the beginning.

- It is the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ.
- It existed before the cross and was revealed progressively throughout Scripture.
- It began with the promise of redemption after sin entered the world.

In her view, the gospel preached in the last days is the same message proclaimed by prophets, apostles, and Christ himself, only now delivered with final urgency.

Her overall theological structure. According to Ellen G. White, the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 is the proclamation of the new covenant of grace established through Christ's sacrifice and priestly ministry, which is the same covenant promise given to Abraham and revealed throughout Scripture. Her theological framework can be summarized like this:



The difference between them is not content, but historical stage and proclamation.

The gospel centers on Christ's saving work. EGW consistently tied the everlasting gospel to the person and work of Jesus. This includes:

- Christ's sacrificial death for humanity
- His righteousness offered to sinners
- His intercessory ministry in heaven

She stressed that salvation comes **entirely by God's grace**, not by human effort.

The gospel produces obedience to God. For EGW, the gospel is not only forgiveness but **transformation**. She often connected the everlasting gospel with:

- Restoration of God’s image in humanity
- Victory over sin through Christ’s power
- Obedience to God’s commandments

Thus the gospel does not abolish God’s law but **restores obedience to it through inner renewal**. She saw this reflected in Revelation’s description of the saints who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

The gospel is linked with the Final Judgment. In Revelation 14 the gospel is preached together with the announcement: “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come.” EGW taught that the everlasting gospel includes the proclamation that God’s judgment has begun. The gospel therefore calls people to: repentance, reverence for God, and moral accountability. It is the final appeal to humanity before Christ’s return.

Reframing the Two Covenants [\[e\]](#)

Instead of the Old Covenant representing “no gospel,” and the New Covenant representing “the gospel,” a more accurate view is: **one everlasting gospel**: present from the beginning, announced progressively, fulfilled in Christ, and proclaimed at the end of time; with multiple covenantal administrations:

The gospel expressed through different covenants	
Covenant	Relation to the Gospel
Adamic	Promise (seed of the woman)
Noahic	Preservation of the “sons of God”
Abrahamic	Promise of blessing to the nations
Mosaic	Promise of land and priesthood—typological system (law, sacrifice)
Davidic	Promise of a king
New Covenant	Fulfillment and realization in Christ

Where the “Two Covenants” still fits is in understanding that the Old was the veiled, typological gospel, while the New was the revealed, fulfilled gospel.

Revelation as the unifying point. Revelation 14 then represents the unifying point, in that it brings *everything* together:

1. It reaches back to creation: “Worship Him who made heaven and

earth”

2. It transcends Israel: “Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people”
3. It anticipates Final Judgment: “The hour of His judgment has come”

This is not merely “New Covenant preaching”—it is the **universal, eternal message of God’s rule and redemption**. Thus, the “everlasting gospel” shows that the gospel is not identical with the New Covenant, but is the **full and final expression of the gospel**.

Final synthesis. You can think of it this way:

- There is **one eternal gospel**
- There are **multiple covenants**
- The **two covenant framework** highlights the climactic shift: from shadow to reality, and from external to internal
- Revelation 14 reminds us that the gospel was never temporary, but that it spans creation → redemption → final dispensation

► Penal Substitution

In Reformed Protestant theology, **Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA)** is the doctrine that Jesus Christ, acting as the representative and substitute for fallen humanity, bore the full penalty of God’s justice against sin through his suffering and death on the cross. In this view, sin incurs a real and judicial guilt before God, whose holiness requires its punishment; Christ, in his obedience, satisfies this requirement by enduring the penalty deserved by sinners. His atoning work both upholds divine justice and secures divine mercy, effecting the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of his righteousness to those united to him by faith.

Executive summary. This article covers the following:

- Introduction to PSA
- [PSA is anti-atonement](#)
- [PSA in Adventism](#)

Introduction to PSA

Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) is the framework that mostly came out of the Protestant Reformation, solidified by Martin Luther and John Calvin. This theory primarily views the relationship with God to be a **legal construct** in which Jesus becomes a legal payment in our place—he substitutes us—and that “atones” God.

The PSA theory “is the most common view taught today among Protestant churches. It is an additional step developed from the *Satisfaction Theory*, with an added **legal framework** mostly developed by Martin Luther and John Calvin in the 1500s (both of these men were trained in law). PSA developed over time via Augustine, then Anselm, then Luther, Calvin, and a few refinements from others since then. In fact, there was no such thing as a developed Penal Satisfaction Atonement view for the first 1500 years of Christianity, as admitted in various sources!” —Kevin George, [Atonement and Reconciliation](#), p. 8.

Where PSA is most prevalent. In Reformed/Calvinist Protestantism PSA is central often non-negotiable. It is found in Confessional Reformed churches, Presbyterian tradition, and many conservative Reformed Baptists. In American evangelicalism, PSA is extremely influential and widely taught in: evangelical seminaries, popular preaching, evangelism tracts, and worship music.

Reformed doctrine and “atonement”. Reformed doctrine refers to the theological tradition that emerged from the Protestant Reformation (espe-

cially John Calvin, Bucer, and later Reformed confessions). For Reformed doctrine *penal substitution* is a core atonement theory.

In Reformed theology, God being *atoned* means that God has been *propitiated* (or satisfied)—the two terms (atonement and propitiation) are essentially synonymous. To Reformed theology, atonement is the **legal arrangement** where Jesus substituted our place so that God could be appeased from His wrath that He has against us. Reformed doctrine places **propitiation** (i.e. *appeasing God's wrath*) **at the logical center** of the atonement because of three core commitments:

1. **God's wrath is real, just, and personal.** It takes seriously biblical statements such as: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness" (Rom. 1:18) and "God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day" (Ps. 7:11). Wrath is not viewed as an impersonal consequence but as **God's holy, judicial opposition to sin**. If wrath is real, then reconciliation requires that wrath be dealt with.
2. **Propitiation directly addresses the central problem. Propitiation** means that *God's righteous wrath is satisfied by a sacrifice*. Key texts: Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; and Isaiah 53:10. In Reformed thought: (a) **Expiation** removes guilt, and (b) **Propitiation** satisfies justice and turns away wrath. Reformed theology insists these cannot be separated: Sin cannot be removed unless wrath is satisfied.
3. **Penal substitution as the governing model.** Propitiation fits naturally with **penal substitution**, which Reformed theology treats as the *structural framework* of the atonement. Key claims:
 1. Sin deserves punishment (penal)
 2. Christ bears that punishment as a substitute
 3. Justice is satisfied
 4. Wrath is exhausted
 5. Reconciliation follows

Hence, **atonement works because propitiation occurs**. John Stott (often cited in Reformed circles): "The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God; the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man."

Transaction or transformation? Atonement matters because it shapes how we understand our personal relationship with God. Is God primarily concerned with settling legal accounts, or is God seeking restored fellowship with humanity? If the latter is true, then atonement is not merely a

juridical transaction but the restoration of harmony—the bringing of estranged minds into agreement. By contrast, if atonement is reduced to a purely legal exchange, then one’s manner of life becomes disconnected from one’s relationship with God, leaving room to suppose that how one lives is ultimately irrelevant to communion with Him.

Working within the classic Reformed/penal substitutionary framework, Wayne Grudem in his *Systematic Theology* writes:

“It is important to notice that in both of these categories [[of Christ’s work]] the **primary emphasis** and the primary influence of Christ’s work of redemption **is not on us**, but on God the Father. Jesus obeyed the Father in our place and perfectly met the demands of the law. And he suffered in our place, receiving in himself the penalty that God the Father would have visited upon us. In both cases, the atonement is viewed as objective; that is, something that has primary influence directly on God himself. **Only secondarily does it have application to us**, and this is only because there was a definite event in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son that secured our salvation.” —Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, “The Nature of Atonement,” 1994. (Emphasis is mine)

Thus, according to Wayne Grudem, the atonement primarily addresses God’s own justice, where the decisive saving event occurs between the Father and the Son. Therefore the atonement is “objective”. It is real because something actually happened *in the divine economy*. Moreover, to Grudem, *we take a secondary role*:

- We do **not** contribute to the atonement.
- We do **not** cooperate in securing it.
- We do **not** complete or activate it.
- We are **not co-agents** in Christ’s redemptive work.

And even stronger: *We are passive with respect to the accomplishment of redemption*. That is precisely Grudem’s point, and it is intentional. This stands over against views that:

- Make the atonement primarily transformative or experiential.
- Make salvation depend on human participation as a causal factor.
- Treat the cross as incomplete until humans respond.

Grudem wants to avoid all of that.

PSA is anti-atonement [\[e\]](#)

However, this Penal Substitutionary Atonement doctrine, as detailed in the preceding section, distorts the biblical meanings of forgiveness, justice, salvation, and the character of God by absolutizing a legal-penal framework. PSA is anti-atonement because it:

- Violates moral intuitions about justice
- Absolutizes punitive justice
- Redefines forgiveness into a legal fiction
- Reduces salvation to a transaction
- Marginalizes resurrection and victory
- Distorts God's character and pastoral outcomes
- Projects later legal categories onto Scripture

Discussed further in the following:

1. Moral objections: Punishing the innocent. PSA requires God to: (a) impute guilt to the innocent Christ, and (b) punish Christ for sins he did not commit. This appears to violate explicit biblical principles:

a. Individual responsibility. *Ezekiel 18:20*, “The soul who sins, he shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him.”

b. Condemnation of human sacrifice. Human sacrifice is explicitly rejected in the Bible. *Micah 6:7b*, “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” And *Jeremiah 19:5*, “and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever come upon My heart.” The phrase “**cosmic child abuse**” (popularized by Steve Chalke) captures the concern that PSA separates the Father's will and wrathful cause of the Son's suffering.

It raises the concern that PSA portrays divine justice as morally incoherent. This is anti-atonement because penal substitution contradicts biblical moral intuitions about justice. The “cosmic child abuse” concern highlights: (a) a perceived rupture between Father and Son, and (b) a coercive, punitive portrayal of God. **Conclusion:** PSA is morally problematic even before it is exegetically debated. This doctrine collapses from a biblical perspective before it even leaves the starting gate.

2. PSA over-privileges legal metaphors. PSA reduces sin to a legal violation requiring penal satisfaction. Scripture presents sin more broadly as: *bondage, corruption, sickness, exile, and relational rupture* (e.g., Romans 6; Isaiah 1; Hosea 11). Legal metaphors are present, but **not dominant nor controlling**.

This is anti-atonement because PSA **imposes a courtroom framework onto the biblical narrative** rather than deriving it organically. Old Testament sacrificial language is framed as: *purification, covenant restoration, and participation in mercy* (e.g., Ezekiel 18, Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8). Not a penal payment in the modern juridical sense. **Conclusion:** PSA narrows the biblical imagination and flattens the richness of sin and salvation.

3. Forgiveness is emptied of meaning under PSA. Forgiveness normally means not exacting what is owed. PSA teaches that punishment was already fully exacted on Christ. Therefore, forgiveness becomes: (a) a *legal declaration* after justice is already satisfied; and (b) a *relabeling*, not a real remission of debt. Mercy becomes cosmetic—applied after punishment rather than freely given.

This is anti-atonement because: (a) it **redefines forgiveness** from *remission* to *reallocation of punishment*; (b) it is a conceptual distortion that makes biblical language about mercy and patience feel artificial; and (c) even Reformed attempts to resolve this (objective payment vs. subjective application) are said to explain *when* forgiveness happens, not *what* forgiveness actually is. The deeper objection is that: PSA assumes **justice requires punishment**, while biblical atonement assumes **justice can be restorative without punishment**. **Conclusion:** PSA preserves justice only by hollowing out forgiveness.

4. PSA narrows Salvation and marginalizes the Resurrection. It has weak grounding in the Gospels, reduces the Cross to a transaction, and neglects the Resurrection.

a. Weak gospel grounding. Jesus forgives sins *prior to the cross* (Mark 2). The Gospels emphasize: *kingdom of God, forgiveness, liberation, victory over evil, and reconciliation* more than penal categories. Also, PSA is seen as overly dependent on selective Pauline texts.

b. Transactional Cross. PSA reduces the cross to a **mechanistic exchange** rather than a transformative event: (a) legal status changes without a change in the believer's moral condition; (b) moral transformation becomes a secondary concern. It risks separating *justification* from *sanctification*.

c. Marginalized Resurrection. PSA centers almost exclusively on Christ's death, while early Christian theology emphasized: *Christus Victor*, defeat of death and powers, and new creation. PSA struggles to integrate cross and resurrection as a unified saving act.

Conclusion: PSA truncates salvation into acquittal rather than participation, victory, and renewal.

5. Pastoral and spiritual concern. PSA can foster: fear-based spirituality, anxiety and shame, and distorted images of God. Especially harmful for trauma survivors or abuse victims. Alternatively, Scripture presents salvation as: *relational reconciliation, cosmic restoration, and covenant healing* (Romans 8:19–22, 2 Corinthians 5:18–19). God's love and mercy are primary, not secondary to wrath. Biblical texts repeatedly present God as *patient, compassionate, and forgiving*, offering restoration rather than exacting satisfaction for the sake of justice alone (Exodus 34:6–7, Psalm 103:8–12, Jonah 4:2). The focus is relational: sin damages community and covenantal trust, which God seeks to heal. **Conclusion:** PSA's framework risks undermining trust, healing, and relational faith.

6. Historical concerns. PSA is often presented as *the* biblical doctrine of atonement. Historically inaccurate: (a) early church emphasized ransom, recapitulation, and victory; and (b) PSA crystallized in medieval and Reformation legal cultures. **The historical context shaped the theology**, not vice versa. **Conclusion:** PSA is one later model, not the original Christian consensus.

In summary. From a biblical-theological lens, PSA can be critiqued for **reading later legal and philosophical categories into Scripture**. The biblical text emphasizes God's love, covenant faithfulness, cosmic restoration, and relational reconciliation over the satisfaction of a juridical penalty. While there are legal metaphors (e.g., "propitiation," "ransom"), they are part of a broader narrative where God's justice, mercy, and relational purposes are inseparable.

DEEP DIVE INTO PSA'S PROBLEM WITH FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness normally means *not exacting what is owed*. But if punishment has already been exacted (on Christ), then forgiveness appears redundant—the payment (or punishment) was already made 2,000 years ago. Forgiveness then becomes a legal fiction. If the debt was already paid by Christ: (a) forgiveness (2,000 years later) sounds like a *mere declaration*; and (b) mercy sounds like a *label applied after justice has already been satisfied*. This makes biblical language about God's mercy, patience, and graciousness feel **theatrical make-believe rather than substantive**.

Moreover, in Scripture, forgiveness often concerns **restored relationship**, not just cleared accounts (e.g., the Prodigal Son). But, if reconciliation requires punishment first, is forgiveness really free? This exposes a tension between PSA and more **relational** models of atonement.

Reformed theology usually says: Forgiveness is **subjectively applied** when one is united to Christ by faith. Thus: (a) the debt is paid *in principle*; and (b) forgiveness is extended *in time*. However, note this still does not fully solve the conceptual issue—it explains *when forgiveness* is applied, not *what* forgiveness consists of if justice is already satisfied.

With respect to mercy, Reformed theology insists that: (a) mercy does not mean “ignoring justice”; but (b) mercy means **providing a substitute** so justice is satisfied without destroying the sinner. From this view: (a) God is merciful because He bears the cost Himself; and (b) forgiveness is meaningful because God absorbs the loss rather than the sinner. This reframes mercy as **costly**, not absent. However, this changes the definition of forgiveness from *remission* to *reallocation of punishment*.

Additionally, Reformed theologians often say the “debt” is not like money but **moral guilt**, which cannot simply be “forgiven” without consequence if God is just. Thus: (a) forgiveness does not mean “nothing happens”; (b) it means “the consequence falls elsewhere”. This stretches the everyday meaning of forgiveness beyond recognition.

The deeper philosophical issue on forgiveness. At bottom, the difference (or disagreement) is about what justice requires: (a) the **PSA assumption** is that justice requires punishment for sin; whereas (b) the **critic’s assumption** is that justice can include restorative forgiveness without punishment. If punishment is *intrinsic* to justice, PSA makes sense. If punishment is *contingent*, the critique gains strength. This is why the debate cannot be resolved merely by wordplay—it depends on deeper moral intuitions.

Conclusion. The above discussion reveals the following two tensions: (a) PSA can preserve justice, but at the cost of redefining forgiveness; and (b) it explains *how God can forgive*, but struggles to explain *why forgiveness still feels like mercy rather than bookkeeping*. For this reason, many theologians—including some within the Reformed tradition—have sought **hybrid models** that retain substitution while giving greater weight to reconciliation, victory, and restoration.

PSA in Adventism [\[e\]](#)

Officially, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church does not explicitly subscribe to the popular evangelical form of Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA). The Church's 28 *Fundamental Beliefs* do not articulate atonement in classic PSA terms, unless one interprets Fundamental Belief #9 ("The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ") as reflecting PSA language and logic. That statement reads: "Christ's death is substitutionary and expiatory, reconciling and transforming." Two key PSA indicators appear here: *substitutionary* and *expiatory* (the removal of guilt through sacrifice). While the language of the statement is broad and not narrowly defined, substitution and expiation are nevertheless core categories within PSA theology.

Historically, Adventism developed outside the Reformed–evangelical PSA tradition. Ellen White repeatedly rejects a picture of God needing to be appeased: "It was not to induce God to love us that Christ died, but to manifest the love that was already in His heart." (Steps to Christ, ch. 1). This is fundamentally anti-PSA in its classic evangelical form.

Where PSA *has* entered modern Adventism. Despite this heritage, PSA has gained traction in some Adventist circles, particularly since the mid–late 20th century. Reasons:

- Increased engagement with **American evangelicalism**
- Influence of Reformed theology in seminaries and publications
- Desire for "orthodox" alignment (**ecumenism**) with mainstream Protestantism.

Ministry Magazine (SDA journal for pastors). Numerous articles in Ministry Magazine use PSA framing. A representative example: "At the cross, Christ bore the penalty of the broken law, making it possible for God to forgive without compromising His justice." This is textbook PSA logic: (a) penalty borne, (b) law upheld, and (c) justice satisfied.

SDA evangelists and theologians. Mark Finley (prominent evangelist) frequently preaches: (a) Christ "paid the price"; (b) Christ "took the punishment"; and (c) the law's claims being met at the cross. This language consistently assumes penal substitution, even when wrapped in Great Controversy themes.

George Knight (SDA historian/theologian) openly acknowledges substitutionary atonement in Adventism: "Adventism has always believed that Christ died in our place, bearing the consequences that were rightly ours." Knight also notes that Adventists historically did not reject

PSA, but resisted exclusive PSA models that ignore resurrection, sanctuary, or cosmic conflict.

Exhibit-A: Clifford Goldstein is author, editor, and a leading figure within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. He made the following remarkable statement that reflects strong PSA themes:

“However, to spare us, God poured out His wrath against the violation of His law (sin), not on the violators of His law (sinners) but on the sinless Jesus, the only way that God could “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). In short, rather than killing us for violating His law, **the Father killed Jesus instead....** Or, to put it crudely, **the Father killed Jesus** so that He wouldn’t have to kill us.” —[Goldstein, C. “Law, Freedom, Love.” *Adventist Review* online edition, December 8, 2023](#) (emphasis mine).

Goldstein’s quote contains multiple hallmark features of classic evangelical PSA, not merely overlap or resonance.

a. Divine wrath. Goldstein’s statement, “God poured out His wrath against the violation of His law (sin),” reflects a **retributive understanding of divine justice**, where: (a) sin is a legal violation; (b) God’s wrath must be poured out in response; and (c) justice requires punitive satisfaction. This aligns directly with PSA’s claim that God’s justice demands punishment for law-breaking.

b. Penal transfer. Goldstein’s statement, “not on the violators of His law (sinners) but on the sinless Jesus,” is a **textbook formulation of penal substitution**, where: (a) a penalty is due to sinners; (b) the penalty is transferred to a substitute; and (c) the substitute is explicitly *sinless*. The contrast between *violators* and the *sinless Jesus* underscores the juridical exchange central to PSA.

c. Christ the direct object. On Goldstein’s statement, “God poured out His wrath ... on the sinless Jesus,” in PSA, the atonement hinges on Christ becoming the **direct object of divine punitive wrath**. Goldstein does not merely say Christ bore sin’s consequences or entered into human suffering; he says God actively **poured out wrath** on Jesus. This moves beyond representational or participatory models into **penal action**.

d. Justification as legal satisfaction. Goldstein states, “the only way that God could ‘be just and the justifier’”. Here justification is framed as a **legal problem requiring resolution**: (a) God must punish sin to remain “just” and (b) God can only justify sinners if punishment occurs elsewhere. This is a standard PSA reading of Romans 3:26: justice is preserved through penal substitution.

Strong PSA rhetoric: the Father killing the Son. Goldstein then intensifies the PSA logic with striking language: “Rather than killing us for violating His law, the Father killed Jesus instead.” This sentence encapsulates **penal substitution in its most unambiguous form**. The language is not metaphorical or indirect—it asserts **a divine act of killing as judicial necessity**. Also, **implicitly assumed** are the following: (a) wrath is poured out because sin must be punished; (b) Jesus receives what sinners deserve; and (c) God’s justice is maintained through substitutionary death.

Theological summary of Goldstein’s statement. His quote contains robust, explicit Penal Substitutionary Atonement, not merely influence or partial overlap. Specifically, it affirms:

- **A retributive view of divine justice**
- **Penal punishment** as necessary for forgiveness
- **Substitution** as the mechanism of atonement
- **The Father as the active agent of punishment**
- Christ’s death as **preventing God from killing sinners**

This goes well beyond the broader, historic Adventist emphasis on: the cosmic conflict, restorative justice, revelation of God’s character, and sin’s self-destructive consequences.

Why this matters. From a biblical-theological (rather than systematic) perspective, the quote:

- **Collapses “sin” and “sinner” into a legal abstraction**, even while verbally distinguishing them.
- Frames the cross primarily as **divine violence redirected**, rather than divine self-giving love confronting evil.
- Recasts God’s justice as something that must be *appeased by death*, rather than *vindicated through faithfulness*.

This is why many readers—especially within historic SDA theological trajectories—identify this formulation as **functionally evangelical PSA**, even if denominationally denied.

Bottom line: Goldstein’s statement is **not merely compatible with Penal Substitutionary Atonement**; it is a **clear, forceful articulation of it**, employing its central logic, vocabulary, and moral framework with little mitigation.

► Translation of *ruach* and *pneuma*

Throughout the Bible, the basic sense of “*spirit*” is that of “breath” or “wind”—powerful, life-giving, in motion, and invisible.

In the Old Testament, the word “*spirit*” derives from the Hebrew term **רוּחַ** (hereafter *ruach*), which literally means *wind*, *breath*, or *spirit*. The term can refer to natural phenomena (such as wind moving through trees), the breath that animates a living being, or God’s active power or presence. Context determines which sense is intended.

When *ruach* refers to the spirit of a human being, it is commonly understood as one’s inner disposition—encompassing attitude, will, and emotional orientation. Examples include:

- a *broken spirit* (Ps 34:18)
- a *proud spirit* (Prov 16:18)
- a *steadfast spirit* (Ps 51:10)

In the New Testament, “*spirit*” comes from the Greek word **πνεῦμα**, which likewise means *wind*, *breath*, or *spirit*. The concept begins from the same basic semantic field found in the Old Testament, but it is now expressed through the Greek language and shaped by Jewish theology and early Christian experience.

Executive outline. The major topics covered here are the following:

- Translation of *pneuma* (New Testament)
- [Translation of *ruach*](#) (Old Testament)

I have chosen to present this material in reverse order, first discussing *pneuma* in the New Testament and then *ruach* of the Old Testament, because of the greater confusion about *pneuma* than *ruach*.

Translation of *pneuma* [\[e\]](#)

Pneuma is an ancient Greek word for “breath”, and in a religious context for “spirit” or “soul”. *Pneuma* is also used in Greek translations of *ruach* in the Hebrew Bible, such as the Septuagint. Like *ruach*, the Greek word *pneuma* has many meanings. In the New Testament, *pneuma* is most often translated as spirit and spiritual, but can also mean breath, wind, and mind. Frequency in the New Testament: 379 times.

***Pneuma* definition:** wind, breath, things which are commonly perceived as having no material substance; by extension: spirit, heart, mind, the immaterial part of the inner person that can respond to God; spirit being: (evil) spirit, ghost, the spirit of God, holy spirit.

Gender in Greek. In the Greek language, there are three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Each noun in Greek has a specific gender and, unlike English, these genders don't only apply exclusively to nouns referring to people, but also to nouns that refer to things or animals. Therefore, gender should be viewed as a grammatical attribute of a noun and not necessarily as the sex of a person, animal, or thing.

***Pneuma* is neuter.** The Greek word *pneuma* is a neuter word. That is, it is neither male nor female. However, when neuter words are referred to with personal pronouns, they can also be male or female. For example, *child* is a neuter word in Greek, but writers refer to a child not as *it* but as *him* or *her*, based on whether the child is a girl or a boy. For another example, the word *Gentile* is neuter, but the apostles always referred to Gentiles as *them*, not as *those things*. Thus, when a neuter Greek word refers to a person, Greek writers are free to use personal terms (he, her, who, etc.) when referring to that word.

The authors of the New Testament often changed the gender of articles, adjectives, and pronouns that referred to a neuter word—if that neuter word referred to a person. However, it is noteworthy that:

Although there were many opportunities to do so, and although it is allowed by the rules of Greek grammar, New Testament writers never changed from neuter to masculine when referring to the *pneuma* of God. They always referred to *pneuma hagion* ("spirit holy") or *hagion pneuma* ("holy spirit") as "it" or "which", never "he" or "whom".

Simply put: The writers of the New Testament never used a personal term when speaking of the holy spirit simply because they did not think the spirit was a person! It is not so much what they wrote that is the issue as it is *what they did not write!*

***Pneuma* with the word "holy".** When employed with *hagion* ("holy") it is used in four ways:

1. *pneuma hagion* - "spirit holy"
2. *hagion pneuma* - "holy spirit"
3. the *pneuma hagion* - "the spirit holy"
4. the *hagion pneuma*- "the holy spirit"

***Pneuma* with and without the article "the".** When used alone *pneuma* is either found with or without the article "the". In the gospels "the" is absent approximately 40% of the time. However, Greek scholars have confessed that no satisfactory principle can be laid down for the use or non-use of the article with proper names. It may be nothing more than a matter of writing style.

Gender and the article “the”. The article always has the same *gender*, *case*, and *number* as the word it modifies. This agreement can be helpful in identifying the *case*, *gender* and *number* of unfamiliar nouns. There are 17 different ways to spell “the” in Greek. However, with respect to the holy spirit we can simplify things. We can ignore all plural forms since there is only one holy spirit. We can also ignore all feminine forms since none of the apostles ever referred to the holy spirit as a “she”. This leaves us with the following eight (8) possible forms:

Article “the” (when used in connection with <i>pneuma</i>)		
Case	Masculine	Neuter
<i>Nominative</i> – subject of the sentence	ὁ (<i>not used</i>)	τό
<i>Accusative</i> – direct object	τόν (<i>not used</i>)	τό
Genitive – of, from the	τοῦ	τοῦ
Dative – in, to, by the	τῷ	τῷ

It simplifies further given that the genitive and dative cases (the last two rows in the table above) have identical masculine and neuter forms (i.e. τοῦ and τῷ). This means that when you see these forms in the Greek text, you can ignore the gender since you cannot know whether it is masculine or neuter. This leaves us with only the *nominative* and *accusative* cases to determine whether the authors intended a masculine or neuter meaning to the “holy spirit”.

A full word study of *pneuma* in the New Testament of the *nominative* and *accusative* forms reveals that **only the neuter form “τό” is used** and never the masculine form (i.e. ὁ and τόν are never used).

Thus, the only reasonable conclusions, based on an assessment of the Greek words used in the New Testament are:

1. **“Spirit of God” is not a person.** The authors of the New Testament did not think of the spirit of God as a person.
2. **Translation bias.** It is a fact that in the New Testament, every Greek word referring to the holy spirit is neuter. Furthermore, in every instance where New Testament writers had a choice between a masculine form and a neuter form, they chose the neuter—without exception. Therefore, when translators render “holy spirit” in the masculine, it does not arise from the Greek text itself but from the translators’ interpretation or *bias*, whether conscious or unconscious..

“in holy spirit”. There are a number of places in the NT, chiefly in the writings of Paul and John, where the phrase “in holy spirit” is found. The

word “in” is the Greek preposition *en* (G1722), which is generally translated as “in”. Greek grammarians refer to this use of *en* as the “static *en*,” which defines a relationship, a connection, an intimate association with, a union with, or in a state of agreement with. (English does not typically use “in” to describe such a relationship.)

In cases where the article “the” is *not* found in the Greek (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:3, “*in* holy spirit”), the article “the” is not needed because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. The preposition *en* means it can be understood as if “the” was actually present. There is no need for the article “the” to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.

Most English translations do include the article “the” and generally translate it as “by the Holy Spirit”. However, this obscures the actual (if not subtle) meaning of the Greek phrase. We have chosen to translate it as “in [*union with the*] holy spirit” to give a better sense of what the Greek is actually saying.

Instances of *pneuma* in the Gospels. There are 102 instances of *pneuma* in Matthew (19), Mark (23), Luke (36) and John (24). All the ones that speak of “unclean” spirits are shown in gray in the table below, since our focus is on those instances that relate to the spirit of God.

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Matthew			
Mat. 1:18	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...she was found pregnant by holy spirit
Mat. 1:20	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...being generated in her is of holy spirit
Mat. 3:11	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	He will be baptizing you in holy spirit
Mat. 3:16	τό (acc-neuter) [“descending”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...He perceived the spirit of God descending as if a dove
Mat. 4:1	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...led up into the wilderness by the spirit
Mat. 5:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Happy, in spirit, are the poor
Mat. 8:16		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	...and He cast out the spirits with a word
Mat. 10:1		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	...He gives them authority over unclean spirits
Mat. 10:20	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...but the spirit of your Father is speaking in you
Mat. 12:18	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	I shall be placing My spirit on Him
Mat. 12:28	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Now if, by the spirit of God [<i>en pneumati theos</i>]
Mat. 12:31	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...yet the blasphemy of the spirit shall not be pardoned

Mat. 12:32	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	...whoever may be saying aught against the holy spirit
Mat. 12:43		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...whenever the unclean spirit
Mat. 12:45		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	...taking along with itself seven other spirits
Mat 22:43	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	How, then, is David, in spirit, calling Him Lord
Mat. 26:41	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The spirit, indeed, is eager; yet the flesh is infirm
Mat. 27:50	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...crying with a loud voice, lets out the spirit
Mat 28:19	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	into the name ... of the holy spirit

Mark

Mark 1:8	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...yet He shall be baptizing you in holy spirit
Mark 1:10	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...and the spirit, as a dove
Mark 1:12	τό (nom-neuter) [“drove out”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	And straightway the spirit drove out
Mark 1:23		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit
Mark 1:26		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the unclean spirit, shouting with a loud voice
Mark 1:27		<i>pneumasi</i> (dat)	...for with authority the unclean spirits also
Mark 2:8	τη (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	And straightway Jesus, recognizing in His spirit
Mark 3:11		<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	And the unclean spirits
Mark 3:29	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...blaspheming against the holy spirit
Mark 3:30		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...An unclean spirit has he
Mark 5:2		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...a man out of the tombs, with an unclean spirit
Mark 5:8		<i>pneuma</i> (voc)	...Come out, unclean spirit
Mark 5:13		<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	...the unclean spirits entered into the hogs
Mark 6:7		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	gave them authority over the unclean spirits
Mark 7:25		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...whose little daughter had an unclean spirit
Mark 8:12	τώ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	And sighing in His spirit
Mark 9:17		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...having a dumb spirit
Mark 9:20		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the spirit straightway violently convulses him

Mark 9:25		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...rebukes the unclean spirit
Mark 9:25		<i>pneuma</i> (voc)	Dumb and deaf-mute spirit
Mark 12:36	τὸ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...David, said, in the holy spirit
Mark 13:11	τὸ (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...it is not you who are speaking, but the holy spirit
Mark 14:38	τὸ (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The spirit indeed is eager, yet the flesh is infirm.
Mark 15:39	"breathes his last"	<i>exepneusen</i>	crying thus, He expires

Luke

Luke 1:15	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...with holy spirit shall he be filled
Luke 1:17	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...in the spirit and power of Elijah
Luke 1:35	—no article [“coming”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Holy spirit shall be coming on you
Luke 1:41	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...and Elizabeth is filled with holy spirit
Luke 1:47	τὸ (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	And my spirit [“the spirit of me”] exults
Luke 1:67	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	And Zechariah, his father, is filled with holy spirit
Luke 1:80	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Now the little boy grows up and was staunch in spirit
Luke 2:25	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Simeon ... and holy spirit was on him
Luke 2:26	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	And he was apprised by the holy spirit
Luke 2:27	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	And he came, in the spirit, into the sanctuary
Luke 3:16	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	He will be baptizing you in holy spirit and fire
Luke 3:22	τὸ (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	and the holy spirit descends on Him
Luke 4:1	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (gen)	Now Jesus, full of holy spirit
Luke 4:1	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (dat)	...was led in the spirit in the wilderness
Luke 4:14	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	And Jesus returns, in the power of the spirit
Luke 4:18	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The spirit of the Lord is on Me
Luke 4:33		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...a man having the spirit of an unclean demon
Luke 4:36		<i>pneumasin</i> (dat)	...with authority ... is He enjoining the unclean spirits
Luke 6:18		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	and who are annoyed by unclean spirits, were cured
Luke 7:21		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	He cures many of ... wicked spirits
Luke 8:2		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	...cured of wicked spirits and infirmities
Luke 8:29		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	For He charged the unclean spirit...

Luke 8:55	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	And back turns her spirit, and she rose instantly.
Luke 9:39		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...a spirit is getting him
Luke 9:42		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Yet Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit
Luke 10:20		<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	that the spirits are subject to you
Luke 10:21	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	In this hour He exults in the holy spirit and said
Luke 11:13	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...be giving holy spirit to those requesting Him!
Luke 11:24		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Whenever the unclean spirit
Luke 11:26		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	...seven other spirits more wicked than it-self
Luke 12:10	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...who blasphemes against the holy spirit
Luke 12:12	τό (nom-neuter) [“teaching”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	for the holy spirit will be teaching you in the same hour
Luke 13:11		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...a woman having a spirit of infirmity eighteen years
Luke 23:46	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Father, into Thy hands am I committing My spirit
Luke 23:46	“breathes his last”	<i>exepneusen</i>	Now, saying this, He expires
Luke 24:37	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...they supposed they are beholding a spirit
Luke 24:39	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...for a spirit has not flesh and bones

John

John 1:32	τό (acc-neuter) [“descending”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	I have gazed upon the spirit, descending as a dove
John 1:33	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...the spirit descending and remaining on Him
John 1:33	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	This is He Who is baptizing in holy spirit
John 3:5	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...begotten of water and of spirit
John 3:6	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...begotten by the spirit is spirit
John 3:6	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...begotten by the spirit is spirit
John 3:8	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The <i>pneuma</i> [spirit or wind] is blowing where it wills
John 3:8	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...begotten from the spirit
John 3:34	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...for God is not giving the spirit by measure
John 4:23	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...will be worshiping the Father in spirit and truth

John 4:24	—no article	<i>pneumo</i> (nom)	God is spirit
John 4:24	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...must be worshipping in spirit and truth
John 6:63	τό (nom-neuter) [“is”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The Spirit is that which is vivifying
John 6:63	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life
John 7:39	του (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	Now this He said concerning the spirit
John 7:39	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	For not as yet was holy spirit given
John 11:33	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	He was deeply moved in spirit
John 13:21	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Jesus was troubled in spirit
John 14:17	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the spirit of truth
John 14:26	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the <i>parakletos</i> , the holy spirit
John 15:26	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of truth
John 16:13	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of truth
John 19:30	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	And reclining His head, He gives up the spirit
John 20:22	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	He exhales and is saying to them, “Get holy spirit!”

Acts

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Acts 1:2	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...through holy spirit directing the apostles
Acts 1:5	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	yet you shall be baptized in holy spirit
Acts 1:8	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...the coming of the holy spirit on you
Acts 1:16	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	in which the holy spirit said
Acts 2:4	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	And they are all filled with holy spirit
Acts 2:4	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	as the spirit gave them utterance
Acts 2:17	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	I shall be pouring out from My spirit
Acts 2:18	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...shall I be pouring out from My spirit
Acts 2:33	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...obtaining the promise of the holy spirit from the Father
Acts 2:38	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...you shall be obtaining the gratuity of the holy spirit
Acts 4:8	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	Then Peter, being filled with holy spirit
Acts 4:31	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...and they are all filled with the holy spirit
Acts 5:3	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...for you to falsify to the holy spirit
Acts 5:9	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Why is it that you agreed to try the spirit of the Lord?

Acts 5:16		<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	...bringing the infirm and those molested by unclean spirits
Acts 5:32	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...as well as the holy spirit which God gives
Acts 6:3	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...full of the spirit and of wisdom
Acts 6:5	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	Stephen, a man full of faith and holy spirit
Acts 6:10	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke
Acts 7:51	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...you are ever clashing with the holy spirit!
Acts 7:55	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...possessing the fullness of faith and holy spirit
Acts 7:59	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...Stephen ... Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!
Acts 8:7		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	...those having unclean spirits
Acts 8:15	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...so that they may be obtaining holy spirit
Acts 8:17	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...and they obtained holy spirit
Acts 8:18	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the spirit is being given, offers them money
Acts 8:19	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...he may be obtaining holy spirit
Acts 8:29	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the spirit said to Philip
Acts 8:39	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of the Lord snatches away Philip
Acts 9:17	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...and be filled with holy spirit
Acts 9:31	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...the consolation of the holy spirit
Acts 10:19	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the spirit said to him
Acts 10:38	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Jesus ... as God anoints Him with holy spirit and power
Acts 10:44	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the holy spirit falls on all those hearing the word
Acts 10:45	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...the holy spirit has been poured out
Acts 10:47	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...who obtained the holy spirit even as we
Acts 11:12	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the spirit said to me
Acts 11:15	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the holy spirit falls on them
Acts 11:16	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...yet you shall be baptized in holy spirit
Acts 11:24	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...and full of holy spirit and faith
Acts 11:28	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...Agabus, rising, signifies through the spirit
Acts 13:2	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the holy spirit said ... Barnabas and Saul
Acts 13:4	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...being sent out by the holy spirit
Acts 13:9	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...being filled with holy spirit
Acts 13:52	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	And the disciples were filled with joy and holy spirit

Acts 15:8	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...giving the holy spirit according as to us also
Acts 15:28	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	For it seems good to the holy spirit
Acts 16:6	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...being forbidden by the holy spirit to speak the word
Acts 16:7	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...and the spirit of Jesus does not let them
Acts 16:16		<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	...a certain maid, having a python [divination] spirit
Acts 16:18		<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...Paul ... said to the spirit
Acts 17:16	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...Paul ... his spirit was incited in him
Acts 18:25	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...and fervent in spirit
Acts 19:2	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Did you obtain holy spirit on believing?
Acts 19:2	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Nay, neither hear we if there is holy spirit
Acts 19:6	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the holy spirit came on them
Acts 19:12		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	Besides, wicked spirits go out
Acts 19:13		<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	...those having wicked spirits
Acts 19:15		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...the wicked spirit said to them
Acts 19:16		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...in whom the wicked spirit was
Acts 19:21	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...Paul pondered in spirit
Acts 20:22	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	...I, bound in spirit, am going to Jerusalem
Acts 20:23	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...more than that the holy spirit
Acts 20:28	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	...among which the holy spirit appointed you supervisors
Acts 21:4	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	...who said to Paul, through the spirit
<u>Acts 21:11</u>	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now this the holy spirit is saying
<u>Acts 23:8</u>	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Sadducees, indeed, are saying ... nor spirit
<u>Acts 23:9</u>		<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now if a spirit or messenger speaks to him
<u>Acts 28:25</u>	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Ideally the holy spirit speaks through Isaiah

Romans

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Rom. 1:4	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	according to the spirit of holiness
Rom. 1:9	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	I am offering divine service in my spirit
Rom. 2:29	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in spirit, not in letter
Rom. 5:5	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	through the holy spirit which is being given to us
Rom. 7:6	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter
Rom. 8:2	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	for the spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus frees you

Rom. 8:4	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	but in accord with spirit
Rom. 8:5	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	yet those who are in accord with spirit
Rom. 8:5	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	to that which is of the spirit
Rom. 8:6	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	yet the disposition of the spirit is life and peace
Rom. 8:9	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Yet you are not in flesh, but in spirit
Rom. 8:9	—no article [“home”; M or N]	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	if so be that God’s spirit is making its home in you
Rom. 8:9	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Now if anyone has not Christ’s spirit
Rom. 8:10	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit is life because of righteousness
Rom. 8:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now if the spirit of Him Who rouses Jesus
Rom. 8:11	—no article [“home”; M or N]	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	because of His spirit making its home in you
Rom. 8:13	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Yet if, in spirit
Rom. 8:14	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	For whoever are being led by God’s spirit
Rom. 8:15	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	For you did not get slavery’s spirit to fear again
Rom. 8:15	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	but you got the spirit of sonship
Rom. 8:16	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	The spirit itself is testifying
Rom. 8:16	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	together with our spirit
Rom. 8:23	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	who have the firstfruit of the spirit
Rom. 8:26	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now, similarly, the spirit also is aiding our infirmity
Rom. 8:26	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	but the spirit itself is pleading for us
Rom. 8:27	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	is aware what is the disposition of the spirit
Rom. 9:1	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	testifying together with me in holy spirit
Rom. 11:8	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	God gives them a spirit of stupor
Rom. 12:11	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	fervent in [the] spirit
Rom. 14:17	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	and joy in holy spirit
Rom. 15:13	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	in the power of holy spirit
Rom. 15:16	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	having been hallowed by [in] holy spirit
Rom. 15:19	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	in the power of God’s spirit
Rom. 15:30	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	and through the love of the spirit

1 Corinthians

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
1Co. 2:4	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	with demonstration of spirit and of power
1Co. 2:10	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	through His spirit
1Co. 2:10	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	for the spirit is searching all

1Co. 2:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of humanity
1Co. 2:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of God
1Co. 2:12	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	not the spirit of the world
1Co. 2:12	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	but the spirit which is of God
1Co. 2:13	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	taught by the holy spirit
1Co. 2:14	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	of the spirit of God
1Co. 3:16	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of God
1Co. 4:21	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in love and a spirit of meekness
1Co. 5:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	yet present in spirit
1Co. 5:4	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	and my spirit
1Co. 5:5	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	that the spirit may be saved
1Co. 6:11	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	by the spirit of our God
1Co. 6:17	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	he who joins the Lord is one spirit
1Co. 6:19	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	your body is a temple of <i>the</i> holy spirit
1Co. 6:20	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	with your body and with your spirit
1Co. 7:34	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	holy in body as well as in spirit
1Co. 7:40	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	that I also have God's spirit
1Co. 12:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	speaking by God's spirit
1Co. 12:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	except by holy spirit
1Co. 12:4	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	yet the same spirit
1Co. 12:7	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the manifestation of the spirit
1Co. 12:8	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	through the spirit
1Co. 12:8	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	according to the same spirit
1Co. 12:9	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	by the one spirit
1Co. 12:10	—no article	<i>pneumaton</i> (gen)	discrimination of spirits
1Co. 12:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	one and the same spirit
1Co. 12:13	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	For in one spirit
1Co. 12:13	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	all are made to imbibe one spirit
1Co. 14:2	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	yet in spirit he is speaking secrets
1Co. 14:12	—no article	<i>pneumaton</i> (gen)	zealots for spiritual endowments
1Co. 14:14	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	my spirit is praying
1Co. 14:15	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	praying in the spirit
1Co. 14:15	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	In the spirit will I be playing music
1Co. 14:16	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	blessing in the spirit
1Co. 14:32	—no article	<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	<i>the</i> spiritual endowments
1Co. 15:45	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the last Adam a vivifying spirit
1Co. 16:18	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	they soothe my spirit and yours

2 Corinthians

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
2Co. 1:22	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the spirit in our hearts
2Co. 2:13	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in my spirit
2Co. 3:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	but with <i>the</i> spirit of the living God
2Co. 3:6	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	but of <i>the</i> spirit
2Co. 3:6	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	yet the spirit is vivifying
2Co. 3:8	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the dispensation of the spirit
2Co. 3:17	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the Lord is the spirit
2Co. 3:17	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	where the spirit of the Lord is
2Co. 3:18	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	even as from the Lord, <i>the</i> spirit
2Co. 4:13	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	having the same spirit of faith
2Co. 5:5	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the earnest of the spirit
2Co. 6:6	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in holy spirit, in love unfeigned
2Co. 7:1	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	from every pollution of flesh and spirit
2Co. 7:13	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	for his spirit has been soothed
2Co. 11:4	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	you are obtaining a different spirit
2Co. 12:18	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Walk we not in the same spirit?
2Co. 13:14	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the communion of the holy spirit

Galatians

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Gal 3:2	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Did you get the spirit by works of the law
Gal 3:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Undertaking in spirit
Gal 3:5	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	did you get the spirit by works of law
Gal 3:14	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the promise of the spirit
Gal 4:6	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	God delegates the spirit of His Son
Gal 4:29	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	according to spirit
Gal 5:5	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	For we, in spirit
Gal 5:16	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	Walk in spirit
Gal 5:17	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	against the spirit
Gal 5:17	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit against the flesh
Gal 5:18	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	led by spirit
Gal 5:22	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	fruit of the spirit
Gal 5:25	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	If we may be living in spirit
Gal 5:25	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in spirit we may be observing
Gal 6:1	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in a spirit of meekness
Gal 6:8	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	sowing for the spirit

Gal 6:8	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	from the spirit
Gal 6:18	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	be with your spirit

Ephesians

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Eph 1:13	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	sealed with the holy spirit
Eph 1:17	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	giving you a spirit of wisdom
Eph 2:2	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the spirit now operating
Eph 2:18	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in one spirit
Eph 2:22	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	God’s dwelling place, in spirit
Eph 3:5	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in spirit
Eph 3:16	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	through His spirit
Eph 4:3	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the unity of the spirit
Eph 4:4	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	one body and one spirit
Eph 4:23	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in the spirit of your mind
Eph 4:30	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	to the holy spirit of God
Eph 5:9	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	fruit of the spirit
Eph 5:18	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	filled full with spirit
Eph 6:17	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	sword of the spirit
Eph 6:18	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in spirit being vigilant

Philippians thru Philemon

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
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Philippians

Phi 1:19	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	the spirit of Jesus Christ
Phi 1:27	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	standing firm in one spirit
Phi 2:1	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	if any communion of spirit
Phi 3:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in the spirit of God

Colossians

Col 1:8	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	your love in spirit
Col 2:5	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	in spirit, I am with you

1 Thessalonians

1Th 1:5	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	but in power also, and in holy spirit
1Th 1:6	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	with joy of holy spirit
1Th 4:8	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	who is also giving his holy spirit to you
1Th 5:19	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	Quench not the spirit
1Th 5:23	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	your unimpaired spirit and soul and body

2 Thessalonians

2Th 2:2	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	either through spirit, or through word
2Th 2:8	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumatī</i> (dat)	will dispatch with the spirit of His mouth
2Th 2:13	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	in holiness of <i>the</i> spirit

1 Timothy

1Ti 3:16	—no article	<i>pneumatī</i> (dat)	justified in spirit
1Ti 4:1	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the spirit is saying explicitly
1Ti 4:12	—no article	<i>pneumatī</i> (dat)	in love, in spirit

2 Timothy

2Ti 1:7	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	not a spirit of timidity
2Ti 1:14	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	guard through <i>the</i> holy spirit
2Ti 4:22	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	be with your spirit!

Titus

Titus 3:5	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	renewal of holy spirit
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Philemon

Phm 1:25	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	be with your spirit!
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{Col 1:8} “**your love in *the* spirit.**” The article “the” is not present and not needed because the preposition “in” (en) can make the “spirit” (*pneuma*) definite without the article.

Hebrews thru Jude

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Heb 1:7	—no article	<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	makes angels his spirits
Heb 1:14	—no article	<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	ministering spirits
Heb 2:4	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	partings of holy spirit
Heb 3:7	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	according as the holy spirit
Heb 4:12	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	parting of soul and spirit
Heb 6:4	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	becoming partakers of holy spirit
Heb 9:8	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	by this the holy spirit
Heb 9:14	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	through the eonian spirit
Heb 10:15	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Now the holy spirit
Heb 10:29	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	and outrages the spirit of grace?
Heb 12:9	—no article	<i>pneumatōn</i> (gen)	the Father of spirits
Heb 12:23	—no article	<i>pneumasin</i> (dat)	to <i>the</i> spirits of the just perfected

James

Jas 2:26	—no article	<i>pneumatōs</i> (gen)	the body apart from spirit is dead
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Jas 4:5	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the spirit which dwells in us
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1 Peter

1Pe 1:2	— no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	in holiness of spirit
1Pe 1:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of Christ
1Pe 1:12	— no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	holy spirit dispatched from heaven
1Pe 1:22	— no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	through <i>the</i> spirit
1Pe 3:4	— no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	quiet spirit
1Pe 3:18	τῷ (dat-neuter)	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	yet vivified in spirit
1Pe 3:19	— no article	<i>pneumasin</i> (dat)	being gone to <i>the</i> spirits in jail
1Pe 4:6	— no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	living according to God, in spirit
1Pe 4:14	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	for the spirit of glory and power

2 Peter

2Pe 1:21	— no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	being carried on by holy spirit
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1 John

1Jo 3:24	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	by the spirit which He gives us
1Jo 4:1	— no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	do not believe every spirit
1Jo 4:1	τὰ (acc-neuter)	<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	but test the spirits
1Jo 4:2	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the spirit of God
1Jo 4:2	— no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	every spirit
1Jo 4:3	— no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	every spirit
1Jo 4:6	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the spirit of truth
1Jo 4:6	τό (acc-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	the spirit of deception
1Jo 4:13	τοῦ (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	He has given us of His spirit
1Jo 5:6	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit it is which is testifying
1Jo 5:6	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	for the spirit is the truth
1Jo 5:8	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit, and the water, and the blood

Jude

Jude 1:19	— no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	not having the spirit
Jude 1:20	— no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	praying in holy spirit

Revelation

Verse	Greek “the”	Case of <i>pneuma</i>	Concordant Literal Text
Rev 1:4	τῶν (gen-neuter)	<i>pneumaton</i> (gen)	the seven spirits
Rev 1:10	— no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	I came to be, in spirit
Rev 2:7	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 2:11	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias

Rev 2:17	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 2:29	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 3:1	τὰ (acc-neuter)	<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	the seven spirits of God
Rev 3:6	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 3:13	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 3:22	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	what the spirit is saying to the ecclesias
Rev 4:2	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	immediately I came to be in spirit
Rev 4:5	τὰ (nom-neuter)	<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	the seven spirits of God
Rev 5:6	τὰ (nom-neuter)	<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	the seven spirits of God
Rev 11:11	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of life out of God
Rev 13:15	—no article	<i>pneuma</i> (acc)	to give spirit to the image
Rev 14:13	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	Yea, the spirit is saying
Rev 16:13	—no article	<i>pneumata</i> (acc)	three unclean spirits
Rev 16:14	—no article	<i>pneumata</i> (nom)	spirits of demons
Rev 17:3	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	he carries me away, in spirit
Rev 18:2	—no article	<i>pneumatos</i> (gen)	every unclean spirit
Rev 19:10	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit of prophecy
Rev 21:10	—no article	<i>pneumati</i> (dat)	he carries me away, in spirit
Rev 22:17	τό (nom-neuter)	<i>pneuma</i> (nom)	the spirit and the bride

Reference: “The influence of Trinitarian doctrine on translations of the Bible,” by John David Clark, Sr., GoingToJesus.com (<https://tinyurl.com/2kvrnym4>)

Translation of *ruach* [e]

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *ruach*—commonly translated as “breath,” “wind,” or “spirit”—is often cited in Trinitarian theology as providing a scriptural foundation for the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. However, the Old Testament does not present a Trinitarian understanding of God. Rather, it consistently portrays Yehovah as one God—a singular being, as discussed in the article “[God of the Bible](#).”

Furthermore, the Old Testament concept of *ruach* does not support the idea of a distinct third person within the Godhead. This issue is examined more fully in the article “[Spirit as Essence](#).”

First occurrence: Genesis 1:2. The first occurrence of *ruach* in the Old Testament appears in Genesis 1:2:

Genesis 1:2 (ESV): The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** [*ruach Elohim*] was hovering over the face of the waters.

This verse is central to discussions of the Trinity because many interpret “**Spirit of God**” as evidence that a third divine person participated in creation. While Scripture clearly attributes creation to the Father (Isa. 45:18; Rev. 4:11) and to the Son as His agent (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), the precise role of the spirit is not explicitly defined.

Additionally, both the immediate context of the creation narrative and the broader usage of *ruach* throughout the Hebrew Bible do not support a Trinitarian interpretation of this passage.

Translation variations of *ruach* in Genesis 1:2. Although *ruach* is often translated as “spirit,” it can also mean “wind” or “breath.” For this reason, several Bible translations render Genesis 1:2 differently:

- (CEB) ...and God’s **wind** swept over the waters
- (NABRE) ...and a **mighty wind** sweeping over the waters
- (NRSVA) ...while a **wind** from God swept over the face of the waters
- (VOICE) ...while God’s **spirit-wind** hovered over the surface of the empty waters

These variations demonstrate the lexical flexibility of *ruach* and highlight how it may be interpreted in different ways. In the examples above, the term is understood as “wind” or “God’s wind.” However, another possible interpretation remains: that *ruach* refers to “God’s breath,” or the “breath of God,” a concept that will be explored further below.

Definition and range of meaning. The word *ruach* (Strong’s H7307) has a broad semantic range in the Hebrew Bible, including:

- *breath*—life-force
- *wind*—natural force
- *spirit*—inner disposition, mind, or animating principle

In living beings (*nephesh chayah*), *ruach* refers to the breath of life—whether in animals (Gen. 7:15; Ps. 104:29) or humans (Isa. 42:5; Ezek. 37:5). God Himself is described as the source and sustainer of this *ruach* (Job 12:10; 27:3).

In humans, *ruach* may also denote the seat of thought, will, and moral awareness. More broadly, it represents the animating principle that gives life to the *nephesh* (the living being).

When applied to God, *ruach* signifies His active power and creative agency (Gen. 1:2; Isa. 40:13). It is associated with:

- Creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4)
- Sustaining life (Psalm 104:30)
- Guidance and providence (Nehemiah 9:20; Psalm 143:10)

- Renewal and transformation (Ezekiel 36:26–27)
- Empowerment of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1)

In this sense, *ruach Elohim* is best understood as an extension of God Himself—His operative presence and power—rather than a separate divine person. In short, as the *ruach* is to the created *nephesh*, so the *ruach Elohim* is to God Himself, part of God and identified with God.

Parallel language: spirit and breath. A key interpretive insight comes from passages where “spirit” (*ruach*) and “breath” (*neshamah*) are used in parallel:

Job 33:4: The spirit [*ruach*] of God has made me, and the breath [*neshamah*] of the Almighty gives me life.

This parallelism suggests that *ruach* and *neshamah* can function synonymously, reinforcing the idea that God’s “spirit” is closely related to His life-giving breath. This insight helps clarify the meaning of the Creation account. Accordingly, the narrative may be understood as presenting two complementary creation accounts within a single story:

1. **Creation of the world (Genesis 1).** In this account, God brings everything into existence over a six-day period through His **spoken word**, marked by the recurring phrase, “And God said.”
2. **Creation of man (Genesis 2).** In this account, God forms man from the dust of the ground and breathes the breath (*neshamah*) of life into his nostrils, and he becomes a living being (Gen. 2:7).

In the first account, God’s *ruach* is active in the creation, while in the second account, His *neshamah* is emphasized. Since the **creation of man** appears in both accounts, it may be understood that God created man through **both** *ruach* and *neshamah*. In each case, God’s “breath”—whether expressed through **speech** or **direct breathing**—serves as the means by which life is brought into being.

Further parallelism: Psalm 104. Psalm 104 reinforces this connection:

Psalm 104:29-30: When you take away their breath (*ruach*), they die... When you send forth your spirit (*ruach*), they are created

Here, *ruach* clearly refers to the life-giving force that both creates and sustains life.

***Ruach* in the Flood narrative.** After Genesis 1:2, the phrase “Spirit of God” does not reappear in the Torah (i.e., the books of Moses) in connection with creation. Instead, *ruach* is used in the Flood narrative to describe the “breath of life”:

- *Genesis 6:3 (ESV)*: **My Spirit** shall not abide in man forever...
- *Genesis 6:4 (CEB)*: **My breath** will not remain in humans forever...

Why the *ruach* of Genesis 6:3 should be understood as Yehovah’s “**breath**” is because in the rest of the Flood story the *ruach* instances are with reference to the “breath of life” as follows:

- *Genesis 6:17*: For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the **breath** [[*ruach*]] of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.
- *Genesis 7:15*: They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the **breath** [[*ruach*]] of life.
- *Genesis 7:22*: Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the **breath** [[*ruach*]] of life died.

This consistent usage suggests that *ruach* in Genesis 6:3 is best understood as God’s life-sustaining breath rather than a distinct personal entity.

Conclusion. The Old Testament usage of *ruach* demonstrates a wide semantic range centered on the ideas of breath, wind, and life-force. While it can describe God’s activity and presence, it does not present *ruach Elohim* as a distinct third person within a Trinitarian framework.

Rather, the evidence suggests that *ruach* is best understood as God’s own dynamic power—His creative and life-giving breath—through which He acts in the world.

***Ruach* in the Torah (38 occurrences)**

#	Verse	TORAH	RSV Text
1	Gen. 1:2	wind	the Spirit of God was moving
2	Gen. 3:8	breezy time	in the cool of the day
3	Gen. 6:3	breath	My spirit shall not abide in man for ever
4	Gen. 6:17	breath	in which is the breath of life
5	Gen. 7:15	breath	in which there was the breath of life
6	Gen. 7:22	breath	in whose nostrils was the breath of life
7	Gen. 8:1	wind	And God made a wind blow over the earth
8	Gen. 26:35	bitterness (RSV: life)	and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah
9	Gen. 41:8	spirit	his spirit was troubled
10	Gen. 41:38	spirit	in whom is the Spirit of God?
11	Gen. 45:27	spirit	the spirit of their father Jacob revived

12	Ex. 6:9	spirits	because of their broken spirit
13-14	Ex. 10:13 (2x)	east wind	
15	Ex. 10:19	west wind	
16	Ex. 14:21	east wind	
17	Ex. 15:8	blast	At the blast of thy nostrils
18	Ex. 15:10	wind	Thou didst blow with thy wind
19	Ex. 28:3	gift of skill (RSV: able mind)	whom I have endowed with an able mind
20	Ex. 31:3	divine spirit (RSV: Spirit of God)	and I have filled him with the Spirit of God
21	Ex. 35:21	spirit	and every one whose spirit moved him
22	Ex. 35:31	divine spirit (RSV: Spirit of God)	and he has filled him with the Spirit of God
23-24	Num. 5:14 (2x)	fit (RSV: spirit)	the spirit of jealousy
25	Num. 5:30	fit (RSV: spirit)	the spirit of jealousy
26	Num. 11:17	spirit	take some of the spirit which is upon you
27-28	Num. 11:25 (2x)	spirit	took some of the spirit that was upon him
29	Num. 11:26	spirit	and the spirit rested upon them
30	Num. 11:29	His spirit	that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!
31	Num. 11:31	wind	And there went forth a wind from the LORD
32	Num. 14:24	different spirit	Caleb, because he has a different spirit
33	Num. 16:22	breath (RSV: spirits)	the God of the spirits of all flesh
34	Num. 24:2	spirit of God	And the Spirit of God came upon him
35	Num. 27:16	breath (RSV: spirits)	the God of the spirits of all flesh
36	Num. 27:18	inspired (RSV: spirit)	(Joshua)...a man in whom is the spirit
37	Deut. 2:30	will (RSV: spirit)	hardened his spirit
38	Deut. 34:9	spirit	(Joshua)...was full of the spirit of wisdom

***Ruach* in the entire Old Testament.** For a complete list of occurrences of the word *ruach* in the Hebrew Bible, see here: [Ruach in the Hebrew Scriptures](#). Similar to the meaning of *ruach* in the Torah, the *ruach* of God in the rest of the Old Testament is a non-participant in any Creation story other than with reference to the “breath of life”. Therefore, the term “*ruach Elohim*” in Genesis 1:2 is best understood as the “breath of God” and *not* a separate divine entity.

► Another Paraclete

Paraclete. The term “Paraclete” is a transliteration of the Greek word *paraklēton* [G3875], variously translated by other Bible versions as Advocate, Helper, Counselor, or Comforter. There are only five occurrences of this word in the New Testament (referenced below). The word comes from *para* (“beside, alongside”) + *kaleo* (“to call”). Its literal meaning is “one called alongside” or “one called to help.” The word can mean: legal advocate (someone who speaks in defense, like an attorney), comforter/encourager (someone who gives comfort or encouragement), or helper/supporter (one who provides aid and guidance). So the word blends **legal**, **moral**, and **personal** overtones—it’s not just a “comforter,” nor just a “lawyer,” but someone who stands beside you to strengthen, defend, and guide.

In John’s writings, the term Paraclete (*parakletos*) appears **five times**:

- **John 14:16** – “another Paraclete”
- **John 14:26** – “the Paraclete, the holy spirit”
- **John 15:26** – “the Paraclete... the one I will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father”
- **John 16:7** – “for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you”
- **1 John 2:1** – “we have a Paraclete with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Context of John 14:16. We will now study the first instance of the Paraclete found in John 14:16. The full text reads as follows:

John 14:16-21: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to abide with you forever. ¹⁷ *This Paraclete* is the spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it neither sees it nor understands it. You know it, because *it* abides with you and will be by [*the side of*] you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am by [*the side of*] my Father, and you by [*the side of*] me, and I by [*the side of*] you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

Another. The term “another” [G243, *allos*] (in Jn 14:16) means “another of the *same* kind.” If there is “another” (or subsequent), then there was a first. The first Paraclete is Jesus Christ himself by virtue of the fact that

he was comparing himself to the coming Paraclete (i.e. v.18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you”). Yet, in his first letter (1 John 2:1), John identifies the Paraclete to be Jesus in heaven post-Resurrection, “we have a Paraclete with the Father—Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The paradox of the Paraclete. How is it possible then that the Paraclete is both on earth (as the spirit) and in heaven (as the resurrected Jesus)? The answer is in the second identifying characteristic of the Paraclete. According to John, the Paraclete is “the spirit of truth” (v.17).

{14:17} “spirit of truth”. The “spirit of truth” (Greek, *τὸ πνεῦμα ἀλῆθειας*) is a neuter term. This is why what follows (“**which** the world cannot receive”) is also neuter because the antecedent is the neuter *pneuma*, not the masculine Paraclete. Also, the other pronouns (“neither sees **it** nor understands **it**. You know **it**”) are neuter and refer back to the “spirit of truth.” Thus,

John 14:17: This Paraclete is the spirit [pneuma, neuter noun] of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it [i.e. the world] neither sees it [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine] nor understands it [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine]. You know it [autos, neuter pronoun, not masculine], because it [pronoun not in the Greek text] abides with you and will be by you.

The issue translators have with the second half of v.17 is whether John was thinking of the Paraclete *or* the “spirit of truth.” If it is the Paraclete then the correct translation is “because **he** abides with you and will be by you.” However, if it is the “spirit of truth” then it should be translated “because **it** abides with you and will be by you.” The decision made in *The Chiastic Word* is the latter, which follows the Greek grammar.

Two intercessors? The Bible also tells us that both the spirit and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, are intercessors:

- *Romans 8:26:* In the same way the spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we ought to pray for, but **the spirit itself intercedes** for us with groanings too deep for words.
- *Romans 8:34:* Who is to condemn? **Christ** is the one who died, but more than that, who was raised and is at the right hand of God, **interceding** for us.

Evidently, *both* the spirit and the Son are interceding with the Father on our behalf. So it seems we have two intercessors, and some would say even two Advocates. But why the need for two intercessors when one should suffice? The answer, of course, is that there is no need when we understand the power given to the Son. To Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

is given all authority and power. The power granted to Jesus now in heaven is unimaginably great.

- *Hebrews 1:3*: He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, **and he upholds the universe by the word of his power**. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
- *1 Peter 3:22*: Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, **with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him**.

And Christ's power is not limited to heaven, but extends to the earth itself. Christ is all and in all (Colossians 3:11). Christ is able to reach out to us and communicate with us and live in us.

Christ's spirit. How can Christ intercede for us when he is in heaven and we are on earth? The answer is plain from Scripture—it is by his spirit. Christ has a spirit just as we have a spirit. The communication between Christ and his people is on a Spirit-to-spirit level. As the Bible tells us:

- *Romans 8:9-10*: You, however, are not in the flesh but in the spirit, if indeed the spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have **the spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Christ.
¹⁰ But **if Christ is in you**, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because of righteousness.
- *Romans 8:16*: **The spirit itself testifies with our spirit** that we are children of God.
- *2 Corinthians 3:18*: And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from **the Lord, who is the spirit**.

Typological language. A better explanation for the wording we find in John chapters 14-16 is to compare it to the rest of John's gospel. It is through and through written in typological language. We find Jesus being described (or describing himself) as the Word (the *logos*) becoming flesh, the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the True Vine, etc. None of these titles should be taken literally, but only symbolically, as "titles" describing Jesus' nature and ministry. The title of Paraclete is just as suitable and a fitting figure for Christ as all the others. All these figures and types speak of Christ's work when he was on earth and now continues to perform in his priestly work in heaven.

Paraclete as a personal pronoun. Most Bible translations use the pronoun “he” in connection with *parakletos* since it is a masculine gender noun in the Greek. However, the reason for its use is **grammatical**, not theological, or spiritual. The fact that it is masculine is “a linguistic accident, and no theological conclusion should be derived from it,” as *Ministry Magazine* states:

“Also, the fact that *parakletos* is masculine does not have any implication regarding the personality (much less the masculinity) of the Spirit. The gender of *parakletos*, as well as that of *pneuma*, is nothing more than a **linguistic accident, and no theological conclusion should be derived from it.**” —[*Ministry Magazine*, “Another Paraclete”: The Holy Spirit in John 14-17, April, 2012.](#)

Grammatical versus linguistic meaning. The Greek language assigns gender to nouns and associated pronouns. That is, all pronouns in Greek must agree in gender with the noun they refer to. This is also true in many other languages such as Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Hebrew. But this is not true in English where a strictly literal translation would not necessarily represent its linguistic meaning.

For example, in Spanish, a “car” is masculine, *el carro*, while a “spoon” is feminine, *la cuchara*. Thus, a literal translation of a Spanish set of sentences might be, “I like this car and would like to buy **him**. The spoon is dirty and I need to put **her** in the dishwasher.” A Spanish to English translator would never translate “the car, **he**” or “the spoon, **she**.” Even Spanish speakers don’t think of cars and spoons as male and female and certainly not persons. The gender of these nouns is simply a part of the language inherited from the past.

{14:17} “**by [the side of] you**”. The term “by” [G1722, *en*; in, by, with, among] is a primary preposition denoting a fixed (always at rest) position in place, time or state. It is used whenever a person is in someone’s presence, at someone’s feet, enveloped by something, in a certain time period, in a certain situation, under a certain condition, in a certain way. In this case, it is comparable to the familiar phrase “in Christ”. To be “in Christ” means to be in a *relationship of union* with Christ. Christ is not the *subject* but rather the *relationship* or environment in which the believer is found. One is *in* Christ as one would joyfully dance *in* the rain.

Not “in” but “by (the side of)” or “with”. The Bible gives us a visual of the giving of the spirit. It is the anointing oil which is poured on the head of the one anointed. The anointing is poured out *on* the believer, not *in* him. When the spirit was given at Pentecost, the “divided tongues that looked like fire” (Acts 2:3) rested “*on* each of them” not “*in* each of them”. As Jesus abode with his disciples when on earth, so the spirit (the

Paraclete, the successor to Christ) abides *with* us, at our side, as the Helper, Counselor, Comforter. In this way, one can better understand v.20 which reads:

John 14:20: On that day you will know that I am **by** [*the side of*] my Father, and you **by** [*the side of*] me, and I **by** [*the side of*] you.

That is, Jesus is not “*in*” his Father, but **by** (*the side of*) his Father, sitting at his Father’s right hand (Heb. 1:3). He is not *in* his Father, but *with* and *alongside* him. Thus,

- As Christ is **by** his Father (*with* and *alongside* him), sitting at his right hand,
- so we can be **by** Christ (*with* and *alongside* him),
- and Christ can be **by** us (*with* and *alongside* us).

{14:21} “**and I will love him and manifest myself to him.**” This is in reference to Jesus “appearing” or “revealing” himself to the believer. This “manifestation” is better understood as coming alongside of, rather than being “inside” the believer. In EGW’s words, “for He [Christ] whom their soul loveth, walks, invisible, *beside* them” ([MB 140.3](#)).

“in” (possession) vs. “by” (a relationship). The reason this is important is that it tells us how Christ abides “in” us. It is not a form of *possession* (“in” us) as a demon-possessed unbeliever—owned and controlled by Satan—but a form of consenting (“by” the side of) loving relationship. That is, the “will” is not subverted and the “mind” is not controlled. The believer is admonished by the spirit; the spirit pleads and the person consents and wills to do the will of God. Think of a loving marriage relationship in which intimate thoughts and feelings are shared, without subversion or control.

► Evolution's Fundamental Flaws

The evolutionary theory of the origin of life is fundamentally flawed because the process is scientifically *unobservable*, *unrepeatable*, and *unfalsifiable*. Therefore, it does not meet the standard criteria of empirical science.

Executive outline. The topics discussed in this article include:

- Evolution vs. science
- Origin of Life
- [Abiogenesis' improbable narrative](#)
- [1952 Miller-Urey experiment](#)
- (brief) Genetics and DNA
- (brief) Fossil record
- (brief) Geologic record
- (brief) Natural selection
- (brief) Radiometric dating
- (brief) Cosmology
- [Moral consequences](#)

Rather than detailing each topic above, I will *briefly* summarize the later sections, which are discussed at length in the book *Evolution's Achilles' Heels*, authored by eight Ph.D. scientists. The latest edition is available from [Creation.com](#).

Evolution vs. science

Evolution's major flaws. Specifically, the evolutionary theory is:

- **Unobservable.** The origin of life cannot be directly observed in a laboratory or natural setting.
- **Unrepeatable.** No scientific experiment has been able to replicate the initial “creation” of life.
- **Unfalsifiable.** The theory is not *falsifiable* (not testable). It is grounded in a philosophical commitment to a purely materialistic process that excludes the possibility of supernatural causation from the outset. As a result, it is *unfalsifiable* because virtually *any* chemical environment can be invoked as a potential explanation.

Science. Science is a systematic, empirical approach to understanding the natural world. Its core features include:

1. **Empirical.** Science relies on *observations, measurements, and experimentation*—data that can be publicly tested and verified.
2. **Testable.** Scientific explanations must be *falsifiable*—they must make predictions that can be tested and potentially shown false.
3. **Natural.** Science seeks explanations based on *natural causes and mechanisms*, not supernatural ones. This principle is known as *methodological naturalism*.
4. **Provisional.** Scientific conclusions are tentative, always open to revision if new evidence emerges.
5. **Reproducible.** Claims must be repeatable under similar conditions.

In short, science is the disciplined pursuit of reliable, testable knowledge about the natural world obtained through systematic observation, experimentation, and reasoning.

Evolution. Evolution is a scientific explanation for how living organisms came to be and “evolved” over time. The foundational tenet to this theory is that of “single origin” or “common ancestry”—the so called, “tree of life”.

Single origin (or “common ancestry). Evolution proposes that all living organisms—plants, animals, fungi, bacteria, humans—descended from earlier forms of life. Ultimately, all life goes back to a single (or a small number of) common ancestral population(s) billions of years ago. It is from this single origin that “speciation” (the formation of new species) occurred.

Origin of Life [\[e\]](#)

Evolution vs. Origin of Life. According to modern scientific thought, strictly speaking, the evolutionary theory *does not explain the origin of life*. Evolution begins **after** the first self-replicating, heritable system exists. Thus, the origin of life (*abiogenesis*) is a separate but related scientific field focused on how non-living chemistry could give rise to the first primitive cells.

Nevertheless, modern science implicitly assumes that the “origin of life” occurred through a materialistic, mechanistic process, in which living matter arose from non-living matter by natural processes alone, excluding any supernatural involvement. In this sense, both modern science and the theory of evolution align with a naturalistic perspective, standing in contrast to the supernatural view proposed in the Creationist framework.

At issue. Creationism postulates that living matter can *only* arise from living matter (i.e. *biogenesis*), while modern science (based on evolutionary, materialistic thinking) postulates that living matter arose from non-living matter (i.e. *abiogenesis*) through natural processes.

Abiogenesis (definition). The scientific theory that life on Earth originated from nonliving organic matter through natural processes, a gradual evolution of increasing complexity from simple chemical compounds to the first basic lifeforms.

Mechanism. The theory of *abiogenesis* proposes that the transition from non-living to living entities was not a single event but a long process involving the formation of a habitable planet, prebiotic synthesis of organic molecules, cellular respiration (energy-producing mechanism), self-replication, and self-assembly (particularly in higher level organisms). That is,

Big bang → habitable planet → prebiotic synthesis of organic molecules → cellular respiration → self-replication → self-assembly

Abiogenesis remains a theoretical framework, but it is a widely accepted plausible explanation for the origin of life, supported by experiments like the 1952 Miller-Urey experiment which showed that basic organic building blocks can form under (supposed) simulated early Earth conditions.

***Abiogenesis'* improbable narrative** [\[e\]](#)

Imagine standing on the edge of the ancient Earth, watching a planet that is still hot, violent, and unsettled. Lightning splits the sky. Volcanoes stain the horizon red. Oceans churn under an atmosphere unlike our own. Somewhere in this restless world, life is supposed to begin—not slowly evolving from something already living, but emerging for the first time from lifeless chemistry.

Main flaws to *abiogenesis*. That moment—life from nonlife—is what abiogenesis seeks to explain. Yet, when you follow the path that theory must take, you begin to notice that the trail is broken in several places. The problems do not cluster in one small corner; they stretch across the entire landscape: from laboratory evidence, to chemistry, to the astonishing complexity of living systems themselves.

Neither observable nor replicable. First, there is the simple matter of observation. No one has ever seen life arise from nonlife. No experiment has recreated it. Carefully controlled setups like the famous Miller–Urey experiment can produce a handful of simple amino acids, but they stop

far short of generating proteins, nucleotides, or anything resembling a living cell. The full pathway from raw chemistry to self-replicating life remains hypothetical, a chain of imagined steps with no complete empirical bridge between them.

No genetic code. Then there is the problem of information. Every living thing depends on DNA and RNA, molecules that do not merely exist but carry digitally coded instructions. These instructions are not useful by themselves; they require an intricate translation system of ribosomes, transfer RNAs, and enzymes to read and execute them. A code needs both a message and an interpreter. DNA needs proteins to be copied, and proteins need DNA to be made. This circular dependency creates a deep puzzle: how could such a coded system arise from unguided chemistry, when information-rich systems are not known to assemble spontaneously?

The “homochirality” problem. As the picture sharpens, another subtle obstacle appears: molecular “handedness,” or *homochirality*. Life is picky. It uses only **left-handed amino acids** to build proteins and only **right-handed sugars** to construct DNA and RNA. Yet ordinary chemistry produces equal mixtures of both “hands.” Even a small presence of the wrong kind can halt the formation of the long chains required for life. Despite decades of study, no widely accepted explanation shows how a pure, single-handed set of molecules could have emerged before life existed to enforce that preference.

The complexity of even the simplest cell. And even if these hurdles were somehow cleared, the gulf between simple organic molecules and even the simplest living cell is enormous. The most minimal self-replicating organisms known today still rely on hundreds of essential genes. Their DNA is fragile and must be constantly repaired through multiple specialized pathways. They require membranes of remarkable sophistication and metabolic networks powered by hundreds of unique proteins working together in tight coordination. The leap from a chemical mixture to such a coordinated system is far greater than it first appears.

The prebiotic soup problem. The setting itself raises further questions. Many origin-of-life scenarios imagine a rich “prebiotic soup” of organic molecules pooling across the planet. Yet geological evidence for such a global soup is thin, and the early atmosphere may not have been as chemically favorable as often assumed. Even if organic molecules were formed, natural processes tend to dilute them, scatter them, or break them apart. The concentrations required for further steps would be difficult to maintain in the open environment of early Earth.

Spontaneous polymerization is unlikely. Chemistry adds another complication. To build proteins and nucleic acids, small molecules must link

together in long chains through a process called *polymerization*. But polymerization requires dehydration reactions—removing water—while the early Earth was dominated by water, which does the opposite: it breaks such chains apart. These reactions also demand energy and carefully controlled conditions. Where would the necessary energy come from, and how would such favorable conditions persist long enough for complex chains to form?

Instability of prebiotic molecules. Even if these chains formed, they would face a hostile world. Prebiotic molecules like RNA, peptides, and lipids are fragile. Ultraviolet radiation from the young sun, heat from geothermal activity, oxygen, and simple contact with water would rapidly degrade them. Without the repair mechanisms found in living cells, these molecules would have a short lifespan, leaving little time for further development.

Multiple “chicken-and-egg” loops. Finally, the entire process is riddled with interlocking “chicken-and-egg” dilemmas. Proteins are needed to copy DNA, yet DNA is needed to make proteins. Membranes are required for enzymes to function efficiently, yet enzymes are needed to build membranes. Metabolism depends on enzymes, and enzymes depend on metabolism. Each piece seems to require the others already in place.

Concluding thought. Taken together, these challenges do not form a single problem but a web of them. Empirical gaps, chemical and thermodynamic barriers, and the systems-level complexity of life intertwine into a picture that is far from straightforward. The story of how life began is still one of the greatest open questions in science—not for lack of imagination, but because the path from chemistry to biology is far more intricate, and far more demanding, than it first appears.

1952 Miller-Urey experiment [\[4\]](#)

In 1952, at the University of Chicago, a young graduate student named Stanley Miller worked under the guidance of Harold Urey to build a glass apparatus that would become one of the most famous symbols in origin-of-life research: the Miller–Urey experiment.

They sealed water and gases inside a closed loop of glass tubes. They heated the “ocean,” sparked electricity through the “atmosphere,” condensed the vapors, and let the cycle repeat. After several days, the water had turned a murky brown. Chemical analysis revealed something remarkable for the time: amino acids—the building blocks of proteins—had formed.

It was an electrifying moment. For many, it appeared to be the first

experimental hint that life's chemistry might arise from nonliving matter.

But as the years passed and understanding of early Earth deepened, critics began to look more closely at what the experiment actually showed—and what it did not.

Incorrect assumptions about the early Earth's atmosphere. They noticed, first, the beginning of the story. The gases Miller and Urey used created a strongly reducing atmosphere—rich in methane, ammonia, and hydrogen. At the time, this seemed plausible. Later geochemical research, however, suggested that early Earth's atmosphere was likely far more neutral, dominated by carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and water vapor. Under those more realistic conditions, the same experiment produces little to no amino acids at all. The very success of the setup appeared to depend on an atmosphere that may never have existed.

Use of a closed, protected system. Then there was the matter of protection. Inside the glass apparatus, fragile molecules were shielded from ultraviolet radiation, oxidation, dilution, and the countless destructive variables of the natural world. A carefully designed cold trap removed newly formed compounds from the reaction zone almost immediately, preventing them from being destroyed by the very energy that created them. In nature, there would have been no such rescue system. No gentle condensation chamber. No glass walls guarding the chemistry from chaos.

The energy source, too, was suspiciously cooperative. A steady electrical spark passed rhythmically through the gases, calibrated just enough to drive reactions without obliterating their products. Real lightning is violent, irregular, and immensely destructive. Ultraviolet radiation from the young sun would have battered exposed molecules. Volcanic gases and reactive minerals would have interfered constantly. The laboratory spark, critics argued, behaved less like nature and more like a chemist's careful hand.

Production of both left- and right-handed amino acids. And what of the products themselves? The amino acids formed were not the biologically useful left-handed type found in living organisms. They appeared as a racemic mixture: equal parts left- and right-handed molecules. In living systems, even small amounts of the wrong *chirality* disrupt protein formation. Alongside these amino acids was a thick mixture of tar-like by-products, cross-linking chemicals, and contaminants—substances more likely to hinder life's chemistry than help it. The useful compounds were **dilute, fragile, and surrounded by chemical clutter.**

No pathway to proteins or genetic information. Even if one granted the formation of amino acids, a deeper problem remained. Amino acids are

not proteins. They are not enzymes. They do not carry genetic information. They do not form membranes. They do not assemble themselves into the intricate, interdependent systems required for even the simplest cell. Water, essential for life, works against the formation of long molecular chains by breaking them apart through hydrolysis. No peptides emerged from the apparatus. No nucleic acids. No sugars. No lipids. The gulf between simple organic molecules and living systems remained as wide as ever.

The energy source was artificially controlled. As critics reflected on the experiment's design, a pattern seemed to emerge. The starting assumptions appeared questionable. The environment was artificially protected. The energy source was finely tuned. The products were chemically problematic and unstable. And at the very center of it all was a silent admission: the experiment never approached the threshold of life.

Specially purified chemical reagents. In fact, the more carefully engineered the setup appeared, the more it seemed to require intentional design to produce even these modest results. Pure gases. Purified water. Sterile equipment. Precisely arranged chambers. Each layer of control made the system less like early Earth and more like a laboratory demonstration.

Summary remarks on the 1952 Miller-Urey experiment. The experiment had shown that under highly controlled, idealized, and protected conditions, some organic molecules could form. But it had not shown that such molecules would form—or survive—under realistic natural conditions. It had not shown a pathway from chemistry to biology. It had not shown how information, complexity, and organization arise from unguided reactions.

What began as a hopeful glimpse into life's possible origins came, for many critics, to illustrate the very difficulty of the problem. The glass apparatus on the laboratory bench demonstrated something important—but perhaps not what it was first thought to demonstrate.

It showed that producing even the simplest building blocks of life required a carefully arranged environment, delicate balance, and intelligent control.

And outside the glass, the early Earth remained a far harsher, far less forgiving place.

(brief) Genetics and DNA [\[↵\]](#)

Modern genetics (DNA, RNA, genomes) undermines the evolutionary story rather than supporting it.

Supporting points: The supposed “junk DNA” argument is functional, not junk; information content and irreducible complexity of genetic systems; molecular repair mechanisms and assumed improbability of getting functional genomes by random mutation plus selection.

(brief) Fossil record

The fossil record does not show the gradual, transitional series required by Darwinian evolution; instead it shows sudden appearances, stasis, and gaps better explained by other models.

Supporting points: Apparent sudden appearance of body plans, long-term morphological stasis, paucity of clear intermediate forms for many major transitions.

(brief) Geologic record

Conventional geological interpretations (deep time/slow uniformitarianism) are challenged; the stratigraphic and sedimentary evidence is presented as problematic for standard evolutionary timelines.

Supporting points: Interpretations of layering, depositional patterns, and claims of catastrophic processes versus slow accumulation (used to question how fossils and their ordering formed).

(brief) Natural selection

Natural selection cannot account for the origin of novel biological information or the major macroevolutionary changes required by standard evolutionary theory.

Supporting points: Limits of selection (it removes deleterious variants, preserves existing function); “microevolution” vs. “macroevolution” distinction; examples argued to show selection cannot build new complex systems.

(brief) Radiometric dating [\[4\]](#)

Radiometric methods and the assumptions behind them (closed systems, initial conditions, constant decay rates) are criticized as unreliable for producing absolute geologic ages.

Supporting points: Examples of discordant dates, sensitivity to initial-condition assumptions, and laboratory/field cases cited to question accuracy.

(brief) Cosmology

Cosmological arguments (origins of the universe, Big Bang interpretations, fine-tuning) are used to argue that standard materialistic cosmology is incomplete or points toward design.

Supporting points: Fine-tuning claims, limits of naturalistic accounts for the origin of physical laws and initial conditions, and interpretation of observational cosmology.

Moral consequences [\[e\]](#)

When evolution moves from **biology** into a **worldview**, it produces a cascade of moral consequences. Below is a summary table of what a fully consistent “evolutionary philosophy” would unfold ethically and morally if taken to its logical end.

Evolutionary worldview	Then logically...
No Creator	No objective morality
Humans and animals	Life has graded value
Survival rules	Compassion is irrational
Natural selection	Eugenics is logical
Struggle for existence	Racism and oppression justified
No ultimate purpose	Nihilism
No judgment	No accountability
No image of God	No human rights

What follows is a detailed discussion of the consequences of an evolutionary worldview.

No objective moral standard (moral relativism). First, morality itself changes character. If human beings are the unintended result of blind, unguided processes, then there is no transcendent moral lawgiver and no objective moral standard. Morality becomes something that emerges from survival advantage rather than eternal principle. What is “right” is simply what promotes the flourishing of the species; what is “wrong” is what hinders it. Good and evil are no longer anchored in anything absolute but become matters of preference, utility, or social consensus. If humanity is merely the rearrangement of matter, then morality becomes a rearrangement of preference.

Human life loses intrinsic value. From this, human life can begin to lose its intrinsic value. If humans differ from animals only by degree and not

by kind, then human dignity becomes negotiable. Personhood may no longer be tied automatically to being human but instead becomes a sliding scale based on age, ability, intelligence, or usefulness. In this framework, practices such as abortion, euthanasia, or even infanticide can be framed as biological decisions rather than moral ones. The language subtly shifts: “personhood” replaces “human being.”

Survival of the fittest becomes an ethical principle. The concept popularized by **Herbert Spencer** — “survival of the fittest”—then moves from biology into ethics. Helping the weak may be seen as interfering with natural progress. Compassion can be viewed as a hindrance to evolutionary advancement. Inequality is not merely tolerated but interpreted as natural and even desirable. This way of thinking historically fed into what became known as Social Darwinism.

Justification for eugenics. From here, it is a short step to eugenics. **Francis Galton**, a cousin of **Charles Darwin**, promoted the idea of improving the human race through selective breeding. This led to forced sterilizations and efforts to “improve the gene pool.” This was not a distortion of evolutionary thinking but a consistent application of it to human society.

Racism gains scientific legitimacy. Racial theories in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also drew from hierarchical interpretations of human development. If humanity evolved in stages, some groups could be mischaracterized as less evolved than others. These assumptions were used to give scientific legitimacy to racism and racial anthropology.

Foundation for Nazi ideology. These ideas found one of their darkest political expressions in the ideology of **Adolf Hitler**. Concepts of racial struggle, elimination of the weak, and breeding programs were framed within an evolutionary lens. This is evolution applied directly to politics, with catastrophic consequences.

Meaninglessness and existential nihilism. Beyond social and political implications, this worldview can also shape how individuals view meaning itself. If life is accidental and temporary, then there is no ultimate purpose, no final accountability, and no lasting significance. Human existence becomes cosmically small and fleeting. This perspective contributes to modern experiences of nihilism and despair.

Ethics become pragmatic, not principled. Ethics, in such a framework, also becomes pragmatic rather than principled. Without absolutes, morality is determined by social agreement. Laws change as cultures change. “Good” becomes whatever works at the time.

Undermining of marriage, family, and sexual ethics. Marriage, family, and sexual ethics may also be reframed. If humans are simply advanced

animals driven primarily by reproductive instincts, then sexual behavior is interpreted biologically rather than morally. Marriage can be reduced to a social convenience, and long-held concepts such as fidelity, chastity, and defined gender roles lose their grounding.

Removal of accountability. If there is no Creator and no ultimate Judge, then there is no final accountability. There is no ultimate justice beyond what humans can enforce. Oppression, if successful, may go unpunished. Compassion toward the weak, the elderly, or the disabled may be seen as sentiment rather than reason. In the end, **power—not righteousness—defines morality.** Might makes right.

Human rights lose foundation. In such a system, even the concept of human rights becomes fragile. If rights are not understood as given by God, then they are granted by governments or societies. What is granted can also be taken away, and there is no ultimate appeal beyond human authority.

Logical conclusion. This is the ethical landscape that unfolds when evolutionary thought is expanded from a scientific explanation into a comprehensive moral philosophy and followed to its logical conclusion.

► Divorce and Remarriage

Within Christianity, views on divorce and remarriage vary among denominations and individuals. These differences arise largely from the way Matthew 5:32 and/or Matthew 19:9 are translated and interpreted. In *The Chiastic Word*, these verses read as follows:

- *Matthew 5:32*: But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, **except on the ground of *porneia***, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.
- *Matthew 19:9*: I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, **except for *porneia***, and marries another, commits adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

The Greek word *porneia* [G4202] was left untranslated because of the lack of clarity to its meaning. The most common translations include: fornication, sexual immorality, sexual promiscuity, and unfaithfulness.

The clause, “**except on the ground of (Or, for) *porneia***,” is commonly referred to as the “exception clause” and is only found in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. It gives an “exception” for remarriage after divorce; otherwise, it would be considered adultery to remarry. The meaning of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 is clear. If a person gets a divorce and then remarries, it is considered adultery unless the exception clause is in effect.

“The exception clause” does not mean adultery. First, we know what *porneia* does *not* mean. It does *not* mean that the offending party committed adultery or was in an adulterous relationship. We know that *porneia* does *not* mean adultery because in Jesus’ day an act of adultery was punishable by stoning to death. This is clearly brought out in the story found in John 8:3-5 with the woman caught in adultery. Also, if Jesus meant adultery, he (or Matthew) would have used another Greek word, *moicheia*, which means adultery. Given that Jesus did not use *moicheia* but *porneia*, we must understand *porneia* to mean something other than adultery.

Why is the “exception clause” only in Matthew? Only Matthew offers an “exception” to divorce and remarriage. In the similar passages found in Mark (Mark 10:2-12) and Luke (Luke 16:14-18), the exception clause is not mentioned. Here is how they read:

- *Mark 10:11-12*: So he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹² And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”
- *Luke 16:18*: Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another

commits adultery, and everyone who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.

Thus, according to Mark and Luke, there are no exceptions. Divorce and remarriage was not in Jesus' vocabulary, at least not in how Mark and Luke record Jesus' teaching.

Why Matthew includes this exception clause is because Matthew is the only gospel writer who mentions divorce in the context of a righteous man, namely, Joseph—Jesus' father. **Joseph initially intended to divorce Mary** after learning that she was “found to be with child” as we read in Matthew:

Matthew 1:18-19: Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by holy spirit.¹⁹ Her husband **Joseph, being righteous** and not willing to shame her publicly, **intended to divorce her privately**.

Evidently, this was a legitimate cause for divorce—which is: a woman is betrothed (i.e. legally married) to her husband, but not yet come together physically, and is found with child. From Joseph's perspective, the divorce was legitimate because “he had found some *uncleanness* in her” (Deut. 24:1), wherein the Law of Moses allowed the man to divorce his wife (cf. Deut. 24:1-4). (The Hebrew term “*uncleanness*” was something other than adultery, since adultery was punishable by death.) With regard to Mary herself, being with child, she was presumed to have been either raped or seduced during the betrothal period and a different set of Jewish laws applied to her (see discussion on “*Fornication*” below), if they were to be enforced on her at all.

Cases of *porneia*. Other examples of *porneia* (or “uncleanness” from an Old Testament perspective) are when the married couple discovers that they are closely related (“near of kin” Leviticus 18:6-18), possibly first cousins, which would be grounds for dissolving the marriage. Another example of *porneia* is found in 1 Corinthians 5:1 which involved a case of incest (cf. Lev. 18:8).

1 Corinthians 5:1: It is actually reported that there is *porneia* among you, a kind of *porneia* that is not even named among the Gentiles, for a man has his father's wife.

Yet another example is the case of temple prostitution and idolatry which was common in pagan temple worship throughout the Old and New Testament times. This type of *porneia* is mentioned by Paul and the apostles (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 10:7-8) and in the Book of Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:14, 20; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2). Finally, a case

can be made that *porneia* also included homosexual behavior (Jude 1:7, *ekporneuo*) as that practiced by Sodom and Gomorrah. *Ekporneuo* is the verb form of *porneia*, and *ek* adds emphasis. That is, *ekporneuo* and *porneia* share the same root meaning. *Ekporneuo* is a verb and *porneia* is the noun form. Thus, the practice of homosexual “marriage,” as is seen today, is also *porneia*.

Sexual sins. The sexual sins just mentioned are briefly defined below.

- If payment of wages is involved (whether commercial or cultic), it is *prostitution*.
- If it involves close relatives, it is *incest*.
- If it involves persons of the same sex, it is *homosexuality*.
- If it involves unmarried, non-commercial, non-cultic heterosexual intercourse, it is *fornication*.
- If it involves a married person outside of marriage, it is *adultery*.

Of these, neither “fornication” nor “adultery” refer directly to the term, *porneia*. These two, together with prostitution, are explained further below.

Prostitution. It should be noted that a commercial prostitute (or harlot, or whore), who sells her body for sexual uses, is called a *porne* (G4204, from *pornos*, G4205). The male equivalent of *porne* is *pornos*. A *porne* or *pornos* practiced *porneia*. This is the classic definition of *porneia*. Also, the term *pornos* is used to describe Esau in Hebrews 12:16, probably referring to his “exogamy” (*def.* marrying outside one’s clan or kinship). The term *porne* is found 12 times in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 21:31, 32; Luke 15:30; 1 Cor. 6:15, 16; Heb. 11:31; James 2:25; Rev. 17:1, 5, 15, 16; 19:2). The wages gained from such behavior was not allowed as an offering to God.

Deuteronomy 23:18: You will not bring the hire of a prostitute, or the wages of a male prostitute, into the house of Yehovah your God for any vow; for both of these are an abomination to Yehovah your God.

In New Testament times, among the Greeks and Romans, sex with prostitutes was permitted, legally and culturally. In fact, the authors of the Roman period saw sex with prostitutes or slaves as the solution to adultery. This is in contrast to Paul’s counsel to the Corinthian believers, in which Paul saw *marriage* as the solution to the temptations of easy sex with dishonored women (cf. 1 Cor. 7:9). This “solution” was carried forward to the days of the early Church Father, Chrysostom (c. late 3rd century AD), where he wrote, “*Moicheia* (adultery) is wicked, *porneia* is wicked, but marriage is the appointed cure for *porneia*” (*Hom. 1 Cor. 7:2*,

Propter fornicationes 2; PG 51:210).

Therefore, there is one purpose for marriage: to avoid *porneia*... and it is not the same thing to commit *porneia* without having a wife and to do it while having one. For in the latter instance, it is rather *moicheia*, not *porneia*. And even if what I am saying is a paradox, it is true. I am not unaware that many believe it is *moicheia* only when one violates a woman with a husband. But I say that a man with a wife wickedly and licentiously commits *moicheia* [[adultery]] if he should use a public whore, a slave girl, or any other woman without a husband. —Chrysostom, *Propter fornicationes 3-4; PG 51:213*

That Chrysostom referred to his commentary as a “paradox” suggests that the social norms of his day were still such that they violated the basic social premises of sexual morality. That is to say, according to Chrysostom, a married man or woman who used a *porne* or *pornos* or a slave, committed not *porneia* but *moicheia* (adultery), even as the social norms of that day said differently. While the married individual committed *moicheia* (adultery), it should be understood that the *porne* or *pornos* or slave continued to practice *porneia*. Of course, both were condemned as wicked and licentious.

Fornication. The act of “fornication”—i.e. pre-betrothal (prior to legal marriage), non-commercial, non-cultic (non-temple prostitution) heterosexual intercourse—was *not* expressly outlawed in the Old Testament. Rather, laws involving rape and seduction were then in effect. In such cases, it was not treated as a moral crime, but as a civil case against the man for theft of the woman’s virginity (cf. Exodus 22:16-17; Deut. 22:28-29). However, the rape of a betrothed or married woman was a serious moral crime, punishable by stoning to death (cf. Deut. 22:22-27). To be clear: There is no evidence in traditional or contemporary usage of the term *porneia* where it means “fornication”—i.e. pre-betrothal, pre-marital, heterosexual intercourse of a non-cultic or non-commercial nature. Thus, Bible versions that translate *porneia* as “fornication” are incorrectly translating the word. Simply stated: *porneia* is not “fornication”.

Adultery. Consider the following Scriptures which distinguish adultery (Greek, *moicheia*) from *porneia* using a typical translation (allowing for the incorrect translation of *porneia* as “fornication”):

- *Matthew 15:19*: For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, **adulteries** [*moicheia*], **fornications** [*porneia*], thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies.
- *Mark 7:21*: For from within, out of the hearts of men, proceed evil thoughts, **adulteries** [*moicheia*], **fornications** [*porneia*], murders, thefts

- *1 Corinthians 6:9*: Or don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's Kingdom? Don't be deceived. Neither **fornicators** [*pornos*], nor idolaters, nor **adulterers** [*moichos*], nor male prostitutes, nor homosexuals,
- *Galatians 5:19*: Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are: **adultery** [*moicheia*], **fornication** [*porneia*], uncleanness, lustfulness,
- *Hebrews 13:4*: Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the bed be undefiled; but God will judge the **fornicators** [*pornos*] and **adulterers** [*moichos*].

The obvious question must be asked: If fornication [*porneia*] can include adultery, why use both words in these passages? Why not just use the one-word *porneia* to cover both? The answer is that adultery and fornication are two distinct sins. When God wishes to indicate adultery, he uses the word for adultery (i.e. *moicheia*), not the one for fornication (i.e. *porneia*), and wherever God wishes to include both, he uses both terms. God inspired it to be written this way.

If Jesus meant the exception clause for divorce and remarriage to include adultery, why didn't he use the word adultery (i.e. *moicheia*)? Simply because the word *porneia* used by Jesus in these passages is not meant to include adultery by someone in a lawful marriage relationship, but rather *porneia* within an unlawful, "unclean" relationship. If it had, Jesus would have used *moicheia* as well, which is a much more explicit term, just as he did elsewhere where it was necessary (i.e. Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21). Every unlawful sexual act conducted by a married individual could be regarded as adultery, so if Jesus meant extra-marital sex he could have used *moicheia*, by itself, without *porneia*. Which he did not.

This all confirms that: adultery (*moicheia*) was not meant in Jesus' exception clause (which used the term *porneia*, not *moicheia*) as a legitimate reason for divorce, or to remarry. Bible versions that translate *porneia* as "adultery" (*moicheia*) are incorrectly translating the term. Simply stated: *porneia* is not "adultery" (*moicheia*).

Not fornication, not adultery. Thus, we have established from the above discussion that *porneia* is neither "fornication" nor "adultery". It is not fornication because such behavior was not a moral crime, but a civil one (as detailed earlier), handled using sundry Mosaic laws. It is also not adultery because such behavior ended in the stoning to death of both parties involved in the adultery. (Please note that the early church regarded a married person's involvement with a prostitute or slave to also constitute adultery.) Obviously then, Jesus' use of the term *porneia* (as recorded by Matthew) had another idea in mind. If not fornication or adultery, then

what? Apparently, Jesus' teaching must have had a more limited scope. We know this to be true by the way the disciples responded (discussed further below).

At a minimum, two definitions can be biblically justified. The first is found in the gospel of Matthew itself in the case of Jesus' parents, Joseph and Mary (as already discussed), and the second is the one mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:1 of a case of incest. Beyond that, nothing more can be said. Basically, Jesus' view of *porneia* (or "uncleanness") in the context of divorce and remarriage narrowed down to cases where the marriage could justifiably be annulled, because of discovering the wife to already be pregnant from another man (as presumed to have occurred with Mary), or as a result of discovering that the marriage is a "near of kin" or an incestuous relationship.

Certificate of divorce. In light of a "certificate" being required in the case of a divorce (cf. Deut. 24:1-4), some suggest that this implies that a *written* marriage contract was also practiced back in biblical times. However, the Bible does not explicitly state this, nor are there any examples. Rather, the marriage "covenant" (cf. Malachi 2:14) seemed to have been a *verbal* agreement between the families of the two parties and the payment was a dowry paid to the bride and the family, as in Isaac's marriage to Rebekah (Gen. 24:52-61). The modern practice of "living together" (or cohabitation) of consenting adults as if *not* legally married, would then have been viewed in biblical times as actually being married, given that a *verbal* agreement is implied. Today, it is also recognized as a marriage in a number of states in the United States and termed, Common-Law Marriage. There is no statutory requirement for the length of time a couple needs to live together to be regarded as married. The court considers the amount of time a couple lives together on a case-to-case basis. Those "living together" who think the laws of marriage do not apply to them, are only fooling themselves. Under God, they are one flesh, and the same biblical laws of marriage and morality apply to them.

Divorce and remarriage is uni-directional. It should also be understood from the Law of Moses (Deut. 24:2-4) that when a person divorces (or is divorced) and remarries, he or she cannot return to the original spouse if found single again, whether from death of the current spouse or from a second divorce. Indeed, such a practice is an abomination to God.

Disciple's response. That Jesus held a limited view of grounds for divorce is also evident by how the disciples responded to Jesus' answer to the Pharisees when this question was brought up:

Matthew 19:9-10: I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, and marries another, commits adultery. And whoever

marries a divorced woman commits adultery.¹⁰ His disciples said to him, “If this is the case of the man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.”

Jesus answered the disciples on their reply (i.e. on remaining single) by saying that not every man can “receive this saying.” That is to say, not every man can become a eunuch. The (properly) married life ought to be the norm, since this is what God idealized in the Creation account.

Divorce permitted because of man’s hard heart. According to Jesus, divorce was *allowed* through the Mosaic Law (cf. Matt. 19:8) as a consequence of man’s hard heart, but it falls short of God’s ideal (Malachi 2:16) and was not intended from the beginning of man’s creation. That is, Moses’ stipulations *did not supersede* God’s original design with regard to marriage.

Jesus’ hard sayings. But Jesus took it a step further. Even if, and when, a man divorces his wife (except for the matter of *porneia*), he cannot remarry afterward; for to remarry is to commit adultery. This is clearly stated in the gospels (see Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; and Luke 16:18). Said another way, according to Jesus, if a man divorces his wife, then he must remain single for the rest of his life. This is not what the Pharisees and the disciples understood (or wanted to hear) about divorce. According to the disciples, and to society at large, this truly is a hard saying. Yet Jesus took this teaching a step further still. A man can commit adultery *in his heart* simply by lusting after a woman (Matt. 5:28). In other words, adultery is not limited to outward actions but extends to inner thoughts and motives. Ultimately, it is a matter of the heart.

True meaning of marriage. Thus, Jesus not only stresses the permanence of marriage as a divine rather than merely human institution, but he contends that divorce is fundamentally at odds with God’s purpose in creation. Marriage, then, according to Jesus (and true Christianity), is intended as a lifelong, faithful union of a man and a woman. Let no man teach or practice otherwise, if he is to call himself a follower of Christ.

Further reading:

- www.tinyurl.com/4fe2ck4v
- www.tinyurl.com/yr4ah3ax
- Rebuilder’s Guide by IBLP (251 pp)
- Rebuilder’s Supplement by IBLP (32 pp)

► Witch of Endor

Description. The story of the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:3-25) is about King Saul's desperation to receive guidance from the deceased prophet Samuel before a major battle against the Philistines. Having been rejected by God, who no longer answered him, Saul disguised himself and went to a medium, or witch, at Endor to summon Samuel's spirit. The witch successfully summoned a figure who identified itself as Samuel, delivering a prophecy of doom for Saul and his army, who were to be defeated the next day. It should be noted that this story is the sole account of a séance in the Bible.

Why is this story important? The story of the Witch of Endor is important because many Christian theologians use it to prove **consciousness after death**. They take the narrative at **face value**, interpreting it as a **literal resurrection or reappearance** of the prophet Samuel's spirit from the realm of the dead. But does it truly teach that?

Biblical principles. Proper **biblical principles of interpretation** must guide our understanding of passages involving witches, mediums, or similar practices, especially when the text appears unclear. The following principles provide a framework for interpreting this episode accurately and within the broader context of biblical teaching.

1. **Scripture interprets Scripture.** The **Law of Moses** repeatedly condemns any consultation with the dead or with occult powers (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10–12; Isa. 8:19–20). Therefore, any interpretation of a story (e.g., Saul and the medium) that appears to approve or legitimize such acts **contradicts the rest of Scripture** and must be rejected. This principle guards against misreading narrative as endorsement.
2. **Distinguish description from prescription.** Biblical narratives often **describe** what happened, not what **should** happen. 1 Samuel 28 records Saul's consultation of a medium as a **tragic act of disobedience**, not as divine approval of necromancy. The moral or theological lesson must come from the **evaluation** given within or after the narrative (e.g., 1 Chr. 10:13–14 explicitly condemns Saul for seeking guidance from a medium).
3. **The authority of God's revelation.** Interpretations must affirm that **God alone is the legitimate source of revelation** and guidance. Consulting witches or mediums reflects a **rejection of God's word** and a desire for unauthorized knowledge (cf. Deut. 29:29; Isaiah 8:19–20). The Bible consistently teaches that divine truth and guidance come

only through God's prophets, His word, and the holy spirit—not through occult intermediaries.

4. **Contextual and theological consistency.** Interpret in light of the **biblical theology of life, death, and the spirit**: The dead “know nothing” of earthly affairs (Eccl. 9:5–6, 10), “their thoughts perish,” and “they do not rise till the heavens be no more” (Psalm 146:4; Job 14:10–12); thus, communication with the dead is impossible. Apparent manifestations (as in Saul's case) may involve **deception** by demons or illusion. Therefore, the story teaches **God's judgment and Saul's spiritual downfall**, not the efficacy of necromancy. *Specific application*: The “Samuel” that appears could have been: **A divine vision permitted by God** solely to pronounce Saul's judgment (some conservative interpreters hold this view, based on the prophet's consistent tone of condemnation and accuracy of the prophecy). **A demonic impersonation or illusion** permitted as part of Saul's punishment (others argue this based on God's condemnation of such practices and the medium's shock at seeing the figure appear). In either case, the event shows **judgment, not revelation** from the occult.
5. **The moral and covenant context.** Interpret the event within Israel's **covenantal ethics**: Under the covenant, witchcraft and mediumship are **capital offenses** (Lev. 20:27). Thus, Saul's act violated both the **law** and his **covenantal role as king** to uphold God's holiness among the people. The story shows the **tragic irony** of Saul seeking revelation from the dead when the living God had turned from him. Its message: **when God's word is rejected, all other sources of “truth” lead to ruin.**
6. **Christological fulfillment principle.** Read in light of **Christ as the ultimate revelation** (Hebrews 1:1–2). Jesus alone mediates between God and humanity (1 Timothy 2:5). Therefore, all attempts to gain supernatural knowledge apart from Him are **forms of spiritual rebellion** or **idolatry**. The story of Saul and the medium illustrates the **spiritual emptiness** of seeking truth outside of God's appointed revelation.
7. **The principle of spiritual discernment.** Interpret the text spiritually, discerning between **divine truth and demonic counterfeit** (1 John 4:1). The Bible presents the occult as part of the realm of **spiritual deception** (2 Cor. 11:14–15). Thus, interpreters must not attribute to God what Scripture elsewhere attributes to **evil spiritual forces**.
8. **The principle of human responsibility and judgment.** Saul's consultation demonstrates the **consequences of rejecting divine guidance** (1 Samuel 15:23; 28:6). The narrative teaches moral accountability, showing that **disobedience and spiritual desperation** lead to

ruin. God's silence was itself part of His judgment on Saul's rebellion.

Summary principle. Any interpretation of biblical accounts involving witches or mediums must reaffirm God's exclusive sovereignty over revelation, condemn occult practices as rebellion, and treat such narratives as warnings, not examples. **Summary application:** The Witch of Endor narrative is not a validation of necromancy but a vivid **warning** of the consequences of rejecting divine revelation. Interpreted through Scripture, covenant, theology, and Christ, it reveals that **God alone holds authority over life, death, and revelation**, and that seeking the supernatural apart from Him results in deception and ruin.

Summary interpretation. The account of Saul's consultation with the medium at Endor (1 Sam 28:3–25) serves not as an endorsement of necromancy but as a theological indictment of disobedience and spiritual apostasy. Interpreted according to the principle that Scripture explains Scripture, the episode must be read in light of explicit prohibitions against witchcraft and consultation with the dead (Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut 18:10–12; Isa 8:19–20). The narrative is descriptive, not prescriptive, depicting the tragic outcome of Saul's rejection of divine guidance. God's silence toward Saul (28:6) underscores his moral and covenantal failure, driving him to violate the very laws he once enforced. Whether the apparition of Samuel was a divine judgmental sign or a demonic counterfeit, the event demonstrates that all attempts to obtain revelation apart from God's Word lead to deception and ruin. In biblical theology, life and death lie under God's sole authority, and true mediation between the divine and human is fulfilled only in Christ (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 1:1–2). Thus, the story stands as a solemn warning: seeking supernatural knowledge outside of God's ordained revelation constitutes rebellion and results in divine judgment.

Flaws to the Witch of Endor story. This story has long been debated, and many interpreters have pointed out **textual, theological, and logical difficulties** with the narrative, especially concerning whether the prophet **Samuel truly appeared** or not. Below is a structured analysis of the **main flaws or tensions** within the story as it stands:

1. **Theological contradiction: God vs. necromancy.** The Torah **strictly forbids** necromancy, spiritism, and consulting the dead (Deut. 18:10–12; Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27). Yet, in this narrative, if Samuel truly appears through the witch's ritual, it would imply that **God allowed a forbidden occult practice to succeed**, which contradicts His law and character. This tension leads many scholars to see the episode as

either a deceptive appearance (demonic or psychological) or a divine intervention bypassing the witch's power, not a literal summoning of Samuel by her magic.

2. **Narrative inconsistency: Who controls the vision?** The woman herself seems **shocked** when the spirit appears (v.12: "*When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice*"). This implies she **did not expect** the result—suggesting she was either **a fraud** or **saw something beyond her own control**. If she were truly capable of calling up the dead, she wouldn't have reacted in fear. This inconsistency weakens the notion that the witch's art had real efficacy.
3. **Ambiguity of the apparition.** The text never says "**Samuel appeared**" in the narrator's own voice until v.15 ("*Samuel said to Saul...*"), which could simply be **Saul's perception** or the witch's **interpretation** of what she "saw." The description of the figure — "*an old man wrapped in a robe*" (v.14)—is vague and filtered through the witch's words. Saul "**perceived**" it was Samuel, but there's no objective confirmation. Thus, some interpreters see this as a **psychological or demonic illusion**, not a resurrection of the prophet.
4. **Conflict with earlier divine silence.** Earlier in the chapter (v.6), God **refused to answer Saul** "by dreams, Urim, or prophets." Yet if the spirit were truly Samuel sent by God, that would contradict the statement that **God was not answering him**—unless one takes the story as a **judgmental act** (God sending a message of doom, not guidance). The tension makes the story **ambiguous in its theology of divine communication**.
5. **Linguistic ambiguity.** The Hebrew term used when the woman sees the spirit is **elohîm** (plural of *elohah*, "god" or "divine being"). She says, "*I see elohim coming up out of the earth*" (v.13). This does not necessarily mean "Samuel"; it could refer to a **false deity** or a **demon**. The term's ambiguity further clouds the identity of what appeared.
6. **Contradiction with biblical anthropology.** Elsewhere, Scripture consistently depicts the dead as **unconscious and inactive** (e.g., Ps. 6:5; 115:17; Eccl. 9:5–6, 10). If Samuel were truly conscious and able to speak from Sheol, that would **contradict** this general biblical teaching—suggesting either the story uses **dramatic imagery**, or **the apparition is not truly Samuel**.
7. **Moral and literary irony.** The narrative might deliberately use irony rather than literal description: Saul, who expelled mediums, now **consults one in desperation**. The witch's "success" may highlight **Saul's spiritual downfall**, not the validity of necromancy. In this

view, the story's "flaws" are **rhetorical tools**—exposing Saul's disobedience and the futility of seeking divine guidance outside God's will.

8. **Alternative explanations (historical interpretations).** **Jewish tradition:** Many rabbis saw the apparition as a **demon or deceptive spirit** imitating Samuel. **Church Fathers (e.g., Tertullian, Augustine):** Argued that it was **not truly Samuel**, since God would not honor witchcraft. **Modern critical view:** Some scholars read the story as a **later insertion** or a **didactic legend** illustrating Saul's final rejection by God, not a historical séance.

Summary on the flaws. The flaws in the story center on **theological coherence, narrative logic, and anthropological consistency**: If the witch truly raised Samuel, then God's prohibitions and the biblical view of death are violated; if she did not, then the story functions as a **moral parable of deception and divine judgment**, not a literal account of a spirit with consciousness.

The Witch of Endor in relation to spirit consciousness. The Witch of Endor account does **not** teach that spirits have consciousness after death. It is a **narrative of judgment and divine intervention**, not a **doctrinal exposition on the nature of the spirit**. In the broader biblical framework, "spirit" refers to the **life-breath** God gives, which returns to Him at death—not to a conscious, immortal essence that survives the body. See the article, "[*Spirit as Essence*](#)," for further discussion.

► Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

The first **Council of Nicaea** was a council of Christian bishops convened in the city of Nicaea (now Iznik, Turkey) by the Roman **Emperor Constantine**. The Council of Nicaea met from May until the end of July 325 AD.

Brief description. This ecumenical council was the first of many efforts to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all Christendom. Attended by 318 bishops (as reported by Athanasius of Alexandria), its most notable accomplishment was the settlement of the Christological issue of the divine nature of the Son of God and his relationship to God the Father, which constitutes the construction of the first part of the **Nicene Creed**. The Nicene Creed teaches the **Trinity** doctrine of one God in three persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit, who are all fully divine and of the same substance (*homoousion*).

Adventism on the Council of Nicaea and the Trinity. Early Adventists were well aware of the history behind this council and the doctrine of the Trinity which it initiated. Per J.N. Andrews,

“The doctrine of the Trinity which was established in the church by the council of Nice, a. d. 325. This doctrine destroys the personality of God, and his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The infamous measures by which it was forced upon the church, which appear upon the pages of ecclesiastical history might well cause every believer in that doctrine to blush.” —J.N. Andrews, “[The Three Angels of Revelation 14:6-12,” 1855, p.54.3.](#)

HOWEVER, modern-day Adventists hold a diametrically opposite view of this council. Per George W. Reid of BRI,

“with respect to their doctrine of God Seventh-day Adventists are in harmony with the great creedal statements of Christendom, including the Apostles’ Creed, Nicea (325), and the additional definition of faith concerning the Holy Spirit as reached in Constantinople (381).” —George W. Reid, “[Seventh-day Adventists: A Brief Introduction to their Beliefs,](#)” p.6.

History of the council. The following text (i.e. Abstract and Transcript) is an attempt at presenting the history—particularly the politics and the profound effect—this council had on the world from that point forward. The Transcript itself is a modified and shortened *transcript* version of the YouTube video: “*The Untold Story About The Politics Behind the Council of Nicaea*” by Historical Rabbit Holes.

Abstract

The **Council of Nicaea (325 AD)** marked a pivotal transformation in both Christianity and imperial politics. Convened by **Emperor Constantine**, the council was not, as traditional narratives suggest, a purely theological assembly seeking divine truth, but rather a calculated political maneuver designed to stabilize a fractured empire. Constantine, facing internal divisions and external threats, recognized that religious unity could serve as a means of imperial cohesion. The Arian controversy—over Christ’s divinity—offered him the perfect opportunity to impose ideological order through religious consensus.

The bishops summoned to Nicaea were hosted at imperial expense, signaling their dependence on Constantine’s favor. Under the guise of promoting unity, the emperor effectively directed the proceedings. The resulting **Nicene Creed** was less a revelation than a political compromise, crafted to exclude Arianism while consolidating imperial authority over the church. This moment marked the beginning of the **fusion of church and state**, where heresy became not merely a theological error but a crime against the empire.

The aftermath was transformative: Christianity, once a persecuted and diverse movement, became a standardized, hierarchical institution serving imperial interests. Orthodoxy was rewarded with wealth and privilege, while dissent was suppressed through exile, censorship, and persecution. Intellectual diversity gave way to enforced conformity, with **truth defined by decree rather than discernment**.

The council’s legacy extended far beyond religion. Nicaea provided a **blueprint for ideological control**—the manufacture of consensus through political power disguised as collective deliberation. The council’s methods—control of narrative, suppression of alternatives, and conflation of power with truth—set a template for ideological governance in the centuries that followed. The Council of Nicaea thus stands as both a theological and political watershed: the moment when Christianity was domesticated by empire, and **when belief became a mechanism of governance rather than a matter of conscience**.

Transcript

The year is 325 AD. Hundreds of bishops from across the Roman Empire were summoned by Emperor Constantine, who had been sacrificing to pagan gods barely a decade earlier. These bishops came bearing theological disputes that were tearing communities apart. But what they did not fully grasp was that they were about to become pawns in one of the most masterful political maneuvers ever orchestrated. The Council of Nicaea

was one of Christianity's most foundational moments. While history books paint it as a sacred gathering where divine truth emerged through holy debate, the reality is far more unsettling. This was politics at its most calculated—religion weaponized for empire, and truth decided not by revelation but by imperial decree.

It begins with an empire in crisis and an emperor who understood that sometimes the most effective weapon isn't a sword, but a creed. The Roman Empire of 325 was a giant with clay feet. Imagine trying to govern a territory that stretched from Britain to North Africa, from Spain to the edges of Persia. For decades, the empire had been hemorrhaging. Civil wars had become routine, with rival generals carving up territories like warlords. The economy was in shambles, inflation was rampant, and barbarian tribes pressed against every frontier like wolves circling a wounded animal. Into this chaos stepped Constantine. He had clawed his way to the top through a series of brutal civil wars, eliminating rivals with the cold efficiency of a seasoned politician. By 312, he controlled the western half of the empire, but his hold on power was anything but secure. The empire was fractured, exhausted, and desperately needed something to bind it together.

Now, here's where the story gets interesting. Constantine claimed to have had a vision before the [Battle of the Milvian Bridge](#), seeing a cross in the sky with the words in Latin, "*in hoc signo vinces*," which when translated reads, "in this sign, you will conquer." Whether this vision was genuine religious experience, or brilliant political theater, we'll never know. What we do know is that Constantine was far too shrewd a politician to let a good crisis go to waste.

Christianity in 325 AD was nothing like the unified institution we know today. It was a patchwork of competing groups, each claiming to possess the true understanding of Jesus' message. Some saw Jesus as fully divine, others as fully human, and still others as something in between. There were communities that emphasized mystical experience, others that focused on ethical living, and some that built elaborate theological systems around Greek philosophy. This diversity wasn't just academic—it was explosive. Riots broke out in major cities over theological disputes. Entire congregations split apart. Bishops hurled accusations of heresy at each other with the venom of political rivals.

In Alexandria, one of the empire's most important cities, the conflict between a priest named Arius (c.270-336 AD) and his bishop (Alexander

of Alexandria)^[a] had reached a fever pitch that threatened to tear the entire eastern provinces apart^[b]. Arius wasn't some fringe figure; he was an eloquent preacher with a massive following. His message was devastatingly simple: Jesus was divine—yes—but not equal to God the Father. He was the first and greatest of God's works, not created but begotten of the Father, exalted above all others, yet still subordinate to the supreme deity. To modern believers, this might sound like splitting theological hairs, but in the 4th century, it was dynamite.

The opposing camp led by figures like Athanasius insisted that this subordination of Jesus undermined the very foundation of Christian salvation. If Jesus wasn't fully divine, how could his death and resurrection have cosmic significance? The debate raged through churches, monasteries, and schools of theology, creating fault lines that threatened to split not just the church, but the empire itself. And here's where Constantine's political genius becomes clear. He didn't care which side was theologically correct. What he cared about was that the dispute was creating exactly the kind of division his fragile empire couldn't afford. A fractured religion meant fractured loyalty. And fractured loyalty meant potential rebellion.

Constantine had inherited an empire that had tried for centuries to destroy Christianity through persecution. Diocletian's [Great Persecution](#), which had ended just a decade before Constantine's sole reign to power in 324 AD, had been the most systematic attempt yet to eradicate the faith. Christians had been tortured, executed, and driven underground. Their books had been burned, their house churches demolished, and their leaders hunted like criminals. But persecution had failed spectacularly. Instead of destroying Christianity, it had only strengthened it. The blood of martyrs had indeed become the seed of the church. And by Constantine's time, Christians made up perhaps 10 to 15% of the empire's population.

^[a] The trinitarian historian Socrates of Constantinople reports that Arius sparked the controversy that bears his name when Alexander of Alexandria gave a sermon stating the similarity of the Son to the Father. Arius interpreted Alexander's speech as being a revival of Sabellianism, condemned it, and then argued that "if the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident, that there was a time when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he [the Son] had his substance from nothing." —[Socrates, "[The Dispute of Arius with Alexander, his Bishop](#)," *The Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates Scholasticus*]. This quote describes the essence of Arius' doctrine.

^[b] The controversy had spread from Alexandria into almost all the African regions and was considered a disturbance of the public order by the Roman Empire. (Eusebius of Caesarea in the [Life of Constantine](#)).

More importantly, they were concentrated in urban centers, among educated elites, and in positions of influence throughout the imperial bureaucracy.

Constantine recognized what his predecessors had missed: if you can't beat them, co-opt them. Rather than continuing the futile policy of persecution, he chose to embrace Christianity and reshape it to serve his political needs. The **Edict of Milan**^[a] in 313 had granted religious tolerance throughout the empire, but that was just the opening move. Nicaea was the endgame. The genius of Constantine's strategy lay in its subtlety. He didn't simply declare himself the head of the church or impose his will through brute force. Instead, he positioned himself as the concerned protector of Christian unity—the benevolent emperor who only wanted to help resolve the disputes that were tearing the faithful apart. It was manipulation disguised as magnanimity, control masked as care.

The summons to Nicaea^[b] went out in early 325 AD, and it was unlike anything the Christian world had ever seen. Bishops from across the empire were invited to attend at imperial expense. Their travel costs were covered, their accommodations provided, their meals prepared by imperial chefs. For many of these men, particularly those from remote provinces, it was the journey of a lifetime. But this imperial hospitality came with strings attached. The bishops weren't gathering as free men debating matters of conscience. They were guests of the emperor, dependent on his goodwill, operating under his watchful eye. Every meal they ate, every

^[a] Events leading to the **Edict of Milan**:—AD 303–311: Led primarily by Galerius, the two Augusti and two Caesars of the Roman empire conduct an empire-wide persecution known as the Great Persecution. AD 311: Galerius signs the Edict of Toleration, ending the persecution, and he admits it was a failure. In that same year, Galerius dies from a terrible disease that the Christians attribute to the judgment of God. AD 312: Constantine has a vision of a Christian symbol similar to a cross, inscribes the symbol on the shields of his soldiers, and defeats Maxentius to unite the western empire. **AD 313**: Constantine and Licinius issue the **Edict of Milan**, legalizing Christianity and restoring property to churches.

^[b] Events leading to the **Council of Nicaea**:—AD 318: Arius, an elder of the church in Alexandria, tells Alexander, his bishop, that the Son did not exist before his generation by God in the beginning. AD 321: Arius is excommunicated by a council of over 100 bishops and moves to Nicomedia, where he is welcomed by the bishop, Eusebius. AD 321–325: Arius and Eusebius teach their doctrine to sailors, merchants, and children and write letters to other bishops trying to spread Arian doctrine. AD 324: Constantine defeats and then executes Licinius, uniting the entire Roman empire under his rule. **AD 325**: Constantine offers transportation to every bishop in the empire to come to the resort city of Nicaea for a council to resolve the Arian controversy.

bed they slept in, every conversation they had was a reminder of who held the real power in this gathering.

The location itself was carefully chosen. Nicaea, modern-day Iznik in Turkey, was strategically positioned near Constantine's new capital of Constantinople—close enough for the emperor to oversee personally, yet far enough from Rome to signal the beginning of a new age. The old capital, with its pagan temples and Republican traditions, was giving way to a Christian empire centered on the Bosphorus. As the bishops arrived throughout the spring of 325 AD, the magnitude of what was happening became clear.

Never before had representatives of the global church gathered in one place. Men who had survived persecution, bore the scars of torture, and spent decades building communities in the face of imperial hostility now found themselves dining with the very emperor whose predecessors had tried to destroy them. The psychological impact was profound. For generations, Christians had defined themselves in opposition to Roman power; now they were being invited to share in it. The transition from persecuted minority to imperial religion was happening so fast that it must have felt like whiplash. Some bishops embraced the opportunity, seeing it as divine vindication; others must have wondered what price would be demanded for this sudden imperial favor.

[Constantine's opening address to the council](#) set the stage for everything that followed. Cloaked in imperial purple, glittering with gold and jewels, he entered like a sovereign claiming more than ceremony—he claimed authority. The bishops rose, a silent acknowledgment of the power imbalance that defined the room. Here was the emperor, unbaptized, commanding the church's highest leaders. His speech dripped with piety: calls for unity, peace, and reconciliation over disputes that scandalized the faith. Yet behind the words, he played a far subtler game. He was no theologian, only a facilitator, a concerned outsider guiding the church to speak as one. The theater was flawless—and terrifying. For beneath the grandeur, the stakes were clear: Constantine demanded unity, and he demanded it swiftly. The empire teetered on fragility, beset by internal strife and external threats. A fractured church meant a fractured society—and that was a fracture he would not tolerate.

The bishops had been summoned [not to discover truth but to manufacture consensus](#). The debates that followed revealed just how deep the divisions ran. The Arian controversy was not merely about abstract theology; it was about power, authority, and the fundamental question of who got to define Christian truth. Arius and his supporters arrived with their own political networks, wealthy patrons, and vision of what the church should become. The anti-Arian faction, meanwhile, was equally

determined to crush what they saw as a dangerous heresy. Led by figures like Hosius of Cordoba^[a], Constantine's own theological advisor, they came armed with philosophical arguments borrowed from Greek thought and political backing from the imperial court.

What emerged wasn't a free exchange of ideas but a carefully orchestrated political theater. The emperor's preferences became clear through subtle signals, imperial nods, and the strategic placement of supporters in key positions. Bishops who might have been inclined toward Arian positions found themselves isolated, their funding threatened, their careers hanging in the balance. This wasn't theology; it was politics at its most ruthless, wrapped in the language of faith and sanctified by imperial authority.

The council wasn't discovering divine truth. It was manufacturing it, pressed and shaped to serve the political needs of a crumbling empire. Within that forced consensus lay the seeds of everything that would follow: the fusion of church and state, the criminalization of dissent, the transformation of faith from a lived experience into a loyalty test. Nicaea was not merely a theological debate—it was the forging of a new power, one that could reach into the human soul and demand not just obedience, but belief. The decisions made in that chamber would reverberate for centuries, reshaping Christianity and redefining religious and political authority across the Western world. This was the moment when faith became policy, when truth became whatever the powerful declared it to be.

The mechanics of control began to reveal themselves as the debates intensified. What appeared to be theological discourse was actually something far more calculated. The bishops weren't just arguing about the nature of Christ—they were unknowingly participating in the construction of an entirely new form of governance, one that would blend religious authority with imperial power in ways never attempted before. Consider the language being used: the famous phrase *homoousion* ("of the same substance") wasn't drawn from Scripture. Jesus never used the word, and the apostles never wrote it. It came straight from Greek philosophy—from the abstract terminology of academics and intellectuals.

This wasn't accidental. By forcing the debate into philosophical jargon, Constantine and his advisers ensured that ordinary believers would be dependent on educated elites to interpret their own faith. Think about what this meant in practical terms: a fisherman in Galilee, a farmer in

[a] **Hosius of Corduba:**—was a bishop of Corduba (now Córdoba, Spain) and an important and prominent advocate for the concept of *homoousion* during the period when the Arian controversy divided early Christianity. He probably presided at the Council of Nicaea. After Lactantius, he was the closest Christian advisor to Emperor Constantine.

Egypt, a merchant in Rome. None of these people would understand what *homoousion* meant. They needed bishops to explain it—bishops who needed imperial approval to maintain their positions. The complexity wasn't a bug in the system; it was a feature. It created a hierarchy of understanding, with the emperor at the top, bishops in the middle, and ordinary believers at the bottom.

The voting process itself revealed the political machinery at work. This was not a careful deliberation in which each bishop weighed the evidence and reached his own conclusions. The pressure was enormous, coming from every direction. Imperial officials^[a] monitored the proceedings. Wealthy patrons made their preferences known. Career prospects hung in the balance. Surviving accounts tell us that some bishops were literally afraid to speak their minds. The memory of persecution was still fresh. Many of these men bore physical scars from torture^[b], and they understood what happened to those who opposed imperial will. The transition from hunted criminals to honored guests had not erased the fundamental reality: cross the emperor at your peril.

The genius of Constantine's approach was that he did not need to threaten anyone directly. The implications were clear enough. Bishops who aligned with his preferred outcome found themselves invited to imperial banquets, granted audiences with the emperor, offered positions of influence. Those who resisted were marginalized, their travel expenses questioned, their accommodations suddenly less comfortable.

But the real masterstroke was yet to come. As the debates raged and positions hardened, Constantine began floating a solution that seemed inspired by divine insight but was, in fact, a calculated political compromise^[c]. The creed that emerged was not a revelation. It was a negotiated

^[a] **Imperial officials:**—imperial presence, promises and punishments, and the patrimonial/administrative stakes produced intense non-theological pressure on deliberations. See: Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 214–221. Interprets Constantine's political motives and how imperial presence shaped the council.

^[b] **physical scars from torture:**—Theodoret relates that many bishops at Nicaea bore visible wounds from earlier persecutions: for example, Paul of Neocaesarea had hands burnt by red-hot irons under Licinius; Paphnutius of Upper Thebes had lost an eye and had his knees crushed; Potamon had had an eye torn out. *Reference:* "A History of the Christian Councils" (Hefele) about Nicaea [Cristo Raul].

^[c] R. M. Grant, *Religion and Politics at the Council at Nicaea*, *Church History* 20, no. 1 (1951): 3–19. Discusses the emperor's interventions and the dual religious/political motives. Also, "Constantine did intervene in the drafting, insisting on the inclusion of the term *homoousios* in the final

settlement designed to exclude Arius while keeping as many bishops as possible within the imperial fold^[a]. The language was carefully crafted to sound definitive while remaining vague enough to allow multiple interpretations^[b]. “True God of true God” could mean different things to different people. But it served the emperor’s primary purpose: it drew a clear line between acceptable and unacceptable belief. Once that line existed, it could be policed. And police it they did^[c].

The aftermath of Nicaea revealed the true nature of what had been accomplished. Arius wasn’t just defeated theologically—he was destroyed politically. His writings were ordered burned: not merely hidden or suppressed, but actively sought out and fed to the flames. His followers were exiled, their property confiscated, their names erased from official records wherever possible. This was the birth of a new concept: heresy as a crime against the state. Before Nicaea, religious disagreement was a matter between communities, teachers, and students. After Nicaea, it became a legal category with real consequences. To believe the wrong thing about the nature of Christ was not just to be mistaken—it was to be a criminal.

The enforcement mechanisms were brutal and effective. Imperial bureaucrats worked with church officials to identify suspected Arians. Loyalty tests were administered: recite the creed, affirm the correct doctrine, prove your orthodoxy. Those who refused or hesitated faced escalating consequences—loss of position, confiscation of property, exile, and, in some cases, death. But what makes the politics of Nicaea truly insidious is that it worked. Within a generation, most Christians had ac-

creed.” —[*National Geographic*, “How the Council of Nicaea changed Christianity forever,” Candida Moss, May 30, 2025]

[a] “It wasn’t sorted. The creed was a compromise: something which most bishops could put up with ... Since no single interpretation was ...” —[“An Idiot’s Guide to the Council of Nicaea’s Big Posh Creed of Compromise,” *Premier Christianity*, 2024].

[b] Some commentators and modern writers treat the Nicene formula as containing semantic ambiguities intentionally, or at least as a pragmatic compromise. For example, the article, “*The Creed of Nicaea*,” Wolfram Kinzig, June 5, 2023; discusses the subtle decisions in formulating the creed.

[c] “Christianity’s First Council: The Council of Nicaea,” *National Geographic*, 2023; see also Wikipedia, “Eusebius of Nicomedia,” for examples of exiles and enforcement after the council. The Cambridge Companion (cited in Wikipedia) observes that though Constantine “did not force the homoousian view ... he did order that all who refused to endorse the creed be exiled.”

cepted the new orthodoxy not because they were convinced by theological arguments, but because the alternatives had been systematically eliminated. When you burn the books and exile the teachers, only one version of the story survives.

The council also established a precedent that would haunt Christianity for centuries: the idea that truth could be determined by committee. Once it was accepted that bishops gathered under imperial authority could settle doctrinal disputes definitively, the door was opened for endless future councils—each claiming to speak with the voice of God while operating according to the logic of politics. This is why the decades after Nicaea were filled with theological chaos. Far from settling the Arian controversy, the council had simply driven it underground. Different emperors favored different positions. New councils were called to reverse previous decisions. Bishops were exiled and restored depending on who held power. The “eternal truth” established at Nicaea kept changing based on political circumstances. (See [“The Council of Nicea and Its Aftermath”](#) for a timeline following the Council of Nicaea.)

Constantine himself revealed the hollow nature of his commitment to Nicene orthodoxy. Toward the end of his life, he began showing sympathy for Arian positions. Some sources suggest that he was baptized on his deathbed by an Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia. The man who had orchestrated the condemnation of Arianism apparently had second thoughts about his own theological creation. This inconsistency exposes the central fraud at the heart of Nicaea: it was never about discovering divine truth; it was about creating a useful political tool. When that tool no longer served Constantine’s purposes, he was perfectly willing to abandon it. The creed wasn’t sacred to him—it was strategic.

The aftereffects of Nicaea. The transformation of Christianity from a diverse movement into a standardized institution had profound consequences that extended far beyond theology. Before Nicaea, Christian communities had developed organically, responding to local needs and circumstances. There were different traditions of worship, varying emphases in teaching, and diverse ways of organizing community life. After Nicaea, this diversity was systematically crushed. The new orthodoxy demanded uniformity—not just in belief, but in practice. Liturgies were standardized, hierarchies were formalized, and deviation from approved patterns became grounds for accusations of heresy.

The rich tapestry of early Christianity was reduced to a single, empire-approved pattern. The economic dimensions of this transformation are often overlooked but were crucial to its success. Constantine didn’t just offer theological backing to orthodox bishops; he offered them wealth

and power. Church buildings began receiving imperial funding, and bishops were granted legal privileges. Christian institutions were exempted from certain taxes. Orthodoxy became, quite literally, profitable. This created a powerful incentive structure that had nothing to do with spiritual truth. Ambitious men saw that the path to wealth and influence ran through the church hierarchy—but only if they towed the orthodox line.

The Episcopate became another arm of the imperial bureaucracy, staffed by men whose loyalty was to the system that sustained them, not to the faithful they were meant to shepherd. The psychological blow to ordinary believers was crushing. Christianity had once offered an escape from the brutal hierarchies of Roman society. It had promised that the last would be first, the mighty would be humbled, and that God stood with the poor and oppressed against their oppressors. After Nicaea, it became a tool of those very hierarchies. The same imperial machine that had crucified Jesus and persecuted his followers for centuries now claimed divine sanction for its rule.

The religion of the cross became the religion of the crown, and in the process, it hollowed out much of its moral authority. The irony is almost cruel: a faith founded by a man who had nowhere to lay his head was now being defined by men feasting in imperial palaces. A movement that had championed God's preferential option for the poor was now being bent to serve the ambitions of the wealthy and powerful. The council set patterns of religious control that still echo through history: complex theological questions reduced to authoritative decree, deviation from orthodoxy condemned as dangerous heresy, and unity valued above truth. Every one of these distortions traces its lineage back to that gathering in Nicaea.

Look at any major religious institution today, and you'll see the DNA of Nicaea: hierarchical authority structures, standardized creeds and confessions, mechanisms for identifying and excluding heretics, and the merger of religious and political power. The blueprint was written in 325 AD, and we are still living with its consequences.

But perhaps the most chilling legacy of Nicaea is how thoroughly it buried its own political origins. The story that survived casts the council as a triumph of divine guidance over human confusion—a moment when the Holy Spirit supposedly worked through faithful bishops to safeguard eternal truth against dangerous error. The reality was precisely the opposite: human ambition masquerading as divine revelation, imperial power engineering religious consensus, truth dictated not by evidence or reason but by the desperate needs of a crumbling empire. The bishops who gathered at Nicaea believed they were defending the faith. In truth, they were domesticating it, transforming a prophetic voice that challenged worldly power into a tool that served it. They came as servants of God; they left

as servants of Caesar.

The Council of Nicaea was about far more than resolving domestic religious disputes; it was about projecting Roman power across cultural and linguistic boundaries through the creation of a standardized version of Christianity. Constantine was, in effect, franchising Roman imperial ideology to the known world. After Nicaea, expansion became a matter of state policy, with orthodoxy enforced through political pressure rather than spiritual conviction. This transformation had profound consequences for the development of the faith across different regions. Areas that embraced Nicene orthodoxy were absorbed into the imperial system, gaining political support, economic advantage, and military protection. Those that resisted were marginalized, impoverished, and ultimately conquered or assimilated.

The Gothic tribes provide a perfect case study. Many had been converted by Arian missionaries before Nicaea and maintained those theological positions for centuries afterward. This created a convenient pretext for Roman military campaigns against them. They were not merely barbarians threatening the frontier—they were heretics threatening the faith. Theology had become a tool of imperial expansion.

Intellectual and social reengineering. The educational and intellectual consequences of Nicaea were equally far-reaching. Before the council, Christian thought had been characterized by remarkable diversity and creativity. Different schools of interpretation flourished. Competing explanations were debated, and intellectual curiosity was generally encouraged within broad boundaries. After Nicaea, this intellectual freedom was systematically curtailed. The boundaries of acceptable thought were narrowed dramatically. Questions that had once been open for discussion became matters of settled orthodoxy. Curiosity about alternative explanations was redefined as a dangerous flirtation with heresy.

The impact on scholarship was catastrophic. Libraries were stripped of prohibited works, and teachers had to prove their orthodoxy before they could instruct students. Research into controversial topics was actively suppressed, often forbidden outright. The vibrant intellectual culture that had once defined early Christianity was replaced by a sterile, fearful conformity, where safety was valued far above insight.

This intellectual stagnation had consequences far beyond theology. The same mindset that discouraged questioning religious orthodoxy also inhibited scientific inquiry, philosophical exploration, and artistic innovation. When people are trained not to think deeply about the most important questions of existence, their capacity for original thought in other areas is inevitably diminished.

The social engineering aspects of the Nicene settlement were perhaps the most insidious of all. Constantine and his advisers understood that controlling belief requires more than just silencing dissent. You have to reshape the entire cultural environment in which ideas develop and spread. The imperial sponsorship of Orthodox Christianity created powerful incentives for conformity that extended far beyond formal church hierarchies.

Merchants learned that displaying the right religious symbols could boost business. Administrators discovered that Orthodox credentials opened doors to advancement. Scholars realized that some research topics were career suicide, while others attracted imperial patronage. Over time, these incentives became self-reinforcing. Parents taught their children to recite orthodox formulas—not out of belief, but to ensure their success. Teachers emphasized approved doctrines, not from conviction, but out of professional necessity. The culture of conformity grew so pervasive that genuine belief became almost irrelevant.

This social conditioning was remarkably effective because it operated below the level of conscious awareness. Most people were not consciously choosing to betray their convictions for material advantage; they were simply adapting to an environment in which certain ideas were rewarded and others were punished. The system manufactured consensus through environmental pressure rather than through direct coercion.

Generational impact. The generational impact was particularly profound. Children who grew up in this environment never experienced the intellectual freedom that had characterized earlier periods. To them, religious uniformity seemed natural, even divinely ordained. The very idea that there might be legitimate alternatives to orthodox positions became literally unthinkable.

The precedent set at Nicaea reached far beyond Christianity—or even religion. The council proved that ideological uniformity could be imposed across vast territories through political pressure, economic incentives, and social engineering. History would replay this blueprint again and again: rulers consolidating power by controlling belief. Replace Christian orthodoxy with communist ideology, nationalist doctrine, or any other creed, and the mechanics remain the same. Authorities are gathered to appear representative; consensus is orchestrated to serve political ends; state power enforces conformity, all while claiming to reflect the popular will. The psychological tools pioneered at Nicaea—staging events to appear spontaneous, wrapping authority in abstract, malleable language, eliminating alternatives while preserving the illusion of choice—became standard. Centuries of refinement have followed, but their roots trace unmistakably back to that fateful council in 325 AD.

The theological implications of Nicaea were just as revolutionary as its political consequences, though they are often overlooked. By establishing that doctrinal questions could be settled by committee vote, the council fundamentally reshaped the foundations of Christian faith. Before Nicaea, religious authority was diffuse and largely experiential, drawn from teachers, scriptures, traditions, and personal insight. No single institution could declare some interpretations correct and others heretical. After Nicaea, this changed dramatically. Religious truth became whatever the officially sanctioned authorities declared it to be. Authority shifted from the community of believers to the hierarchy of officials, from spiritual discernment to institutional decree, and from the movement of the Spirit to the vote of the committee.

This transformation had profound implications for how subsequent generations would understand the nature of religious truth itself. Rather than emerging through prayer, study, and communal discernment, truth became something manufactured by councils and enforced through institutional authority. The dynamic, living quality of early Christian thought was replaced by the static certainty of official doctrine. Ironically, this institutional approach to truth was wholly alien to the Jewish and early Christian traditions from which the faith had arisen. Neither Jesus nor the apostles had established anything resembling the conciliar structures that developed after Constantine. The entire apparatus of councils, creeds, and canonical enforcement was an imperial innovation, imposed upon a movement that had originally been far more organic, decentralized, and fluid.

But perhaps the most profound consequence of Nicaea was the way it changed the relationship between Christianity and power itself. Before Constantine, the faith had maintained a prophetic stance toward worldly authority—sometimes supportive, often critical, but always retaining a certain independence that allowed it to speak truth to power when necessary. After Nicaea, this prophetic independence was systematically compromised. The church became so entangled with imperial power that it lost the ability to critique that power effectively. How can you speak truth to Caesar when Caesar is paying your salary, building your churches, and enforcing your orthodoxy?

This co-optation was so complete that it became almost invisible. Subsequent generations of Christians grew up assuming that close collaboration between church and state was natural, even divinely ordained. The idea that faith might require maintaining some distance from political power—that prophetic religion might need to preserve its independence in order to fulfill its calling—became almost incomprehensible. The transformation was so thorough that when later reform movements tried

to recover the prophetic dimension of Christianity, they were often accused of innovation or heresy. The imperial version of the faith had become so normalized that alternatives were difficult even to imagine, let alone implement.

Understanding this history doesn't require rejecting the Christian faith, but it does demand an honest acknowledgment of how political considerations have shaped what many assume to be purely spiritual developments. The creeds recited in churches today are not timeless truths revealed from heaven; they are historical documents crafted under specific political pressures to serve specific imperial needs.

The patterns established at Nicaea continue to operate today, not just in religious contexts but throughout society. Wherever authorities manufacture consensus through carefully controlled processes while maintaining the fiction of free deliberation, you are witnessing the heirs of Constantine's political innovation. The techniques have been refined, the technologies have advanced, but the basic logic remains the same: control the process, shape the narrative, eliminate the alternatives, and present the outcome as inevitable. Whether in religious doctrine, political ideology, or corporate messaging, the Nicene model provides the template.

Recognizing these patterns is the first step toward developing resistance to them. Once you understand how manufactured consensus works, it becomes much harder to mistake it for genuine agreement. When you see how authority figures use abstract language and procedural complexity to obscure their political goals, you can begin to ask more penetrating questions about what is really happening.

So there you have it—the untold story behind one of Christianity's most foundational moments. What happened at Nicaea in 325 AD wasn't divine revelation guiding faithful bishops to eternal truth; it was imperial politics at its most calculating—religion weaponized for empire, a manufactured consensus disguised as sacred unity. The patterns established in that council chamber—the merger of faith and power, the criminalization of dissent, the transformation of belief into a loyalty test—continue to shape our world today. Every time you see authorities manufacturing agreement while eliminating alternatives, you're witnessing the heirs of Constantine's political innovation. Understanding this history doesn't just change how you see Christianity; it equips you to recognize these same techniques of control wherever they appear in modern life.

► Thomas Jefferson to James Smith (1822)

(The following letter, written by Thomas Jefferson after his presidency, is taken from the National Archives' *Founders Online* website and is entitled "[*Thomas Jefferson to James Smith \(of Ohio\), 8 December 1822.*](#)" Emphasis is mine.)

To James Smith (of Ohio)

Monticello Dec. 8. 22.

Sir

I have to thank you for your pamphlets on the subject of Unitarianism, and to express my gratification with your efforts for the revival of primitive Christianity in your quarter. **no historical fact is better established than that the doctrine of one god**, pure and uncompounded was that of the early ages of Christianity; and was among the efficacious doctrines which gave it triumph over the polytheism of the antients, sickened with the absurdities of their own theology. nor was the unity of the supreme being ousted from the Christian creed by the force of reason, but by the sword of civil government wielded at the will of the fanatic Athanasius. the hocus-pocus phantasm of a god like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads had it's birth and growth in the blood of thousands and thousands of martyrs. and a strong proof of **the solidity of the primitive faith is it's restoration as soon as a nation arises which vindicates to itself the freedom of religious opinion, and it's eternal divorce from the civil authority**. the pure and simple unity of the creator of the universe is now all but ascendant in the Eastern states; it is dawning in the West, and advancing towards the South; and I confidently expect that the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United states. the Eastern presses are giving us many excellent pieces on the subject, and Priestly's learned writings on it are, or should be in every hand. **in fact the Athanasian paradox that one is three, and three but one is so incomprehensible to the human mind that no candid man can say he has any idea of it**, and how can he believe what presents no idea. he who thinks he does only deceives himself. he proves also that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder is the sport of every wind. with such persons gullability which they call faith takes the helm from the hand of reason and the mind becomes a wreck.

I write with freedom, because, **while I claim a right to believe in one god, if so my reason tells me, I yield as freely to others that of believing in three**. both religions I find make honest men, & that is the

only point society has any authority to look to—altho’ this mutual freedom should produce mutual indulgence, yet I wish not to be brought in question before the public on this or any other subject, and I pray you to consider me as writing under that trust. I take no part in controversies religious or political. at the age of 80. tranquility is the greatest good of life, and the strongest of our desires that of dying in the good will of all mankind. and with the assurances of all my good will to Unitarian & Trinitarian, to whig & tory accept for yourself that of my entire respect.

Th: Jefferson

Key takeaways

Several key themes emerge from this letter that shed light on Thomas Jefferson’s understanding of the nature of God, including:

2. **Primitive Christianity:**
 - Early Christians believed in one pure, simple God.
 - This belief helped Christianity triumph over ancient polytheism.
3. **Critique of the Trinity:**
 - The doctrine of the Trinity (“one body and three heads”) was imposed by civil power, not reason.
 - Under the sword of civil authority, directed by the fanatic Athanasius, the imagined (“hocus-pocus phantasm”) deity of one body and three heads came into being and was sustained by the blood of innumerable martyrs.
4. **Faith vs. Reason:**
 - True belief must be grounded in reason, not blind faith.
 - Accepting incomprehensible doctrines leads to self-deception and mental ruin.
5. **Rise of Unitarianism in America:**
 - Unitarianism is spreading across the U.S.—strong in the East, growing West and South.
 - Jefferson expects it to become the nation’s predominant faith.
6. **Religious Freedom and Tolerance:**
 - Everyone has the right to believe according to reason or conscience.
 - Both Unitarian and Trinitarian faiths can produce honest, moral people.
 - Society’s only concern should be virtue, not doctrine.

► The Rockefeller Creed

The following credo provides an interesting window into Rockefeller Jr.'s views on individual responsibility, government, labor, thrift, service, faith, and moral character. It was first published in 1941 and is displayed in bronze letters at the Rockefeller Library. I have enumerated it for reference in the commentary below; it reads as follows:

1. I believe in the supreme worth of the individual and in his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
2. I believe that every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty.
3. I believe that the law was made for man and not man for the law; that government is the servant of the people and not their master.
4. I believe in the dignity of labor, whether with head or hand; that the world owes no man a living but that it owes every man an opportunity to make a living.
5. I believe that thrift is essential to well ordered living and that economy is a prime requisite of a sound financial structure, whether in government, business or personal affairs.
6. I believe that truth and justice are fundamental to an enduring social order.
7. I believe in the sacredness of a promise, that a man's word should be as good as his bond; that character—not wealth or power or position—is of supreme worth.
8. I believe that the rendering of useful service is the common duty of mankind and that only in the purifying fire of sacrifice is the dross of selfishness consumed and the greatness of the human soul set free.
9. I believe in an all-wise and all-loving God, named by whatever name, and that the individual's highest fulfillment, greatest happiness, and widest usefulness are to be found in living in harmony with His will.
10. I believe that love is the greatest thing in the world; that it alone can overcome hate; that right can and will triumph over might.

Commentary on the Creed

Individual worth, rights, and government (lines 1 and 3). The opening line borrows directly from the Declaration of Independence’s “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” anchoring Rockefeller’s personal philosophy in the American founding rather than in business success or inherited wealth. The third line — “the law was made for man and not man for the law... government is the servant of the people and not their master” — inverts a statist logic and asserts that institutions exist to serve persons, not the reverse. This is consistent with a broadly classical-liberal, Lockean view of government as instrumental rather than sovereign in its own right. It’s worth noting the historical moment: this was delivered in 1941, against the backdrop of European fascism and the early stages of total war, when the question of whether the individual or the state was primary was not abstract but existential.

Responsibility as the corollary of right (line 2). This is arguably the structural hinge of the whole creed—every other plank is really an elaboration of it. “Every right implies a responsibility; every opportunity, an obligation; every possession, a duty” rejects the idea that freedom is mere license. Rights, in this framing, are not free-floating entitlements but come paired with corresponding duties—a view with roots in civic republicanism as much as in Christian stewardship theology (notable, given Rockefeller’s well-documented sense that inherited wealth obligated him to public service rather than private enjoyment).

Labor and dignity of work (line 4). “The world owes no man a living but...owes every man an opportunity to make a living” is a classic statement of equal-opportunity-not-equal-outcome thinking. It dignifies labor “whether with head or hand”—refusing a hierarchy between intellectual and manual work—while still locating responsibility for one’s livelihood with the individual rather than the state. This reflects Rockefeller’s own documented record on labor relations; he became, notably, an advocate against the 12-hour workday and 7-day workweek in industry after World War I, arguing that humane labor conditions were sound economic policy, not mere charity.

Thrift and economy (line 5). This plank extends fiscal discipline from the personal to the institutional level—government, business, and personal finance are treated as governed by the same moral logic of economy. It’s a fairly Protestant-work-ethic position: thrift isn’t just prudent, it’s a component of “well ordered living,” tying financial discipline to moral order rather than treating it as a purely technical or economic matter.

Truth, justice, and the sacredness of one's word (lines 6 and 7). These two lines together ground social order in personal integrity rather than in enforcement. "A man's word should be as good as his bond" elevates informal trust above legal mechanism—the implicit claim is that a society of promise-keepers needs less coercive law, not more. And the explicit ranking—character "not wealth or power or position" as the thing of supreme worth—is a striking statement coming from one of the wealthiest men in American history. It functions almost as a personal corrective: an assertion that the Rockefeller name's importance lay in something other than the fortune attached to it.

Service and sacrifice (line 8). The "purifying fire of sacrifice" image is the most rhetorically dense line in the creed—sacrifice burns away "the dross of selfishness" to liberate "the greatness of the human soul." This metaphor (refining fire, dross, purification) draws on a long tradition of religious imagery—it echoes biblical refining-metal language (e.g., Malachi, Isaiah)—recasting self-sacrifice not as loss but as a kind of liberation or unlocking of human potential.

Faith (line 9). "An all-wise and all-loving God, named by whatever name" is notably ecumenical phrasing for 1941—it gestures toward an inclusive theism rather than a sectarian Christian formulation, consistent with Rockefeller's documented interfaith philanthropic interests (he funded interfaith and interracial causes throughout his life). The line ties personal flourishing ("highest fulfillment, greatest happiness, widest usefulness") to alignment with divine will, making theology practically inseparable from ethics in his framework.

Love over hate, right over might (line 10). The closing line is the most overtly historically situated. Delivered five months before Pearl Harbor, with the radio appeal explicitly raising funds for the USO and National War Fund, "right can and will triumph over might" reads as a direct, if restrained, response to the rise of fascist power politics in Europe—an assertion that moral force, not merely material force, governs history's outcome.

Chiastically framed. The creed itself has a loosely chiasmic shape worth noting: it opens on the individual (worth, rights) and closes on transcendent love and moral triumph, with the middle planks (law/government, labor, thrift, truth, character, service) functioning as the practical outworking of the inner conviction stated at the start and the theological grounding stated near the end. Whether that's intentional structuring on Rockefeller's part or simply the natural shape of a personal creed is hard to say with certainty.

► Parable of the Donkey and the Tiger

The Donkey said to the Tiger, “*The grass is blue.*”

The Tiger replied, “*No, the grass is green.*”

The discussion heated up and the two decided to go before the Lion, the King of the jungle.

The Donkey began to shout, “*Your highness, is it true that the grass is blue?*”

The Lion replied, “*If you believe it is true, the grass is blue.*”

The Donkey continued, “*The Tiger disagrees with me, contradicts and annoys me. Please punish him.*”

The King declared, “*The Tiger will be punished with three days of silence.*”

The Donkey jumped with joy and went on his way, content and repeating, “*The grass is blue, the grass is blue...*”

The Tiger accepted his punishment, but before he left he asked the Lion, “*Why have you punished me? After all, the grass is green.*”

The Lion replied, “*In fact, the grass is green.*”

The Tiger asked, “*So, why are you punishing me?*”

The Lion replied, “*That has nothing to do with the question of whether or not the grass is blue or green. The punishment is because it is not logical for a brave, intelligent creature like you to waste time arguing with a donkey. And on top of that, come and bother me with a question like that.*”

Subjective bias. One of the greatest wastes of time is arguing with someone who has no regard for truth or reality, but is instead committed to the triumph of personal beliefs and illusions. Such a person reflects a *post-modern* mindset—elevating “his truth” above *objective* truth and expecting others to accept his *subjective* reality as authoritative.

For all the evidence presented to him, he is unable to understand, or is so blinded by his ego, resentment, or hostility, that the only thing he wants is to be proven right, even when the evidence shows otherwise.

Argumentation. In private conversations with such individuals, when ignorance screams, intelligence shuts up. But in society at large, we must be truth-telling tigers, even in the face of punishment, lest confusion and tyranny follow.

—Adapted from an unknown author.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer on *stupidity*

The following is excerpted from “*Why Intelligent People Become Stupid?*” by Psyphos on YouTube ([youtube.com/@psyphos_official](https://www.youtube.com/@psyphos_official)).

Bonhoeffer wrote: “*Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than malice*” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 1945). Read that again. More dangerous than malice. Why? Because you can fight evil. You can expose it. You can resist it. Evil makes people uncomfortable. It leaves a trace, a guilty conscience, a crack you can exploit. But stupidity? Against stupidity, we are defenseless.

Bonhoeffer writes, “*Neither protests nor the use of force accomplish anything here.*” Why? Because the stupid person doesn’t care about your facts. You bring them evidence and they dismiss it. You show them contradictions in their beliefs and they get more entrenched. You prove them wrong with irrefutable data and they call it irrelevant.

Bonhoeffer writes, “*Facts that contradict one’s prejudgment simply need not be believed. And when facts are irrefutable, they are just pushed aside as inconsequential.*” Now here’s the twist. Bonhoeffer makes it clear: stupidity has nothing to do with intelligence. He writes, “*There are human beings who are of remarkably agile intellect yet stupid and others who are intellectually quite dull yet anything but stupid.*”

So what is it then? What’s the difference?

Stupidity as surrender. Bonhoeffer’s answer is chilling. He says, “*Stupidity is not a lack of brain power. It’s a surrender of independence.*” Under certain circumstances, he writes, people are made stupid—or they allow this to happen to them. Made stupid, not born stupid.

And here’s the mechanism. When a powerful force rises—political, religious, social—it offers people something irresistible: certainty, belonging, identity, purpose. But there’s a cost. To join, you have to stop thinking for yourself.

Bonhoeffer writes, “*Under the overwhelming impact of rising power, humans are deprived of their inner independence and more or less consciously give up establishing an autonomous position.*” They stop asking questions. They stop weighing evidence. They stop being individuals.

And here’s the scariest part. In conversation with him, Bonhoeffer says, one virtually feels that one is dealing not at all with a person, but with slogans, catchwords, and the like that have taken possession of him. You’re not talking to them anymore. You’re talking to the ideology that’s colonized their brain. They’ve become a vessel, a repeater, a tool.

And the worst part: “*Having thus become a mindless tool, the stupid person will also be capable of any evil and at the same time incapable of*

seeing that it is evil." They can commit atrocities and feel righteous doing it because they're no longer thinking. They're obeying.

Why you can't argue with them. Now you understand why your arguments don't work. You think you're talking to a person, but you're actually talking to a system—a mental framework that filters out anything that threatens its stability.

Bonhoeffer explains it perfectly: *"The stupid person is often stubborn, but he is not independent."* Stubbornness looks like strength, like conviction. But it's the opposite. It's fragility disguised as certainty. Because deep down they know—if they let one doubt in, the whole structure collapses.

So they double down. They attack. They deflect. Not because you're wrong, but because you're right. And that's unbearable.

This is why never again should we try to persuade the stupid person with reasons, for it is senseless and dangerous. Dangerous—because when you challenge their belief system, you're not just disagreeing; you're threatening their identity. And people will fight to the death to protect that.

The sociological trap. Bonhoeffer noticed something crucial. People who have isolated themselves from others or who live in solitude manifest this defect less frequently than individuals or groups inclined—or condemned—to sociability. Translation: stupidity is a group phenomenon. The more you need to belong, the more vulnerable you are.

"It would seem that stupidity is perhaps less a psychological than a sociological problem," he writes.

And then he drops the bombshell: "Every strong upsurge of power in the public sphere, be it of a political or of a religious nature, infects a large part of humankind with stupidity." It's almost a law of nature. The power of the one needs the stupidity of the other.

Every authoritarian regime, every cult, every mass movement—they don't succeed because people are dumb. They succeed because people surrender their intelligence in exchange for certainty and belonging. And once that trade is made, you can't reason them out of it because they didn't reason themselves into it.

The only way out. So what's the solution? Bonhoeffer is brutally honest. *"Only an act of liberation, not instruction, can overcome stupidity."* You can't teach someone out of it. You can't debate them out of it. They have to be freed from it. To Bonhoeffer, what must come first is the collapse of the external power structure. The regime has to fall. The ideology has

to die. The movement has to crumble. Then—and only then—can people wake up.

We are living in an age of manufactured stupidity. Algorithms that reward certainty over curiosity. Echo chambers that punish doubt. Ideologies—left, right, religious, secular—that demand total loyalty in exchange for belonging. And millions of people—smart people, educated people—are making the same trade Bonhoeffer warned about. They’re surrendering their independence, becoming vessels for slogans, repeating ideas they never questioned, and attacking anyone who dares to think clearly.

So here’s the hard truth. If you’ve been wondering why it feels so lonely to think for yourself, this is why. You’re not broken. You’re just refusing to make the trade. You’re keeping your independence. And in a world addicted to certainty, that makes you dangerous—but it also makes you free.

Bonhoeffer’s final words on the subject were these: “*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.*” Meaning this: real intelligence isn’t about having all the answers. It’s about staying humble enough to keep questioning, brave enough to stand alone, and strong enough to resist the comfort of stupidity.

Scripture Notes

► Trinitarian verses

The following is a list of biblical passages most commonly cited in defense of the Trinitarian doctrine, grouped by theme. Passages that include links are discussed in detail and are accompanied by counterarguments.

1. **Passages naming Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together.** These are often presented as evidence of a triadic or Trinitarian pattern.
 - a. [Matthew 28:19](#). The “Great Commission” text.
 - b. [2 Corinthians 13:14](#). “fellowship of the holy spirit.”
 - c. [Ephesians 4:4–6](#). “One spirit... one Lord... one God and Father.”
 - d. [1 Peter 1:2](#). “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the spirit, for obedience and for sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ.”
2. **Defending the deity of Christ.** These passages are cited to support the claim that Jesus shares the divine nature.
 - a. [John 1:1](#). “The word was God”
 - b. John 1:14. “The word became flesh.”
 - c. [John 8:58](#). “Before Abraham was, I am.”
 - d. [John 10:30](#). “I and the Father are one.”
 - e. [John 20:28](#). “My Lord and my God.”
 - f. Colossians 2:9. “For all the fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily in Christ.”
 - g. Philippians 2:6. “who, being in the form of God.”
 - h. [Hebrews 1:8](#). “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”
 - i. [Titus 2:13](#). “Our great God and Savior’s glory—Jesus Christ.”
3. **Defending the deity or Personhood of the Holy Spirit.** These are commonly cited to support the spirit as a distinct divine person.
 - a. [Acts 5:3–4](#). Lying to the holy spirit.
 - b. 1 Corinthians 3:16. God’s spirit dwells in believers.
 - c. 1 Corinthians 12:4–11. List of spiritual gifts
 - d. [2 Corinthians 3:17](#). “The Lord is the spirit.”
 - e. Ephesians 4:30. The holy spirit of God can be grieved.

- f. [John 14:16–21](#). Another Paraclete sent by the Father.
 - g. John 16:13–15. When the Paraclete comes he will guide into all the truth by speaking what he receives from Jesus.
4. **Divine unity.** Used in Trinitarian synthesis.
- a. [Deuteronomy 6:4](#). The Shema.
 - b. 1 Corinthians 8:6: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”
5. **Disputed or textually contested passage.**
- a. [1 John 5:7](#) (*Comma Johanneum*). Explicit Trinitarian formula in the KJV, but absent from the earliest Greek manuscripts and generally rejected by modern scholarship.

Summary. Trinitarian theology is **constructed by synthesizing these passages** rather than relying on a single explicit statement. The doctrine was formally articulated in the 4th century (e.g., Nicaea 325 AD, Constantinople 381 AD), using these verses as theological building blocks.

Notes on Matthew

Content [\[↶\]](#) [\[↑\]](#) [\[↓\]](#)

Matthew 5:22	“fire of Gehenna”
Matthew 5:32	“except on the ground of porneia”
Matthew 10:28	“cannot kill the soul”
Matthew 11:12	[<i>Hebraic expression</i>] “breaking forth”
Matthew 12:31	“blasphemy against the spirit”
Matthew 13:34	“Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables”
Matthew 25:46	“punishment in the age [<i>to come</i>]”
Matthew 26:28	“for forgiveness”
Matthew 28:9	[<i>Hebraic expression</i>] “Greetings!”
Matthew 28:19	[<i>Emendation</i>] “baptizing them in my name”
Hebrew Matthew	

Matthew 5:22 “fire of Gehenna”

“**Gehenna**” is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew words “ge,” meaning “valley,” and “Hinnom,” a man’s name. In the Old Testament, the valley was known as the Valley of Hinnom, located just to the southeast of the Old City of Jerusalem. (Today, it looks nothing like it did during the Old and New Testament periods.) Back then, it was the place where the city dumped its waste and burned its trash. The inhabitants of Jerusalem carried their garbage—including dead animals, bones, and other refuse—outside the south gate (appropriately named, “the Dung Gate”), down the hill, and into the Valley of Hinnom, i.e., *Gehenna*. The waste dumped there was either consumed by the fires that continually burned there or left to rot, eaten by maggots and worms. It was this imagery of fire and maggots continually consuming the garbage in the Valley of Hinnom that the Scriptures use to typify the Judgment, where the fire will not be quenched nor the worm die (Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:48) until the wicked are consumed.

In Christ’s day, people knew *Gehenna* as the place where garbage burned until it was gone—but they knew *nothing* of a place where people burned alive forever (i.e., “hell”). The Old Testament certainly does not mention such a place. When Christ used the term “fire of *Gehenna*,” he was simply speaking of the destruction of the wicked into nothingness—like garbage consumed by fire in the Valley of Hinnom. On the Day of

Judgment, the fire—the **Lake of Fire** of Revelation 20:15, which corresponds to Jesus’ *Gehenna*—will not be “quenched” until all the wicked are consumed. The destruction of the wicked is “eternal” in the sense that they never receive eternal life. They die, and that punishment—their death—lasts forever.

The concept of “hell,” or burning forever in torment, entered Christianity from the Greeks, who believed in an “immortal soul.” The phrase “immortal soul” does not appear in the Bible, and eternal torment is not a teaching of Scripture.

Matthew 5:32 “except on the ground of porneia” [↩]

The full verse reads as follows:

Matthew 5:32: But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, **except on the ground of *porneia***, makes her commit adultery. And whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

This verse is covered in the Resource article, “[Divorce and Remarriage](#)”.

Matthew 10:28 “cannot kill the soul” [↩]

The full verse reads as follows:

Matthew 10:28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but **cannot kill the soul**, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna*.

The same teaching appears in Luke:

Luke 12:4-5: I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more they can do. ⁵ But I will tell you whom you should fear: Fear him who has authority to throw you into *Gehenna* after your body has been killed. Yes, I tell you, fear him!

Man naturally fears death at the hands of another human being. But these Scriptures tell us not to fear this kind of death—which is “sleep” death—and instead to fear the *second* death, the one that comes from God in the lake of fire (i.e., *Gehenna*) at the Final Judgment (Rev. 20:14–15).

“Soul.” The Greek term for “soul” (G5590, *psuchē*) most often refers in the New Testament to the physical “life” of a human or animal, but it can also carry the broader sense of one’s attitudes, feelings, and emotions. In this translation, it is rendered “life” except where that broader, more inclusive meaning is intended — in which case it is rendered “soul.”

In Greek mythology, the soul was immortal, pictured taking flight like a butterfly (as often shown in ancient art) once released from the “shackles” of its chrysalis, the body. But this notion of an immortal soul appears nowhere in the Bible, either as a term or as a concept. Instead, Scripture teaches that the soul that sins will die (Ezek. 18:4), and that the soul itself will be destroyed at the Final Judgment, as already noted. When Greeks converted to Christianity, however, they carried this belief in an immortal soul with them, and it eventually became the traditional teaching of the Church.

The most common biblical argument for an immortal soul is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), which is discussed in detail in “[Notes on Luke](#)”.

Matthew 11:12 “breaking forth” [\[↗\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Matthew 11:12: From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has been **breaking forth**, and every man in it is breaking forth.

Most translations render this verse similar to the ESV:

Matthew 11:12 (ESV): From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has **suffered violence**, and the violent take it by force.

The Greek word for “suffered violence” is *biazetai* [G971] which also has the meaning, “to use (or apply) force.” The NIV84 and a few other translations prefer this alternate meaning:

Matthew 11:12 (NIV84): From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been **forcefully advancing**, and forceful men lay hold of it.

That this later translation is closer to the original meaning is understood when it is viewed as the Hebraic expression found in MICAH 2:12-13:

Micah 2:12-13: “I will assemble all of you, Jacob; I will gather the remnant of Israel, I will put them together **like sheep in a pen**, like a herd in its pasture—it will hum with the sounds of people.” ¹³ **The one breaking through went up before them; they broke through, passed the gate and went out.** Their king passed on before them; Adonai was leading them.

The imagery in these verses is that of sheep penned up for the night.

The next morning, the sheep can hardly wait to get out of their cramped quarters to freedom and to pasture. So, they push and shove at the gate until they successfully *break through*, either on their own or by the shepherd who opens the gate.

There is then a “breach-maker”—the one who opens the gate. This breach-maker is the one Jesus interpreted to be John the Baptist. Since John the Baptist, the kingdom of heaven has been *breaking forth*. That is, John the Baptist had come and opened the gate; he had opened the way to the kingdom of heaven. The people then “*broke through*, passed the gate and went out” (MICAH 2:13).

The prophet Micah then says in v.13, “Their king passed on before them.” This “king” would then be prophetically speaking of the coming Messiah. It was this imagery that Jesus was presenting to his listeners. It was the fulfillment of Micah’s prophecy.

Matthew 12:31 “blasphemy against the spirit” [\[↩\]](#)

The full verse should include v.32 as shown below. (The parallel references are found in Mark 3:28-30 and Luke 12:10.)

Matthew 12:31-32: Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but they will not be forgiven for **blasphemy against the spirit**.³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the holy spirit will not be forgiven, neither in the present age nor in the age to come.

Blasphemy. Broadly speaking, “blasphemy” refers to words, actions, and attitudes that profane something that is sacred. The most serious form of blasphemy is to blatantly disrespect or mock Yehovah’s name, as the Law of Moses states in Leviticus:

Leviticus 24:16: He who **blasphemes Yehovah’s name**, he shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him. The foreigner as well as the native-born shall be put to death when he **blasphemes the Name**.

Hardened heart. To mock Yehovah’s name was to mock His power and authority. This is illustrated in the life of Pharaoh during the Exodus. Through the first five plagues, Pharaoh “hardened his heart” against Yehovah (Exodus 7:22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) and refused to let His people go. In the next five plagues, however, Yehovah gave Pharaoh over to his own blasphemous attitude, and Yehovah Himself hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10). This suggests that Pharaoh’s resistance became so entrenched that he would never change, and God could no longer reach him.

Thus, at least in the case of Pharaoh, a person can become increasingly resistant to God's expressed will, to the point where he is no longer responsive and reachable. At that point his sin becomes unpardonable—not because forgiveness is withheld, but because his heart has become so hardened that it is unchangeable and unreachable.

Jesus and the Pharisees. This appears to be what Jesus was warning the Pharisees about. They were witnessing God's power at work in the miracles of Jesus, yet attributing that power to Satan. In doing so, the Pharisees were speaking blasphemous words, calling the work of God the work of Satan. If they persisted in this path of blasphemy, they stood in danger of committing the unpardonable sin.

Blasphemy against the spirit. This refers to speaking against what is unmistakably from God. When Jesus speaks of the “holy spirit,” he means God's spirit of truth and power at work. To mock or attribute God's activity—His truth, authority, and power—to something evil is to commit blasphemy. If this sinful disposition persists, it can reach the point of being unpardonable, not because forgiveness is withheld, but because the person's heart becomes hardened, unresponsive, and unreachable.

Matthew 13:34 “Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables” [\[↵\]](#)

In context, the verse reads as follows:

Matthew 13:34-35: All these things **Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables; he did not speak to them without using a parable.**

³⁵ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will declare things hidden from the foundation of the world.” [Ps. 78:2]

Jesus spoke in “tongues”. You might say he spoke in another language—the language of **parables**. He taught this way for two main reasons. First, he intended his parables to be memorable, drawn from everyday life, so they could be easily recalled. Second, the parables carried a hidden meaning that only the spiritually minded could grasp. Jesus himself explained this hidden meaning in Matthew 13:10–17.

Paradoxically, the teaching of Jesus—the language of heaven—is both visible and hidden at the same time. This is what the psalmist foretold in Psalm 78:2, already quoted above in Matthew 13:35. A similar theme appears in Isaiah:

Isaiah 28:11: For Yehovah will use **strange words** and a **foreign tongue** to speak to these people.

Intended for those with ears to hear. Jesus spoke plainly, telling stories

that were easy to understand. He did not babble or speak gibberish; the crowds could hear and understand his language. Jesus spoke in “strange words” and “a foreign tongue” not because it was babbling or gibberish, but because it could not be understood by the spiritually deaf and blind. His words were intended only for those with ears to hear. Jesus’ words, and the Scriptures as a whole, are not for the lost, but for those who are saved or seeking to be saved.

The model to follow. This was Jesus’ style of teaching and preaching, and it is the model Christians ought to follow. In Acts chapter 2, on the day of Pentecost, when the holy spirit was poured out on the disciples, they spoke in “tongues” that everyone could understand.

Acts 2:7-8 (CSB): They were astounded and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language?”

Charismatics (“tongues” speakers) who appeal to 1 Corinthians 14 argue that they are speaking “mysteries in the spirit” (1 Cor. 14:2). But they fail to recognize that if their words are not plain to the listener, then they are not the words of Jesus—because that is not how Jesus spoke, nor how the disciples spoke at Pentecost. Paul himself rebuked the Corinthians for speaking unintelligibly:

1 Corinthians 14:9 (CSB): In the same way, unless you use your tongue for intelligible speech, how will what is spoken be known? For you will be speaking into the air.

Matthew 25:46 “punishment in the age [to come]” [\[↩\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Matthew 25:46: And these will go away into **punishment in the age [to come]**, but the righteous into life in the age [to come].

“In the age.” The phrase “in the age” translates *aiōnios* (G166), which is an adjectival form of *aiōn* (G165). This word refers to an eon—a period of time, an unbroken age. The Greek term does not in itself mean “unending”; the context could suggest an unending duration, but it could equally suggest “a period of time.” If it refers to a period of time, then that time is the coming kingdom. That is to say, “in the age to come” there will be punishment, and “in the age to come” there will be the reward of life. This “age to come” includes the Day of Judgment—the moment when judgment is executed on the “sheep and the goats,” as this parable teaches.

Most translators prefer “eternal punishment,” which suggests unending punishment. In doing so, they focus on *duration* (i.e., forever and ever) rather than on the point in time (i.e., the coming kingdom). Such a

reading imports the *biased* Christian tradition of eternal hell—a notion not even implied by the context of this verse.

On “life in the age [*to come*]” (or, as most translators prefer, “eternal life”), F. F. Bruce writes:

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

Craig Keener notes that Jewish sources traditionally applied the phrase “eternal life” to mean the “life of the world to come,” inaugurated, according to Jewish teaching, by the future resurrection of the dead (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, note on Titus 1:2-3, 626).

Matthew 26:28 “for forgiveness” [\[↩\]](#)

Matthew 26:28 reads as follows (cf. Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20):

Matthew 26:28 (LSB): for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out **for many for forgiveness** of sins.

This passage is often read as though Jesus were making a covenant with God by which God would then be able to pardon our sins—implying that God could not forgive until Jesus enabled Him to do so. However, three Greek terms in this passage significantly alter that reading.

“For forgiveness.” The first term is the word translated “for” in the phrase **“for forgiveness.”** The Greek here is *eis*, a preposition meaning “into” or “unto,” indicating movement toward or into something. If the sense were simply “for” in a causal or explanatory sense, the Greek word *gar* would have been used—but it is not.

“For forgiveness.” The second word is translated “forgiveness” (or “remission”). This is the Greek *aphesin*, which literally means “to release” or “to let go.” Figuratively, it can refer to forgiveness understood as the offended party choosing to let go of an offense—that is, choosing not to demand revenge or restitution. But when the action belongs to the one who committed the offense, as the grammar of this verse suggests, it is the sinners—the “many”—who are doing the releasing, not God, the one against whom the sin was committed.

“For many.” The third key term appears in the phrase “for many,” translated from the Greek *peri pollon*. The preposition *peri* means “around,” “concerning,” or “with respect to.” So, the blood of the covenant is shed not for God’s sake, but “concerning many”—that is, for our sake.

Matthew 26:28 revised. Given the context and the Greek terminology above, this verse can be read as follows:

Matthew 26:28 (paraphrased): This is my blood that establishes the new covenant, poured out for many who choose repentance and a life released [*removed, freed*] from sin.

In other words, the blood covenant is something people may enter into, and by entering it they agree, *in blood-covenant terms*, **to release** themselves (*be freed*) from **their sins**—that is, **to cease sinning**. This reading aligns with Old Testament passages in which God promises forgiveness to those who forsake sin (e.g., 2 Chr. 7:14; Isa. 1:18; 55:7; Ezek. 18), and it avoids portraying God as demanding blood as a form of divine retribution or payment for human sin.

The purpose of the plan is to help humanity turn away from sin, cease offending God, and be reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. There can be no reconciliation without an end of rebellion—without the cessation of sin.

Matthew 28:9 “Greetings!” [\[↩\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Matthew 28:9: As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!”

The term “Greetings!” translates the Greek *chairete* (G5463, *chairō*; imperative, 2nd person plural), which can mean “rejoice” (42x), “be glad” (14x), “joy” (5x), “hail” (5x), and so on. This is *not* the customary Eastern salutation “Peace be unto you!” (i.e., *Shalom*), but a different form of greeting—one with special significance given the context of the Resurrection.

In place of “Greetings!” the Hebrew Matthew renders this term as “*HaShem* saves you!” where *HaShem* (“The Name”) is the rabbinic way of referring to *Yehovah*. This suggests that the underlying salutation should be understood as “*Yehovah* saves you!” If this is indeed what Jesus intended, then it stands as a joyous proclamation that his mission has been fulfilled. The gospel opens in Matthew 1:21 with the command, “you shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”—or, as the Hebrew Matthew has it, *Yeshua* (“Yehovah saves”) for *Yoshia* (“he will save”) his people from their sins. Read this way, Jesus’s resurrection greeting becomes the fitting bookend to that opening promise: a concluding declaration of what has just been accomplished, “*Yehovah* saves you!”

Matthew 28:19 “baptizing them in my name” [e]

The “Great Commission” text, found in Matthew 28:18-20 reads as follows in the ESV (and in almost all modern translations):

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV): And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Whereas it reads as follows in The Chiastic Word:

Matthew 28:18-20 (CHI): Then Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in my name**, ²⁰ teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

The authenticity of the threefold-name wording of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Matthew 28:19 is disputed on the grounds of textual, literary, and historical criticism.

I. Textual and literary arguments

There are six textual and literary arguments against the authenticity of the threefold-name wording in Matthew 28:19. In summary, they include:

1. **Baptized in the name of Jesus alone**. Although many baptisms are recorded in the New Testament, none follow the threefold-name wording. Rather, it is always in the name of Jesus alone.
2. **The phrase, “the name of.”** All New Testament occurrences of the phrase, “*in the name of*,” reference a single individual. Matthew 28:19 is the *only* exception.
3. **Matthew 28:19 in context**. The *context* of the passage (vv.18-20) does not agree with the threefold-name wording.
4. **Parallel account**. The parallel text in Luke does not support this threefold-name wording.
5. **Diminished atonement**. It diminishes the all sufficiency of Christ’s atonement.
6. **Violates principle**. It violates the general principle taught by Paul in Colossians 3:17.

1. Baptized in the name of Jesus alone.

The New Testament does not record anyone getting baptized in the three-fold name. Rather, all baptisms where a name is mentioned are done in the name of Jesus alone. It is extremely unlikely that if Jesus had specifically commanded his apostles to baptize “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” that the apostles would later disobey his direct command and baptize in the name of Jesus Christ, alone. Thus, the reason why the disciples did not carry out this command was not because they were unfaithful to the command of Jesus, rather, it was because Jesus never said these words in the first place. Here are the clear instances in the Book of Acts where the disciples baptized in the name of Jesus alone.

- Acts 2:38: Repent and be baptized every one of you **in the name of Jesus Christ...**
- Acts 8:16: ...they had only been baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus.**
- Acts 10:48: And he commanded them to be baptized **in the name of Jesus Christ...**
- Acts 19:5: On hearing this, they were baptized **in the name of the Lord Jesus.**
- Acts 22:16: ...Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling **on his name.**

Baptized *into*. The apostle Paul is the only writer in the New Testament to give us the term ‘baptized *into* Christ’ or ‘baptized *into* his death’ or ‘baptized *into* one body’. The reason we are baptized in Jesus’ NAME is because we are being baptized “*into*” Jesus’ AUTHORITY. We are taking on the NAME of Jesus as a wife takes on the name of her husband. We belong to Christ and form part of his BODY. We become ONE FLESH with him as is the symbol of marriage.

- Romans 6:3-7: ...were **baptized into Christ** Jesus were baptized into His death...
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: ...we were all **baptized into one body...**
- Galatians 3:26-28: ...For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ...**
- Ephesians 5:29-30: For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are **members of his body.**
- Colossians 2:11-13: ...**buried with Him in baptism...**

It is also a sign of ownership—we become Jesus' PROPERTY by virtue of becoming his BRIDE.

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 1910, James Hastings, Ed., Vol 2 (Summary thoughts): Christian baptism was administered using the words, "in the name of Jesus." Baptism was always in the name of Lord Jesus until the time of Justin Martyr when the triune formula was used. NAME was an ancient synonym for "person."

Payment was always made in the name of some person referring to ownership. Therefore one being baptized in Jesus' name became His personal property. "Ye are Christ's." —pages 377 and 389.

2. The phrase, "the name of." [\[e\]](#)

Notice that the phrase "the name of" is in the *singular*. Why is it singular if there are supposed to be three persons? A simple search of this phrase in the New Testament will show over 50 results. In *all instances* (except for Matthew 28:19) it addresses a single individual, such as a prophet, a righteous man, an apostle, a disciple, but more typically "the name of the Lord" or "the name of Jesus." For example:

- *Matthew 10:41 (LSB)*: He who receives a prophet in **the name of a prophet** shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in **the name of a righteous man** shall receive a righteous man's reward.
- *Matthew 10:42 (LSB)*: And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink in **the name of a disciple**. . .
- *Matthew 21:9*: Blessed is he that comes in **the name of the Lord**.
- *Acts 3:16*: ". . . In **the name of Jesus Christ** of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"
- *Acts 4:18*: And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in **the name of Jesus**.
- *Acts 9:27*: ". . . and that he had spoken to him, and how he [Paul] had preached boldly at Damascus in **the name of Jesus**."
- *Acts 16:18*: ". . . I command you in **the name of Jesus Christ** to come out of her."
- *1 Corinthians 1:13*: Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in **the name of Paul**?
- *1 Corinthians 5:4*: In **the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**, when ye are gathered together...

- *Colossians 3:17*: And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in **the name of the Lord Jesus...**
- *2 Thessalonians 3:6*: Now we command you, brethren, in **the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.** . .
- *James 5:14*: ...and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in **the name of the Lord**

Notice that whether it was to accept salvation, or be baptized, or perform miracles, or preach, or cast out demons, or gather together, or in apostolic admonitions, or prayer for the sick, all things were done in “the name of” Jesus. Not once is the threefold-name used. Again, the **only** exception to the singular use of the phrase, “the name of,” in the **entire** New Testament (of over 50 occurrences) is found in Matthew 28:19.

Also, it is evident that the concept of AUTHORITY in the New Testament (i.e. “in the name of”) was confined to a single individual. It is the authority of ONE person, not a committee of persons, not a collection of persons, not a trinity of persons. The singular exception is Matthew 28:19 (i.e. “in the name of [three Persons]”). Think about that. This is the only verse in the New Testament where “in the name of” involves more than one person.

Should not this raise a red flag? If the Bible is to be consistent and rational, why this singular exception? The answer is simple, the authenticity of the wording of this verse can be, and should be, brought into question.

3. Matthew 28:19 in context. [\[e\]](#)

The meaning of a word or a phrase should always be determined by its context. This is an iron rule in Bible interpretation. Let’s quote the passage again but with emphasis in a few key words that surround the phrase in question.

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV): And Jesus came and said to them, “**ALL AUTHORITY** in heaven and on earth has been given **TO ME**.¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ **TEACHING** them to observe all that **I HAVE COMMANDED YOU**. And behold, **I AM** with you **ALWAYS**, to the end of the age.”

Observe:

1. **Jesus’ AUTHORITY**. *Who was given ALL AUTHORITY?* Answer: **Jesus**. Because Jesus says it himself, “ALL AUTHORITY...has been given TO ME.”

2. **Jesus' TEACHING.** *Whose TEACHING are we to teach and observe?* Answer: **Jesus' teaching** (i.e. "TEACHING...all that I HAVE COMMANDED YOU").
3. **Jesus' PRESENCE.** *Who will be with us ALWAYS?* Answer: **Jesus** (i.e. "I AM with you ALWAYS"). Jesus will be with us ALWAYS by way of his spirit.

Given that the context concerns Jesus and only Jesus, would it not make sense that v.19 should also agree with this context? Alas, it does not. At least, it does not with the traditional wording found in our Bibles. But what if in v.19, instead of the phrase, "in the name of [three Persons]," it reads, "in MY name," as church history suggests (see below on Eusebius)? Then, v.19 would be in agreement with the context. Thus, consider the following proposed "original" reading:

Matthew 28:18-20 (proposed reading): And Jesus came and said to them, "ALL AUTHORITY in heaven and on earth has been given TO ME. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them **IN MY NAME**, TEACHING them to observe all that I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. And behold, I AM with you ALWAYS, to the end of the age."

From a contextual perspective, the above reading makes perfect sense. It is all about Jesus—his AUTHORITY, his BAPTISM (i.e. baptized into Christ; Galatians 3:27), his TEACHING, and his PRESENCE. Do you see the significance of this passage when properly read and understood?

4. Parallel account. [\[e\]](#)

The Gospel of Luke argues against the threefold-name wording. In the parallel account in Luke it reads, "and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed **IN HIS NAME** to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

5. Diminished atonement. [\[e\]](#)

As to the meaning of the text, baptizing in the threefold-name diminishes the all sufficiency of Christ's atonement. Robert Roberts makes this argument:

[The baptismal phrase of Matthew 28:19](#): Brother Roberts wrote: "According to triune-immersion, it is not sufficient to be baptized into the Son. . . Thus Christ is displaced from his position as the connecting link—the door of entrance—the 'new and living way.' And thus there are three names under heaven whereby we must be saved, in opposition to the apostolic declaration, 'that there is none other name (other than the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth) under

heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.’ “

Christ’s atonement work immediately impacts us in three important areas:

1. By baptism. The forgiveness of our sins.
2. Through anointing. The empowerment gain-ed by the indwelling of the spirit (i.e. new birth, spiritual gifts, etc).
3. Into ministry. The ministry of reconciliation (i.e. the proclamation of the gospel) given for us to perform.

(1) By baptism. First, it was Jesus *alone*—not the Father and Holy Spirit—who was baptized, and became the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. We experience forgiveness of sins through repentance and an outward manifestation of that repentance by baptism.

Acts 2:38: And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit.”

(2) Through anointing. Second, it was Jesus *alone*—not the Father and Holy Spirit—who received the *anointing* of the spirit (at his baptism) as prophesied of the coming Messiah (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18). John the Baptist himself bore witness to this:

John 1:32-34 (CHI): And John testified, saying, “I saw the spirit descending from heaven in the form a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not recognize him, but he who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘**He upon whom you see the spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes in holy spirit.**’ ³⁴ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

Not only was it Jesus alone who was baptized and received the holy spirit, but it is Jesus alone “who baptizes in holy spirit” (John 1:33).

- *John 15:26 (KJV):* But when the Comforter is come, **whom I will send unto you from the Father**, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:
- *Acts 2:33:* Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **he [Jesus] has poured out this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
- *1 John 2:27:* But **the anointing that you received from him** abides in you. . .

(3) Into ministry. Third, it was at Jesus’ baptism where he inaugurated his priestly work of atonement. This fulfilled the type in the Jewish sacrificial system when the descendants of Aaron began their priestly roles

through washing with water and anointing with oil (Exodus 29:4, 7; Leviticus 8:6, 12). It was *after* his baptism that he could say, “The spirit of Lord [*Yehovah*] is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...” (Luke 4:18). Further, Jesus continues his priestly atonement work as our High Priest in Heaven (Heb. 5:1, 5, 10).

We also can participate, as baptized believers, in Christ’s atoning work for mankind. We become “priests” and are given a “ministry”.

- *Revelation 1:5-6*: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood ⁶ and made us a kingdom, **priests to his God and Father**, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.
- *1 Peter 2:9*: But you are a chosen race, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- *2 Corinthians 5:18*: All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself **and gave us the ministry of reconciliation**;

Thus, we are to follow Christ, as our Perfect Example, *by* BAPTISM, *through* ANOINTING, *into* MINISTRY. This work was Jesus’ work alone. Only Jesus made it possible to forgive sins through the merits of his Sacrifice. Only Jesus baptizes in holy spirit. Only Jesus ministers to us in Heaven as our High Priest. All this was initiated at his Baptism. We are, therefore, to be baptized in his Name and his Name alone.

6. Violates principle. [\[e\]](#)

There is a general principle taught by Paul in Colossians 3:17 which says, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, **do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” This surely must include baptism. In the name of Jesus is also seen in other contexts as follows:

- *Matthew 12:21*: and in **his name** the Gentiles will hope.
- *Matthew 24:9*: you will be hated by all nations because of **my name**.
- *Luke 24:47*: and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in **his name** to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.
- *Acts 9:15*: Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry **my name** before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

- *Acts 10:43*: everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through **his name**.
- *Romans 1:5*: through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of **his name** among all the nations,

II. Historical arguments against the threefold-name wording [e]

In addition, there are the following four historical arguments against the authenticity of the threefold-name wording in Matthew 28:19. In summary,

1. [An interpolation](#). Christian scholars believe it to be an *interpolation* in view of Eusebius' alternate reading and the testimony of other early Church Fathers and historians.
2. [Theologians of the past](#). Theologians throughout Christian history have debated and questioned the authenticity of this verse.
3. [Catholic perspective](#). Catholics acknowledge the discrepancy and (some) propose a novel idea: That the apostles were given a one-time exemption to baptize in the name of Jesus alone.
4. [Ellen G. White on Matthew 28:19](#). EGW routinely quoted and commented on Matthew 28:19 in her writings using the KJV wording. However, her perspective was clearly non-trinitarian.

1. An interpolation. [e]

The definition of an “interpolation” is the insertion of a passage into a text. The view of Christian scholars is the following:

- “The historical riddle is not solved by Matthew 28:19, since, according to a wide scholarly consensus, **it is not an authentic saying of Jesus**, not even an elaboration of a Jesus-saying on baptism” —*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, 1992, page 585.
- “The chief Trinitarian text in the NT is the baptismal formula in Mt 28:19...This late post-resurrection saying, not found in any other Gospel or anywhere else in the NT, has been viewed by some scholars as **an interpolation into Matthew**. It has also been pointed out that the idea of making disciples is continued in teaching them, so that the intervening reference to baptism with its Trinitarian formula was perhaps a later insertion into the saying. Finally, Eusebius's form of the (ancient) text (‘in my name’ rather than in the name of the Trinity) has had certain advocates. (Although the Trinitarian formula is now found in the modern-day book of Matthew), this does not guarantee its source in the historical teaching of Jesus. It is doubtless better to

view the (Trinitarian) formula as derived from early (Catholic) Christian, perhaps Syrian or Palestinian, baptismal usage (cf. Didache 7:1-4), and as a brief summary of the (Catholic) Church's teaching about God, Christ, and the Spirit..." —*Hastings Dictionary of the Bible* 1963, p. 1015

Original wording from Eusebius of Caesarea (270 - 340 AD). Eusebius was the Church historian and Bishop of Caesarea. On page 152 of "[*Demonstratio Evangelica*](#)" Eusebius quotes the early book of Matthew that he had in his library in Caesarea. According to this eyewitness of an unaltered Book of Matthew that could have been the original book or the first copy of the original of Matthew. Eusebius informs us of Jesus' actual words to his disciples in the original text of Matthew 28:19: "With one word and voice He said to His disciples: 'Go, and make disciples of all the nations in **My Name**, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' "

- Regarding Eusebius: "Of the patristic witnesses to the text of the New Testament as it stood in the Greek MSS, from about 300-340, none is so important as Eusebius of Caesarea, for he lived in the greatest Christian library of that age, that namely which Origen and Pamphilus had collected. It is no exaggeration to say that from this single collection of manuscripts at Caesarea derives the larger part of the surviving ante-Nicene literature. In his library, **Eusebius must have habitually handled codices of the Gospels older by two hundred years than the earliest of the great uncials that we have now in our libraries**" —The Hibbert Journal, October., 1902.
- "It is clear, therefore, that of the MSS which Eusebius inherited from his predecessor, Pamphilus, at Caesarea in Palestine, some at least preserved the original reading, in which there was no mention either of Baptism or of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It had been conjectured by Dr. Davidson, Dr. Martineau, by the present Dean of Westminster, and by Prof. Harnack (to mention but a few names out of many), that here the received text, could not contain the very words of Jesus? This long before anyone except Dr. Burgon, who kept the discovery to himself, had noticed the Eusebian form of the reading. . . It is satisfactory to notice that Dr. Eberhard Nestle, in his new edition of the New Testament in Latin and Greek, furnishes the Eusebian reading in his critical apparatus, and that Dr. Sanday seems to lean to its acceptance." —*History of New Testament Criticism*, Conybeare, 1910, pages, 98-102, 111-112.

Quotes from Eusebius. [\[↵\]](#)

- ‘With one word and voice He said to His disciples: “**Go, and make disciples of all the nations in My Name**, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” [[Matt. xxviii. 19.]] . . .’ —[Eusebius, “*Demonstratio Evangelica*,” Book III, Chapter 6, p. 152](#)
- ‘But while the disciples of Jesus were most likely either saying thus, or thinking thus, the Master solved their difficulties, by the addition of one phrase, saying they should triumph “**In MY NAME**.” For He did not bid them simply and indefinitely make disciples of all nations, but with the necessary addition of “**In my Name**.” And the power of His Name being so great, that the apostle says: “God has given him a name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth,” [[Phil. ii. 9.]] He shewed the virtue of the power in His Name concealed from the crowd when He said to His disciples: “**Go, and make disciples of all nations in my Name**.” He also most accurately forecasts the future when He says: “For this gospel must first be preached to all the world, for a witness to all nations.” [[Matt.xxiv.14]]’ —[Eusebius, “*Demonstratio Evangelica*,” Book III, Chapter 7, p. 157](#)
- ‘I am irresistibly forced to retrace my steps, and search for their cause, and to confess that they could only have succeeded in their daring venture, by a power more divine, and more strong than man’s, and by the co-operation of Him Who said to them: “**Make disciples of all the nations in my Name**.” And when He said this He appended a promise, that would ensure their courage and readiness to devote themselves to carrying out His commands. For He said to them: “And lo! I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world.” **Moreover, He is said to have breathed into them a holy Spirit**, yea to have given them divine and miraculous power—first saying: “**Receive ye Holy Spirit**,” [[John xx.22]] and then: “Heal the sick, cleanse lepers, cast out demons; freely ye have received, freely give.”’ [[Matt. x. 8]]’ —[Eusebius, “*Demonstratio Evangelica*,” Book III, Chapter 7, p. 159-160](#)
- ‘And He says to them, “The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” And He bids His own disciples after their rejection, “**Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name**.”’ —[Eusebius, “*Demonstratio Evangelica*,” Book IX, Chapter 11, p. 175](#)

Eusebius post-Nicaea. Eusebius quotes Matthew 28:19 using the shorter form (“in my Name”) some 17 times. He uses the threefold-name form only 3 times and they are all post-Nicaea (i.e. 325 AD). *Reference:* F.C. Conybeare, “Eusebian Form of the Text of Matthew 28:19,” ZNW (1901), 275-288.

Other witnesses. Eusebius is not the only witness. Here are three others:

- **Author of De Rebaptismate.** The anonymous author of *De Rebaptismate* in the third century dwells at length on “the power of the name of Jesus invoked upon a man by Baptism” (The Author of *De Rebaptismate*, from Smith’s Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. I, page 352).
- **Origen.** In Origen’s works, as preserved in the Greek, the first part of the verse is cited three times, but his citation always stops short at the words ‘the nations’; and that in itself suggests that his text has been censored, and the words which followed, ‘in my name’, struck out. —Conybeare.
- **Justin Martyr.** In Justin Martyr, who wrote between A.D. 130 and 140, there is a passage which has been regarded as a citation or echo of Matthew 28:19 by various scholars. . . The passage is in Justin’s dialogue with Trypho 39, p. 258: ‘God hath not afflicted nor inflicts the judgment, as knowing of some that still even today are being made disciples in the name of his Christ, and are abandoning the path of error, who also do receive gifts each as they be worthy, being illuminated by the name of this Christ.’ The objection hitherto to these words being recognized as a citation of our text was that they ignored the formula ‘baptizing them in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.’ But the discovery of the Eusebian form of text removes the difficulty: and Justin is seen to have had the same text as early as the year 140, which Eusebius regularly found in his manuscripts from 300 to 340. —Conybeare (Hibbert Journal)

2. Theologians of the past. [\[↩\]](#)

Martin Luther in his “*Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*” describes disagreements over the wording of the baptism as “pedantry” and argues for acceptance of baptisms in the name of Jesus if carried out with proper intent (section 3.14), which reads in part, “Baptism truly saves in whatever way it is administered, as long as it is not administered in the name of man but in the name of God.” Other theologians include the following:

- St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 AD) argues for a literal interpretation of the Luke’s records of baptisms in the name of Jesus, as accounted in Acts. [John Chrysostom. *Homily* on Acts X.44, 46 XXIV.

Chrysostom, in *Instructions to the Catechumens*, makes several references to Acts 2:38, but does not reference Matt 28:19 a single instance. Additionally, in his *Homily on Matthew*, Ch XXVIII, **he repeatedly quotes Matt 28:19 in what F.C. Conybeare called the “shorter Eusebian form”, suggesting the potential that Chrysostom and Eusebius of Caesarea referenced a common, earlier source for the Gospel of Matthew.]**

- St. Basil of Caesarea (330-378 AD) states that, “the naming of Christ is the confession of the whole.” [Basil. On the Holy Spirit, Book I, Ch 3]
- St. Ambrose, mentor to Augustine, argued for the validity of baptisms “in the name of Jesus.” [Ambrose. On the Holy Spirit, Book I, Ch 3]
- St. Augustine states that “those baptized into other names need to be rebaptized into Christ.” Elsewhere, he states knowledge of those who had been baptized into the name of Christ alone [outside the apostolic era]. and likewise argues for a literal interpretation of Acts 2:38 “in the name of Jesus”. [Augustine. To Petitianus, Ch 44, sect 104; On Baptism, Against the Donatists, Chs 28, 52]
- St. Thomas Aquinas (while arguing for Trinitarian baptism), states that the apostles (Peter, James, John, etc.) baptized in the name of Christ alone by “special dispensation.” (Whereas many modern scholars, by contrast, interpret the saying “in the name of Jesus Christ” figuratively instead of literally in an attempt to reconcile the two conflicting passages [Acts 2:38 and Matt. 28:19]). [Aquinas, Thomas. Summa Theologica, “On Baptism”.]
- The Baptist Standard Confession of 1660 declares baptisms in the name of “Jesus Christ” to be valid.

3. Catholic perspective. [\[↵\]](#)

Catholics acknowledge the discrepancy between the command in Matthew 28:19 to baptize in the triune name and the Apostles baptizing in the name of Jesus alone. In response, some of their authorities claim that the Apostles received “*special dispensation*” to do so.

“Owing to these texts some theologians have held that the Apostles baptized in the name of Christ only. St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, and Albertus Magnus are invoked as authorities for this opinion, they declaring **that the Apostles so acted by special dispensation**. Other writers, as Peter Lombard and Hugh of St. Victor, hold also that such baptism would be valid, but say nothing of a dispensation for the Apostles. The most probable opinion, however, seems to be that the terms “in the name of Jesus”, “in the name of Christ”, either refer to

baptism in the faith taught by Christ, or are employed to distinguish Christian baptism from that of John the Precursor. It seems altogether unlikely that immediately after Christ had solemnly promulgated the Trinitarian formula of baptism, the Apostles themselves would have substituted another.” —[Catholic Encyclopedia, Baptism, “Matter and form of the sacrament”](#). (Also found in the previously cited, [The Catholic Encyclopedia, II, p. 263](#))

The Jerusalem Bible. Is a Catholic translation of the Bible which first was introduced to the English-speaking public in 1966. The footnote on Matthew 28:19 reads as follows:

“g. It may be that this formula, so far as the fullness of its expression is concerned, **is a reflection of the liturgical usage established later in the primitive community.** It will be remembered that Ac speaks of baptising ‘in the name of Jesus’, cf. Ac 1:5+. But whatever the variation in formula, the underlying reality remains the same.” —*The Jerusalem Bible*, 1966, footnote on Matthew 28:19

4. Ellen G. White on Matthew 28:19. [[↩](#)]

EGW routinely quoted and commented on Matthew 28:19 in her writings using the KJV wording. However, it was clearly from a non-trinitarian perspective. One important quote is found below. (Please note that the bracketed words are from EGW herself.)

[RH, October 26, 1897 par. 9](#): Christ gave his followers a positive promise that after his ascension he would send them his Spirit. “Go ye therefore,” he said, “and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the **Father [a personal God]**, and of the **Son [a personal Prince and Saviour]**, and of the **Holy Ghost [sent from heaven to represent Christ]**: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

Here she says that the Father is a **personal God**, the Son is a **personal Prince and Savior** and the Holy Ghost is sent from heaven to **represent Christ**. Only one of the three is referred to as “God”. For there is one God, one Savior and one Spirit (the Spirit of Christ). In her own words:

[9T 189.3](#): Let them be thankful to God for His manifold mercies and be kind to one another. **They have one God and one Saviour; and one Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—is to bring unity into their ranks.**

Note in the above quote: not three Gods, but one God. This one God is the Father.

Her “Trinitarian” wording confined to Matthew 28:19. You will note that whenever you read wording in her writings that seems Trinitarian—i.e. “the three great (powers or dignitaries or authorities)”—it is almost always in the context of the baptismal formula found in Matthew 28:19. If you take away her quotes specific to the Matthew 28:19 baptismal formula, you find practically nothing else in her writings to support the Trinity, in keeping with her non-trinitarian stance throughout her life.

The other common use of the threefold name (“the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”) is when it is referring to divine powers, or attributes, or agencies—not divine persons.

Centered on Christ’s name. According to EGW, Christ’s name was to be pervasive among the disciples:

[AA 28.2](#): The disciples were to carry their work forward **in Christ’s name**. Their every word and act was to **fasten attention on His name**, as possessing that vital power by which sinners may be saved. Their faith was to **center in Him** who is the source of mercy and power. **In His name** they were to present their petitions to the Father, and they would receive answer. They were to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Christ’s name was to be their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing was to be recognized in His kingdom that did not **bear His name and superscription**.

Note that all her wording in the above quote (AA 28.2) is consistently centered on Christ’s name, all except for the reference to Matthew 28:19 which uses the threefold-name wording. In other words, according to EGW, *everything* the disciples did was centered on Christ’s name:

- In Christ’s name – their work
- In Christ’s name – their prayers
- In Christ’s name – their badge of distinction
- In Christ’s name – their bond of union
- In Christ’s name – their authority and source of success

“Their every word and act was to **fasten attention on His name**, as possessing that vital power by which sinners may be saved.” —Ibid.

Hebrew Matthew [\[e\]](#)

Several Church Fathers stated that the gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew.

- **Papias (c. 125-150 AD).** So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted them as he was able. [Eusebius; *Eccl. Hist.* 3:39]
- **Irenaeus (c. 170-180 AD).** Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and laying the foundation of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia. [*Against Heresies* 3:1]
- **Origen (c. 244 AD).** Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the first was written by Matthew, who was once a publican, but afterwards an apostle of Jesus Christ, and it was prepared for the converts from Judaism and published in the Hebrew language. [Eusebius; *Eccl. Hist.* 6:25]
- **Eusebius (315 AD).** For Matthew, who had at first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other peoples, committed his Gospel to writing in his native tongue, and thus compensated those whom he was obliged to leave for the loss of his presence. [Eusebius; *Eccl. Hist.* 3:24]
- **Epiphanius (370 AD).** They [The Nazarenes] have the Gospel according to Matthew quite complete in Hebrew, for this Gospel is certainly still preserved among them as it was first written, in Hebrew letters. [*Panarion* 29:9:4]
- **Jerome (382 AD).** Matthew, who is also Levi, and from a tax collector came to be an Apostle first of all evangelists composed a Gospel of Christ in Judea in the Hebrew language and letters, for the benefit of those of the circumcision who had believed, who translated it into Greek is not sufficiently ascertained. Furthermore, the Hebrew itself is preserved to this day in the library at Caesarea, which the martyr Pamphilus so diligently collected. I also was allowed by the Nazarenes who use this volume in the Syrian city of Borea to copy it. In which is to be remarked that, wherever the evangelist.... makes use of the testimonies of the Old Scripture, he does not follow the authority of the seventy translators [[i.e. Septuagint]], but that of the Hebrew. [*Lives of Illustrious Men*, Book 5]

This patristic tradition strongly suggests Matthew's Gospel was first written in Hebrew. But Papias' works survive only in rough quotation, mostly through Eusebius, and Irenaeus' comments may simply derive from Papias. Neither claims to have actually seen this Hebrew gospel, or even fragments of it. Whether the tradition is accurate, we cannot know—but no ancient manuscript of a Hebrew Matthew has ever been found. The story does not fit the evidence.

Shem Tov's gospel of Matthew. This brings us to Shem Tov's gospel of Matthew, the oldest surviving Hebrew text of Matthew, dated c. 1385 AD and compiled in eighteen manuscript pages. It is thought to derive from earlier Jewish copies.

The general consensus, however, is that this text is the work of a fluent Hebrew writer of the medieval period, showing clear signs of late origin. Rather than first-century idiom, it uses late Hebrew—for example, early rabbinic sources render “to repent” as לעשות תשובה (“to do repentance”), while late rabbinic and medieval sources use לחזור בתשובה (“to return in repentance”). Shem Tov's gospel uses the latter (e.g., Matt. 12:41).

Some passages are even less Hebraic than Matthew's Greek, and others show clear signs of Greek editing—interference a genuine first-century Hebrew Matthew should not display.

The evidence points instead to a Hebrew translation of another translation (possibly Spanish, Italian, or Arabic) of the Greek Matthew. David Bivin notes it was Shmuel Safrai's view that Shem Tov worked from a Hebrew translation of an Arabic version of Matthew (jerusalemperspective.com/4067/). Wikipedia's entry on “Shem Tob's Hebrew Gospel of Matthew” concurs, describing the text as a blend of “the Vulgate of southern France recension of Visigoth origin, the ordinary gloss of Laon or the University of Paris, the preaching and liturgy in Romance languages, and more recently Hebrew biblical and rabbinical expressions”—the product of collaborative, layered work over time.

This Hebrew Matthew may still be useful for studying Hebraic expressions within the Gospel, but as a composite text of later origin, its value otherwise is limited.

Notes on Mark

Content [\[↶\]](#) [\[↑\]](#) [\[↓\]](#)

Narrative features

[Form Analysis](#)

Narrative features

Long and detailed. Some of Mark's narratives are longer and more detailed than the parallel stories in Matthew and Luke. Examples:

- {5:1-20} *The Gadarene with an unclean spirit* (contrast Matthew 8:28-34)
- {5:21-43} *Jairus' daughter; woman ill for 12 years* (contrast Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 8:40-56)

Present tense. Mark prefers grammatical *present* tense while narrating past events. In contrast, Matthew and Luke often switch to *past* tense in their versions of the same story. Example:

- {1:12} ...the spirit drove him out into the wilderness.
[*Contrast with:*]
Matthew 4:1, "Then Jesus **was led** up into..."
Luke 4:1, "Then Jesus...**was led**...into the wilderness"

Human and emotive. Jesus' human and emotional state is often mentioned in Mark while omitted in Matthew and Luke. Examples:

- {1:41} Moved with compassion
- {3:5} ...with anger, grieved by the hardness of their hearts
- {6:6} And he was amazed at their unbelief
- {8:12} Sighing deeply in his spirit
- {10:14} ...he was indignant
- {10:21} ...he felt love for the man
- {11:12} Jesus was hungry
- {13:32} no one knows, not even the angels ... nor the Son
- {14:34} My soul is very sorrowful

Disciples' weaknesses and failures. Mark often portrays the disciples' weaknesses and failures. For example, they fail to understand (4:13; 6:51-52; 8:14-21), lack faith (4:40), self-interest (8:32; 9:32-34; 10:35-41), betray, deny, and forsake Jesus in the passion narrative (chapter 14). Mark does not record any redress of the disciples' faithlessness, such as the remorse of Judas (Matthew 27:3-10), the recovery of Peter (John 21:15-19)

or the post-resurrection reconciliation of the eleven disciples with Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:36-53; John 20:19-21:14).

Aramaic expressions. Mark often includes Aramaic and/or Hebrew words, phrases and customs which are largely absent in Matthew and Luke. For example, *Boanerges* (3:17), *Talitha koumi* (5:41), *Corban* (7:11), *Ephphatha* (7:34), *Bartimaeus son of Timaeus* (10:46), *Rabboni* (10:51), *Abba Father* (14:36), *Golgotha which means "Place of the Skull"* (15:22), *Eloi Eloi lima sabachthani* (15:34).

Latinisms. Mark uses many words and phrases borrowed from or influenced by Latin. Latin examples, *modius* (4:21, "basket" used to measure a peck; Gk. *μοδιον*), *speculator* (6:27, "executioner"; Gk. *σπεκουλατωρ*), *sextarius* (7:4, "pots"; Gk. *ξεστης*), *quadrans* (12:42, Roman copper coin; Gk. *κοδραντης*), *fragello* (15:15, "scourged"; Gk. *φραγελλω*), *praetorium* (15:16, governor's headquarters), *consilium dederunt* (3:6, "took counsel"; Gk. *συμβουλιον εδιδουν*), *in extremis esse* (5:23, "point of death"; Gk. *εσχατως εχει*), *satisfacere* (15:15, lit. "to make enough", Gk. *το ικανον ποιησαι*), *genua ponentes* (15:19, lit. "to place the knees"; Gk. *τιθεντες τα γονατα*).

Form Analysis

Inclusios and Intercalations. *Inclusio* encloses a section by using similar words, phrases, or themes at both the beginning and end. *Intercalation* encloses one story in the middle of a different story, so that each affects the interpretation of the other. Examples of each found in Mark are listed below.

1. {2:1-12} **Paralytic healed; Jesus' authority to forgive questioned.**
 - a. {vv.1-5} A paralytic brought to Jesus
 - x. {vv.6-10} Jesus' authority to forgive sins questioned
 - a'. {vv.11-12} Jesus heals the paralytic
2. {3:19b-35} **Jesus' family; strong man and his house.**
 - a. {vv.19b-21} Jesus' family goes out to restrain him
 - x. {vv.22-30} Binding the strong man
 - a'. {vv.31-35} Jesus' family arrives
3. {4:3-20} **Parable of the sower; mystery of the kingdom of God.**
 - a. {vv.3-9} Parable of the sower
 - x. {vv.10-12} Mystery of the kingdom of God
 - a'. {vv.13-20} Parable of the sower explained
4. {5:21-43} **Jairus' daughter; woman ill for 12 years.**

- a. {vv.21-24} Jairus asks Jesus to heal his dying daughter
 - x. {vv.25-34} Woman's twelve-year illness healed
 - a'. {vv.35-43} Jairus' daughter raised from the dead
5. {6:7-31} **Jesus sends out the twelve; death of John the Baptist.**
- a. {vv.7-13} Jesus sends out the twelve
 - x. {vv.14-29} Death of John the Baptist
 - a'. {vv.30-31} The twelve return and report
6. {11:12-26} **Cursed fig tree; temple cleansed.**
- a. {vv.12-14} Cursed fig tree
 - x. {vv.15-19} Temple cleansed
 - a'. {vv.20-26} Fig tree withered
7. {14:1-11} **Plot to kill Jesus; Jesus anointed.**
- a. {vv.1-2} Plot to kill Jesus
 - x. {vv.3-9} Jesus anointed
 - a'. {vv.10-11} Judas arranges to betray Jesus
8. {14:53-72} **Peter follows; Sanhedrin trial.**
- a. {vv.53-54} Peter follows into the courtyard
 - x. {vv.55-65} Sanhedrin trial
 - a'. {vv.66-72} Peter denies Jesus three times

Two discourses. Mark's gospel is light on discourses except for two prominent concentrations of teaching in chapters 4 and 13. The first one is at the chiastic center of its section and the second one is at the end.

- {4:1-34} Parables of Jesus
- {13:1-37} Time of Tribulation

Notes on Luke

Content [\[↶\]](#) [\[↑\]](#) [\[↓\]](#)

- Luke 1:35 “*The* holy spirit will come upon you”
[Luke 12:10](#) “blasphemes against the holy spirit”
[Luke 16:19-31](#) “a certain rich man and Lazarus”
[Luke 23:43](#) “today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Luke 1:35, “*The* holy spirit will come upon you”

The full verse reads as follows:

Luke 1:35: The angel answered her, “***The* holy spirit will come upon you**, and *the* power of *the* Most High will overshadow you; therefore the holy child that is to be born will be called the Son of God.

“***The* holy spirit.**” There is no article “the” before “holy spirit” (Greek, *pneuma hagian*) in this verse. Therefore, it is not referring to a proper name or a person, but to a kind of influence: *spirit* as opposed to flesh, holy in the sense of separation from all fleshly defilement.

“***The* power of the Most High.**” Likewise, there is no article “the” in the original Greek for either “power” or “Most High.” This further indicates that the cause is the power of God. God’s name in v.32 is “Most High,” and Jesus is called “Son of the Most High.” In this verse (v.35), he is also called “the Son of God.” The term “Most High” corresponds in Hebrew to *El Elyon*, “the Most High God.” It is common in Hebrew to state something and then repeat it in different words—a practice found throughout the Old Testament. Thus “holy spirit” and “Most High” can be considered equivalent in this verse, referring to two attributes of the same divine entity, namely, the Father.

Not the Son of the holy spirit. Nowhere in the Bible is Jesus called the “Son of the Holy Spirit,” though he is called the “Son of the Most High,” “Son of God,” and “Son of the Father.” In her song of praise (Luke 1:46–55), Mary understood the “Holy Spirit” to be another name for God, since she also used the title, “Mighty One.”

Jesus’ true father. Many appeal to this verse, along with Matthew 1:18–20, to argue that the “person” of the holy spirit is Christ’s true father, since the spirit caused the conception. However, the New Testament, without exception, declares God the Father to be the true Father of Jesus. The “spirit” in these verses is not “the” Holy Spirit—since the article

“the” is absent in the original Greek—but simply “holy spirit,” an influence rather than a “person.”

Luke 12:10, “blasphemes against the holy spirit” [\[↗\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Luke 12:10: And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever **blasphemes against the holy spirit** will not be forgiven.

Blasphemy against the holy spirit is also mentioned in Matthew (12:30–32) and Mark (3:28–29). In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees’ accusation that he was casting out demons by the prince (or ruler) of demons. Jesus’ response is that if Satan casts out Satan, then he is divided against himself, and such a kingdom cannot stand. However, if Jesus is casting out demons “by the **spirit of God**, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matthew 12:28). Thus, the context in Matthew and Mark shows that “blasphemy against the spirit” (Matthew 12:31) occurs when someone attributes the work of God to Satan. Such a declaration—and the underlying belief behind it—is blasphemy, and it is unpardonable.

Luke also tells the story of Jesus casting out demons, in Luke 11:14–20. However, his comment concerning blasphemy against the spirit does not appear in that account; it comes later, in chapter 12. The context there is different, and in fact quite sparse, which leaves room for various interpretations. It would appear that Luke is speaking of one’s confession before others—whether given freely or under trial, before rulers and authorities. If one’s testimony regarding the Son of Man denies that it is the work of God, that person is blaspheming against the spirit of God, and this sin is unpardonable.

Luke 16:19-31, “a certain rich man and Lazarus” [\[↗\]](#)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is *not* a literal story. It should be obvious from the story itself that it is satire and fictional. Here are a few glaring, “unreal” aspects to the story:

1. **Impossible conversation.** Can people in “Hades” really speak directly to people in Heaven? If so, can you imagine the constant “chatter” they would produce given their constant suffering in the flames? Talk about a nagging wife! There would be no end to their complaining to those in Heaven, and who could blame them?
2. **Heaven, not heaven.** Heaven would not be heaven if the saved were allowed to see those in “Hades” suffering everlasting torment, crying out

for help and relief, and yet not be allowed (or be willing) to extend some form of relief even “to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool” their tongues (v.24). Such behavior is entirely out of character to what Jesus taught and what Christians practiced on earth—to show loving kindness and mercy to the poor, needy, and the suffering. It is inconceivable that this hard-hearted behavior of the saved could bring everlasting joy in Heaven.

3. Logically inconsistent. In the story, the rich man asks for Lazarus to dip his finger in water and come over and cool his tongue (v.24). The man is engulfed in flames, in complete agony, and is merely asking for a drop of water on the tongue! Are you kidding me? Who in their right mind would ask for drops when buckets full of water is in order? Such a request is illogical, ludicrous and goofy.

4. Contradicts Scripture. What about Psalm 6:5 which says there is no remembrance in death; or, those who die are asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16)?

Purpose of the parable. Consider the context. This parable was aimed at the Pharisees, “who were lovers of money,” and who were “ridiculing Jesus” (v14). Jesus chose to meet their ridicule with satire. If they couldn’t handle the truth as taught by Jesus, maybe a fabulous story could get through their thick skulls. And so, he tells them the fictional story of the rich man and Lazarus. Which, according to Karel Hanhart, was not an entirely made-up story. Mr. Hanhart uncovered some seven different versions of this parable floating around in Jesus’ day (see Karel Hanhart, *The Intermediate State in the New Testament*, 1966). All Jesus had to do was modify his version to suit his purposes on that occasion.

The key lesson in this parable is that the choices we make with the use of wealth and earthly possessions in this life matters in the next one. Effectively, Jesus was rebuking their covetousness. It also points to the hard-hearted, unbelieving condition of the Pharisees. It was not that they did not have enough information to go on: “They have Moses and the Prophets; they can listen to them” (v.29). But if they would not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither would they listen even if someone rose from the dead (v.31). In the end, this parable became a prophecy in that they maintained their unbelief in the face of the real-life Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, and of Jesus himself rising from the dead.

An attempt by many to derive theological truths regarding the after-life from this fictional story misses the point of the story. The purpose of the parable was not to provide a complete theological treatise on the subject of the afterlife, but to expose the moral condition of the listeners and drive home a message of rebuke.

Luke 23:43, “today, you will be with me in Paradise.” [\[↗\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Luke 23:43 (CHI): Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

Most translators put the comma *before* the word “today” not *after* as is done in this translation. Placing the comma *after* the word “today” makes more sense for the following reasons:

Luke’s preference. In 14 of the 20 occurrences of the word “today” (Greek, *sēmeron*), Luke had a definite tendency of linking this adverb with the preceding verb in both Luke and Acts (Luke 2:11; 5:26; 12:28; 13:32, 33; 22:34, 61; Acts 19:40; 20:26; 22:3; 24:21; 26:2, 29; 27:33). This form is not only acceptable in terms of grammar, but it is also in complete agreement with Luke’s literary style. Of the other six occurrences, only one is freely placed before the verb (Acts 4:9). And, in the other five, one is quoting Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), and in three cases, “today” is preceded by a conjunction (Luke 4:21; 19:5, 9).

Context. Jesus promised Paradise to the thief on the cross. There is no question that what Jesus meant was heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) or the New Jerusalem (Revelation 2:7; 22:1-5). If so, then how could the thief be with Jesus in Paradise that day (i.e. Friday) when Jesus himself would remain in the grave until the third day (Sunday)? Moreover, we know that Jesus had not yet gone to heaven even after the resurrection, because he told Mary that very thing (John 20:17, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father”).

Textual evidence. The oldest manuscript on Luke (*Papyrus 75*) has no punctuation here. Other later manuscripts have punctuation *after* “today” (e.g. *Codex Vaticanus* and *Minuscule 339*), not *before*. Nevertheless, understand that punctuation marks was not an integral part of the original autographs. The copyists placed punctuation wherever the theological conviction prevailed at the time.

Idiomatic. We should regard the phrase, “Truly I say to you *today*...” as an idiomatic way to emphasize the significance of the announcement, no more and no less. What the thief asked Jesus was to be remembered in his kingdom, and this is exactly what Jesus promised him.

Notes on John

Content [\[↶\]](#) [\[↑\]](#)

John 1:1	“the word”
John 1:1b	“was of God”
John 1:13	“was born”
John 1:18	“only begotten”
John 1:29	“takes away the sin of the world!”
John 3:5	“born of water and spirit”
John 4:24	“God is spirit”
John 5:18	“making himself equal with God”
John 8:58	“before Abraham was, I am <i>the one</i> .”
John 10:6	“Jesus spoke to them this proverb”
John 10:30	“I and the Father are one.”
John 12:41	“Isaiah...saw the Lord’s glory”
John 14:6	“I am the way, the truth, and the life”
John 14:16-21	“another Paraclete”
John 15:26	“When the Paraclete comes”
John 17:5	“before the world [<i>of people</i>]”
John 20:28	“My Lord and my God!”

John 1:1 “the word”

The term “word” comes from the Greek word *logos* (G3056). This term (*logos*) is used 331 times in the New Testament, and the wide range of meanings come down along two basic lines of thought. One is the mind and products of the mind like “reason,” and the other is the expression of that reason as a “word,” “saying,” “command,” etc. Given the wide range of meanings, a careful study of the context will give the proper interpretation. However, even given its wide range of meanings, from a lexical definition, *logos* does not refer to a person. It does not mean “Jesus”. You cannot translate this verse to say, “In the beginning was Jesus.” Nor can you imply that it means Jesus by capitalizing the term to read “the Word”. To do so would suggest you are no longer translating but interpreting the passage. This is in fact what translators have done some seven (7) or so times in the New Testament (depending on the translation) of the 331 occurrences of the term *logos*. How they determine the capitalization is

not lexical but creedal, with a desire to uphold a particular dogma in their belief system.

How Greek and Jewish readers understood the term “logos.” Long before the gospel of John was written, the word *logos* had a rich tradition in Greek and Jewish thought. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, applied the term *logos* to “reasoned discourse” or “the argument” in the field of rhetoric. Other Greek philosophers had similar views and understanding of *logos*. To Jewish readers the *logos* was understood along the lines of the Aramaic term *memra* which means “word”.

Memra. “The Word,” in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of **God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind**; a term used especially in the Targum as a substitute for “the Lord” when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided. ... In the ancient Church liturgy, adopted from the Synagogue, it is especially interesting to notice how often the term “Logos,” in the sense of “the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man,” was changed into “Christ”. —Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906, on “MEMRA”.

The original idea of *logos* to the Jewish mind was “the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man.” There were other philosophical ideas as well which included the Wisdom and Reason, the Mind, the Intellect of God. One scholar postulates perhaps “the Disposing Power of God” would be a good translation for *logos*.

Thus, no first-time reader in John’s day, whether Greek or Jew, would have read John 1:1 and understood it to mean, “Jesus,” or *any* person, for that matter; but rather that it was about God and His *spoken* word or His reason or wisdom.

Personification of logos. The Old Testament is known to personify God’s word (and wisdom) on many occasions. For example,

- *Psalms 107:20*: He **sends his word**, and heals them, and delivers them from their graves.
- *Psalms 147:15*: He **sends out** his commandment to the earth. **His word runs** very swiftly.
- *Proverbs 1:20*: Wisdom **calls aloud** in the street. She **utters her voice** in the public squares.
- *Isaiah 55:11*: So will **My word** be which **goes forth** from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing **what pleases Me**, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Thus, God's word becomes an agent which God sends out on a mission. God's word is more than mere speaking.

Pronouns that follow and relate to *logos*. Given that this was, most likely, the understanding of the first-time Greek and Jewish reader in John's day, then what follows in the passage is the handling and translation of the pronouns that relate to the term *logos*. In this case, the two pronouns that follow and relate are *houtos* [G3778] and *autou* [G846] in verses 2-5. *Houtos* as well as *autou* can be he, she, or it; depending on the context. The context of this passage (John 1:2-5) is that it is referring to "the word" (*ho logos*) of the previous verse which we have already determined to mean the word of God, not a he or she, but an "it".

John's master theme. The master theme in the gospel of John is this: **Jesus proclaimed the word of God.** Understand that the historical meaning of the *logos* is "the word of God"—it is His Wisdom, His Reason, His Disposing Power. Every word in the Gospel of John was to express and to proclaim the words and works of God the Father. This is what Jesus declared:

- These are my Father's words (John 14:24).
- These are my Father's works (John 14:10).

The Father spoke *through* the Son; the Father did His works *through* the Son. Effectively, the word was about God—it was God the Father whom Jesus came to reveal. With this understanding, a paraphrased version of John 1:1 could read:

John 1:1 (paraphrased): In the continuum of time [from Creation to Prophecy to the Present] was God's word (the *logos*) proclaimed, and the word (the *logos*) belonged to God ["with" God: He possessed it; it is an integral part of who He is], and the word (the *logos*) had divine attributes ["God" in a qualitative sense].

Jesus fulfilled what God had sent him to do. Jesus himself declared that his mission was accomplished in his final prayer in Gethsemane where he said:

John 17:3-17: And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, **having accomplished the work that you gave me to do . . .** ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For **I have given them the words that you gave me . . .** ¹⁴ **I have given them your word . . .** ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; **your word is truth.**

Before Pilate, Jesus gave a similar message, when he declared his mission

was “to bear witness to the truth” which is by implication the word of God.

John 18:37: Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—**to bear witness to the truth**. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

This thought is again echoed in Hebrews,

Hebrews 1:1-2: Long ago, at many times and in many ways, **God spoke** to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

Jesus gave us the *logos* of God. Jesus gave us the words and works of God. In the past, God communicated the *logos* by the prophets, but in our time He gave us the *logos* by His Son. The *logos* (i.e. God’s word) became incarnate in His Son because he gave it so effectively. Jesus is the *logos* of God because he was a perfect representation of the word of God. What Jesus accomplished in his life by perfectly living by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4) is the pattern for every Christian. We are to speak the word of God and we are to do the works of God.

John 1:1b “was of God” [\[e\]](#)

In John 1:1b, the phrase “and the word was *of* God,” as rendered in *The Chiastic Word*, is more commonly translated by others as “and the Word was *with* God.” The underlying Greek expression is *pros ton theon*. The interpretation advanced here is that *pros ton theon* in John 1:1b is better understood as “was *of* God”—that is, belonging to, pertaining to, or proceeding from God—rather than the traditional rendering, “was *with* God.” This reading can be supported by several independent lines of evidence, which are explored below.

1. The primary meaning of *pros* is not “with” (in the sense of accompaniment). The Greek preposition *pros*, when governing the accusative case (as it does in *pros ton theon*), has as its root sense “toward,” “in relation to,” or “pertaining to.” The translation “with” in the sense of one person existing *alongside* another is, statistically speaking, quite rare. Out of roughly 700 occurrences of *pros* in the Greek New Testament, only about 24 translate it as “with” in the sense of one thing being alongside or in the presence of another—meaning “alongside” is far from its primary meaning or use.

This matters greatly, because the standard English translation (“the

Word was *with* God”) implies a kind of spatial or personal co-presence—two beings standing side by side—which is a heavily loaded theological reading that the Greek does not require and arguably does not support.

2. The parallel usage in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1—the identical phrase.

This is perhaps the single strongest grammatical argument available. The exact phrase *pros ton theon* (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) appears not only in John 1:1–2 but also in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1, and in those texts, virtually every major translation renders it quite differently:

- **Hebrews 2:17:** “...a merciful and faithful high priest *in things pertaining to God*” (πρὸς τὸν θεόν)
- **Hebrews 5:1:** “...ordained for men *in things pertaining to God*” (πρὸς τὸν θεόν)

Since the same phrase is used in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1 as in John 1:1, and in those Hebrews texts it is translated “pertaining to God,” this demonstrates that “*pros ton theon*” does not exclusively mean “with” in the sense of one person being present with another. The translators themselves acknowledge a “pertaining to” sense in Hebrews but suppress it in John—a disparity that is difficult to justify on purely grammatical grounds and looks more like a theologically *biased* choice than a lexical one.

3. The testimony of Philo of Alexandria—a contemporary Jewish reader. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC – c. 50 AD) is the ideal witness here: he was a Greek-speaking Jewish philosopher writing in Alexandria at almost exactly the time John’s Gospel was composed, and he used the Greek *logos* concept extensively. Crucially, Philo uses *pros theon* in a sense that aligns with “pertaining to” or “belonging to God” rather than “alongside God.” Philo speaks of three kinds of life, one of which is *pros theon*—related to God, characteristic of God—and elsewhere speaks of things *pros theon* as things pertaining to God, belonging to Him.

This is highly significant. In Philo, the Logos is God’s self-expression—it is *of* God, proceeding *from* God, belonging *to* God. It is the instrument through which God acts. This is entirely consistent with the “of God” / “pertaining to God” reading of John 1:1b, and it is the reading a first-century Greek-speaking Jewish reader would most naturally arrive at.

4. John’s own preference: *para* and *meta* for personal presence. Another revealing line of evidence comes from John’s own Gospel, where he consistently uses *different* prepositions when he actually wants to convey the idea of one person being *present with* another. Elsewhere in John’s Gospel, John uses *para* to express the idea of proximity of one

person to another (John 1:39; 4:40; 8:38; 14:17, 23, 25; 19:25), and never uses *pros* for this purpose.

This is a decisive internal argument. If John had wanted to say that the *logos* was personally *alongside* God—existing as a distinct person in God’s presence—he had perfectly good words to do it with, and he used them elsewhere. The fact that he used *pros* instead of *para* or *meta* in John 1:1 strongly suggests he did not intend a simple co-presence of two persons. He was expressing a relational, possessive, or emanative connection—the *logos* as God’s own word, belonging to and proceeding from God.

5. The Hebrew background: “with” as possession. The *Chiastic Word* on John 1:1b makes a key point about the Hebraic background of John’s language, citing Proverbs 11:2 and 13:10. This is well grounded in how Hebrew prepositions work. In Biblical Hebrew, the preposition *עִם* (*im*, “with”) frequently encodes *possession* rather than mere accompaniment. The Hebrew preposition *לָמַד* (לָ) similarly acts as a periphrastic genitive expressing possession—as in *סֵפֶר הַחַיִּים לְמֹשֶׁה*, “the book belongs to Moses.” The same possessive logic applies to *im*: to say wisdom is “with the humble” (Prov. 11:2) is to say the humble *possess* wisdom, not merely that wisdom stands next to them.

When Greek authors translated these Hebrew idioms, they often carried this possessive sense into Greek, using *pros*, *para*, and related constructions. John, steeped in this tradition, would naturally deploy *pros ton theon* to communicate that the *logos* belonged to God, proceeded from God, was God’s own—not that it was a separate person standing alongside God.

The Wisdom literature provides another close parallel. Proverbs 8:30 — “Then I was beside Him, as a master workman”—uses the Hebrew *amon*, often translated as a nursling or craftsman *with* God, and was linked by early commentators to John 1:2, “The Word was with God.” But in Proverbs, Wisdom is clearly *God’s* wisdom—it is not a second divine person, but the attribute and word of God personified. The *pros* in John 1:1b most naturally reflects this same Wisdom-literature idiom: the *logos* is of God, as wisdom is of God.

6. External Greek literature: *pros* as “pertaining to” or “characteristic of”. Beyond the New Testament, classical and Hellenistic Greek literature regularly uses *pros* with the accusative to convey what pertains or belongs to something. Liddell-Scott-Jones (LSJ), the standard lexicon of ancient Greek, lists among the uses of *pros* with the accusative: “in relation to,” “with reference to,” “in accordance with,” and “characteristic of.” This last category is particularly apt.

For example, in classical Greek one could say something is *pros ti-nos* — “of/pertaining to someone”—to indicate it belongs to their nature or domain. Daniel 2:22 in the Septuagint states that “light dwells with God” (*pros* construction), where no one understood “light” to be a second divine person—it simply belongs to God, it is God’s.

This broad classical usage confirms that a Greek reader in the first century would not have been jarred by *pros ton theon* meaning “pertaining to God” or “of God.” On the contrary, this would have been a natural and well-understood way to express the Logos as something that belonged to, proceeded from, or was characteristic of God.

7. The structural confirmation: John 1:1 as a whole. Read through the lens of the “of God” interpretation, John 1:1 forms an elegant and logically progressive statement:

- **1:1a** — “In the beginning was the *logos*”: the *logos* pre-existed
- **1:1b** — “and the *logos* was of God (*pros ton theon*)”: it belonged to, emanated from, and pertained to God
- **1:1c** — “and the *logos* was divine (*theos*)”: in nature it was God-like, divine in character

This reading has a natural rhetorical momentum—moving from the *logos*’s pre-existence, to its source (God), to its nature (divine). By contrast, the traditional reading creates an awkward redundancy: “the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God”—which raises the obvious question of how a person who *is* God can simultaneously be *with* God as a distinct entity, a tension that has occupied centuries of Trinitarian theology.

Summary. The case for translating *pros ton theon* as “was of God” rests on at least five independent lines of evidence:

1. The primary and dominant meaning of *pros* is not “alongside” but “toward” or “pertaining to.”
2. The identical phrase in Hebrews 2:17 and 5:1 is universally translated “pertaining to God”—with no theological controversy.
3. Philo of Alexandria, John’s closest contemporary Jewish parallel, uses *pros theon* to mean “belonging to” or “characteristic of” God.
4. John himself uses *para* and *meta* when he means personal presence—never *pros*.
5. The Hebrew background of “with” as possession (not accompaniment) is the native conceptual soil from which John’s Greek grew.

Together, these arguments constitute a strong cumulative case that the traditional “was with God” translation, while not grammatically impossible, is a theologically motivated reading that imposes a Greek philosophical framework of two co-eternal persons onto what John intended as a Hebraically rooted statement about the divine origin and character of God’s own word.

John 1:13 “was born” [\[↵\]](#)

The singular phrase “*was* born” is the minority view and you will find that the overwhelming majority of translations read “*were* born”. The Greek texts are *all* plural, and most Latin and Syriac texts are plural. However, there are some older Latin textual variants that are singular, some Syriac texts that have a plural subject but a singular verb, and there are several Church Fathers who quote the text in the singular. These Church Fathers are fairly spread apart geographically speaking—**Justin** in Palestine, **Hippolytus** in Rome, **Irenaeus** in Gaul, **Tertullian** in Africa, **Origen** in Alexandria and the *Epistula Apostolorum* in Syria. Taking into account the fact that all these patristic testimonies that present John 1:13 in singular appear *before* the 4th century, and the manuscripts that present the plural version appear *after* the 4th century, several authors have reason to believe that the oldest reading of the text was the singular.

This interpretation finds strong support in a text from Tertullian (*De carne Christi*, 19, 1-2) against the Valentinians. According to Tertullian, these heretics had intentionally changed the text from singular to plural, wishing to present themselves as those chosen, spiritual beings born of God, thereby omitting all other baptized from this category. It should be noted that most of the manuscripts containing the text in plural proceed from this area where the controversy with the Valentinians took place.

The internal evidence also adds support to the singular reading—analyzing various elements of the text such as the grammar (aorist tense, use of personal pronoun and verb forms), John’s use of vocabulary, the structure, the context, the Johannine style, the polemical thrust of the verse, the coherence between v. 13 and Johannine theology and so on. All of this is analyzed in great detail in the following reference: “*The Birth of Jesus or the Birth of Christians? An Inquiry into the Authenticity of John 1:13*” [\[full PDF\]](#) by Denis S. Kulandaisamy. (Cautionary note: The author is a Catholic priest and provides a Mariological interpretation in the end—i.e. “the virginity of Mary,” a Catholic dogma—which is an extraneous conclusion, even given the thorough and compelling analysis of John 1:13.)

Here are just five of the 22 reasons listed in the previous reference which favor the singular reading of John 1:13.

1. The antecedent to the first word in the verse, *ohi* [G3739: “which”] does not match any antecedent in the prior verse (v. 12). For grammatical reasons, both *tekna* [G5043: “sons”] and *pisteuousin* [G4100: “that believe”] in verse 12 are not suitable in tense to *ohi* in verse 13. Given this, the singular is more likely the original. [*Ibid.* p. 128]
2. The aorist of *genesthai* [G1096: “to become”] is never used by John when speaking of Christians. Rather, John always employs the *perfect* tense in both the gospel and first letter of John. [*Ibid.* pp. 129-131]
3. The personal pronoun *autou* [G846: “his”] at the end of verse 12 is in the singular and should continue in the singular of the relative pronoun *ohi* [G3739: “which”] in verse 13. [*Ibid.* p. 131]
4. The *present* tense of *pisteuousin* [G4100: “that believe”] in verse 12 requires either an atemporal present or perfect tense in verse 13, but there is only an aorist tense in verse 13. [*Ibid.* p. 131]
5. The first word *kai* [G2532: “and”] in verse 14 connects this verse with verse 13. In verse 14 we have the well-known phrase, “and the word became flesh,” which is obviously referring to Jesus. Given that the conjunction *kai* connects both verses 13 and 14, then they are both dealing with the same theme, the Incarnation of Jesus. If they were *not* dealing with the same thing, then there would not be the conjunction *kai*.

John 1:18 “only begotten” [\[↩\]](#)

The Greek word *monogenēs* [G3439] is here and elsewhere translated as “only begotten.” It is found nine times in the New Testament—three in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38), five by the apostle John (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9) and once in Hebrews (Hebrews 11:17). Those found in Luke are all generally translated as “only son” or “only daughter” while the reference in Hebrews which is speaking of Isaac and the ones in John which all refer to the Son of God are translated either as “only” or “only and unique” or “one and only” or “only begotten.” The translators seem to have a difficult time figuring out how to properly and consistently translate the word, especially when it is referring to the Son of God. The reason for this is not because of a lack of clarity with the meaning of the word or some variance in the grammar, but because the translators invariably bring their creedal baggage to the table and are uncertain how to make the translation fit with their particular theology.

Root fallacy. First, most Greek scholars take a semantic reductionistic approach to Greek words and, in the case of *monogenēs*, assume the whole (*monogenēs*) is the sum of its parts (*mono-genes*). Where, *mono*

means “only” and *genes* (or *genos*) can mean either species, race, family, offspring, kind, or even “nation”. But this is not always the way a word should be analyzed. In fact, Greek scholars are found to fall into the “root fallacy” trap from time to time in which the meaning of a word is attempted by studying the component parts, which does not always follow.

For example, in English, the word “butterfly” does not mean a “butter-fly”. That is, a “butterfly” is not a stick of butter flying through the air. It’s actually an insect with pretty wings. Also, there is no butter in butternut squash or egg in eggplant, no ham in hamburger or apple in pineapple, and so on. In the same way, the Greek word *monogenes* does not necessarily encode *mono-genes*, but requires a study of its *usage* to fully determine its true meaning.

So then, how is *monogenes* *used* in the Bible? That’s easy. In all the cases where *monogenes* is *not* referring to Jesus, *monogenes* involves an only child of a father or mother. That is, it is an only child “birthed” by a mother or “begotten” by a father. Now the word “begotten” is not commonly used these days, but the meaning is well understood.

Definition of *begotten*. Something is *begotten* when it has been generated by procreation—in other words, it has been fathered. A somewhat old-fashioned adjective, *begotten* is the past participle of the verb *beget*, which means to father or produce as offspring.

In the case of a mother, a son is one that has been “birthed” by her. In the case of a father, a son has been “begotten”—men *beget* children while women give birth to children. Example usage: “They hoped that the King might *beget* an heir by his new queen.” However, in the Bible, even women are said to *beget* (i.e. Luke 7:12). But this should not be a problem in understanding. The idea is the same—a child is *begotten* by a parent.

Baseline theology. C.S. Lewis provides at least a baseline to work from in this regard. This is what he says (in “*Mere Christianity*”, Book IV – Chapter 1, “Making and Begetting”):

When we speak of the Son being “begotten”, we are not talking about the incarnation. One of the creeds says that Christ is the Son of God “begotten, not created”; and it adds “begotten by his Father before all worlds.” Will you please get it quite clear that this has nothing to do with the fact that when Christ was born on earth as a man, that man was the son of a virgin? We are not now thinking about the Virgin Birth. We are thinking about something that happened before Nature was created at all, before time began. “Before all worlds” Christ is begotten, not created.

(i) To beget means to have something of the same kind. To beget

is to become the father of: to create is to make. And the difference is this. When you beget, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds.

(ii) To make is to make something of a different kind. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set—or he may make something more like himself than a wireless set: say, a statue. If he is a clever enough carver he may make a statue which is very like a man indeed. But, of course, it is not a real man; it only looks like one. It cannot breathe or think. It is not alive.

(iii) There is a difference between making and begetting. What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.

At minimum, therefore, we should be able to agree (theologically) on at least the following:

1. **Not a Son of creation.** God the Father did not create His Son. If He had done so, then that would have meant His Son was of a different *kind*. See C.S. Lewis' argument with respect to "kind" in the already mentioned comments above under, "(ii) To make is to make something of a different kind."
2. **But a Son begotten, of the same substance of the Father.** Rather, God the Father *begat* His Son. To beget a son means to bring forth a son of one's own genetic makeup (humanly speaking), of one's own substance. How that happened with the Son of God has not been revealed and is unknowable. Some suggest the creation of Adam and Eve is a type of how it may have occurred. That is, Adam came into existence from the dust of the ground and the breath of God, while Eve came from the "bosom" or "side" of Adam (i.e. "he took one of his ribs," Gen. 2:21, KJV). But, again, it has not been revealed to us and we should forever hold it as a mystery.
3. **Men are sons of God by adoption.** Scripture reserves the term *hui-othesia* ("adoption as sons") exclusively for redeemed humanity—never once applying it to Christ. Human sonship is a legal and relational status *conferred* through the plan of salvation: decided beforehand in the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 1:5), secured by the redemptive work of Christ "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5), received at

conversion through the witness of the spirit (Rom. 8:15), and **appropriated by the individual only through faith** (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). This adoption, though already possessed in part, awaits its full and final realization at the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23), just as it was once the corporate covenant privilege of Israel before being extended, through Christ, to all who believe (Rom. 9:4; Gal. 3:29).

“Eternal sonship” a self-contradiction. Beyond the baseline theology outlined above, theologians throughout time have raised a powerful objection to the concept of a literal Son of God. It reads something like the following:

How could God the Father, a divine, *eternal* being give birth to another divine, *eternal* being? True sonship involves a “birthing” process at some point in time. That is to say, a son has a beginning—at one point in time he was not, and then he comes into existence. But if the Son of God is divine and *eternal*, then he cannot have a beginning, because *eternal* implies no beginning. Therefore, the Son of God cannot be a literal son.

Thus, most theologians throughout the centuries have subscribed to a metaphorical Father and Son, as some kind of divine “actors” in a play. That is to say, at some point in eternity past, one of the divine beings took on the role of Son and the other the role of Father.

The problem, of course, is that the Bible does not teach this. Nowhere in the Bible do we have even a hint that the Father and Son are role playing. Rather, to the contrary, Jesus not only called God the Father his father, but he encouraged us to call Him affectionately, “Abba, Father.” Right after the Resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene, “*I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*” (John 20:17). We are the Father’s sons by adoption. This is not just for the here and now, but for eternity. Our adoption as sons to the Father is not a metaphor.

While Jesus is God’s true Son (Matthew 3:17; John 3:16; Hebrews 3:6, etc.), ours is that of adoption as sons that will last for eternity. “We are God’s children now. It has not yet been revealed what we will be; but we know that when he appears, we will be like him; for we will see him just as he is” (1 John 3:2). We will be like Jesus because he has chosen to remain like us, as the Son of Man, forever. “For both he who sanctifies [i.e. *Christ*] and those who are sanctified are all from one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Hebrews 2:11). Thus, we are sons together with Christ—Christ literally and we by adoption—with God as our Father. This is the plain and simple teaching of Scripture. Eternity will not change this relationship whatsoever.

If Jesus said God is his Father and our Father, then so be it. If the

Father said that Jesus was His only begotten Son, then so be it. This is the testimony of the Father and this is the testimony of the Son.

1 John 5:11-12: And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

The Biblical concept of “eternal.” Then what do we do with the issue of the “eternal” nature of the Son? Again, we have to go back to the *usage* of the term. How was *eternal* understood by the Hebrews and the Greeks in biblical times? First, it should be clear that *eternal* to a Hebrew or Greek did not mean forever and ever, without beginning and end. This is best illustrated with the use of the term “eternal fire” in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

When Jude 1:7 speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah being punished with “eternal fire,” he was not saying that the fire would never go out, but that the fire would burn until the cities were consumed. To those living in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, it was eternal. But, to those looking from outside those cities, it was not. Thus, it was *eternal* in a relative sense.

This is also true with God. He does not dwell in time because, if God is God, then he is not bound by time; or any aspect of His creation, for that matter. He created time. Time is a “dimension” of *our* creation. Given that God does not dwell in time because He created it, then He must dwell in eternity—a dimension we have no conception of because we are bound to our created order which includes the dimension of time. Therefore, to say that the Son of God is *eternal* is to say he came into existence outside our dimension of time and into God’s dimension of eternity. What that looks like to us mere mortals, bound by the dimension of time, is not knowable until we enter eternity when Christ comes. Then we will know even as we are known.

Arianism. Invariably, those opposed to the belief that Jesus Christ is the *literal* Son of God, as the Scriptures teach, will label it as “Arian” or “Arianism” and call it a heresy. The argument goes that this subject was discussed at length by an ecumenical council in 325 AD (i.e. the Synod of Nicaea) and that this matter has already been settled by the Church. The appeal is, therefore, to Church *authority*, over and above the Scriptures. If the Church says it’s heresy, then it’s heresy.

Unfortunately, what Arius or Arianism taught can hardly be known, given that all Arian writings were destroyed by order of civil and papal authorities on penalty of death. Only three surviving letters *attributed* to Arius survive. Not enough to be certain what he actually taught. Thus, it is futile to have a debate on the subject of Arianism when only one side of the argument is known—the side of those who opposed it.

Also, the appeal to Church *authority* has no value to one who believes that Church authority is subject to the authority of the Scriptures (i.e. *sola Scriptura*). “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Let the one who argues against the *literal* reading of Christ’s sonship prove it from Scripture and Scripture alone.

If the Scriptures tell us that God ***gave*** us His only Son (John 3:16), then God must have had an only Son to ***give***.

John 1:29 “takes away the sin of the world!” [!\[\]\(bad0b78bca05a176505bcd9fc79688ad_img.jpg\)](#)

John 1:29. This verse reads:

John 1:29: On the next day John saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the **Lamb of God**, who **takes away** the sin of the world!”

When Jews heard John the Baptist declare, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” they had no Old Testament scriptural context for understanding this statement in terms of penal substitution. Rather, they would have understood Jesus figuratively as the lamb God provides—the means or mechanism of reconciliation between God and humanity—by leading people to remove sin from their lives.

“Takes away”. First, the phrase “takes away” translates the Greek word *airon*, which literally means “to remove.” In this sense, Jesus functions as a lamb involved in the process of **removing sin** from the world. This “removal” has nothing to do with the transfer of sin, since sin is not a physical substance that can be relocated from one being to another. One cannot transfer love, hatred, virtue, vice, or sinful actions. When a person removes the sinful habit of lying from their life, nothing is transferred elsewhere; the habit simply ceases. Jesus functions in this same way—as the one who leads and enables people to abandon sinful practices by removing them.

Analogous to fat loss. The removal of sin may be analogized to the loss of fat in the human body. When a person loses weight through dietary restriction and/or exercise, **fat loss** occurs through a biochemical process called **oxidation**, not dissolution. Fat is literally **burned** for energy. In this context, “burning” is not a metaphor but a chemical reality: fat reacts with oxygen. A simplified representation of fat oxidation is as follows:

Fat + Oxygen → Carbon Dioxide + Water + Energy (ATP + heat)

As a result of this oxidation, approximately 84% of the fat leaves the body as carbon dioxide and about 12% as water. Carbon dioxide is exhaled through the lungs, while water is expelled through urine, sweat, or

water vapor in the breath.

In the same way, the removal of sin is not best understood as a physical extraction or dissolution of something that remains intact elsewhere. Rather, it is a “burning” or extinction event—**a cessation of sin’s existence**. Scripture speaks of sin in similar terms—not as something God merely sets aside, transfers, or tolerates, but as something He **destroys, consumes, and brings to an end**. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). The old stain does not remain hidden or transferred; it is gone.

This removal of sin is not achieved through outward rituals. God consistently teaches that true cleansing is within. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). **Fire imagery** is often used to describe this inward work of God—an image of purification rather than punishment. “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver” (Malachi 3:3). **What is impure is consumed; what is true remains.**

Just as the body becomes lighter and freer as excess fat is burned away, so the soul finds freedom when sin is brought to its end. This is the work of God’s grace—transforming, purifying, and restoring—until nothing remains of the old life except what has been made new. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

“Lamb of God”. The title “Lamb of God” must therefore be understood within a Jewish/Hebrew framework. A lamb was commonly regarded as food for a meal. When a lamb was offered to God, it was often eaten, at least in part. In such cases, the lamb was considered God’s lamb—unblemished and set apart. The resulting meal was understood as a social and relational event. As the pleasing aroma of the lamb ascended toward heaven—the dwelling place of God—God was regarded as the honored guest at the table.

Unfortunately, those unfamiliar with Hebrew thought often misunderstand “the Lamb of God” as a payment for sin. This is a serious misreading. The lamb was offered because the worshiper had forsaken a sin and was presenting the lamb as **a gift of reconciliation to God**. The lamb was neither a payment nor a substitute. It was not punished for sin. Instead, it was shared as a meal among friends, welcoming God into restored fellowship. The effect of the lamb offering was relational, not transactional.

In Jewish thought, reconciliation between estranged parties was commonly expressed by eating together as a sign of restored harmony. Neither the altar nor the sacrifice functioned as substitutes for sin, since

sacrifices were offered only *after* the sin itself had been addressed. Sacrifice presupposed repentance; it did not replace it.

Example from Psalm 51. An illustration of offerings functioning as a sign or token that sin had already been removed from one's life is found in Psalm 51.

Psalm 51:10-19 (LSB): Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. . . ¹⁶ For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. . . ¹⁹ **Then** You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; **Then** young bulls will be offered on Your altar.

Notice that the breaking and cleansing of the heart come first, and only afterward are sacrifices acceptable. Sacrifices were never intended to substitute for the prior removal of sin from the heart and life of the sinner. God desires obedience, not sacrifices. Yet sacrifices were sometimes misused as an attempt to propitiate (*pacify or bribe*) God without first repenting of sin, a practice that represents a serious distortion of God's ways. Scripture explicitly condemns this misuse; for example, God's anti-propitiation message to the corrupt people of ancient Judea is recorded in Isaiah 1:10–20.

John 3:5 “born of water and spirit” [↩]

The full verse reads as follows:

John 3:5: Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and spirit**, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The main interpretations on the phrase “born of water and spirit” are summarized below.

1. **Water baptism.** This is the oldest and most traditional interpretation. *Basic idea:* “Water” refers to water baptism, and “spirit” refers to the holy spirit working through baptism to bring spiritual rebirth. The two main weaknesses to this view: (1) Christian baptism had not yet been instituted when Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, and (2) Some argue it risks making salvation dependent upon ritual rather than faith.
2. **Natural birth + spiritual birth.** *Basic idea:* “Born of water” refers to physical birth (amniotic fluid), while “born of spirit” refers to spiritual rebirth. Thus, Jesus means: “You must be born physically and spiritually.” The main weakness: There is little evidence that “water” was a Jewish idiom for natural birth in the first

century.

3. **Cleansing and renewal.** *Basic idea:* “Water and spirit” together allude to the prophecy of spiritual cleansing in Ezekiel 36:25-27, especially: “I will sprinkle clean water on you...and I will put my spirit within you.” Jesus expected Nicodemus, “the teacher of Israel,” to understand Old Testament imagery. The passage combines: (a) cleansing by water (symbolic of removal of guilt), and (b) inward renewal by the spirit (symbolic of transformation). This fits the theme of the New Covenant. Strengths: (1) strong Old Testament background, (2) fits Johannine symbolism, and (3) explains why Jesus expected Nicodemus to understand.

The phrase in Greek reads literally: “born from water and spirit.” Important observations: (a) one preposition (“from/of”) governs both nouns, and (b) this may suggest one unified experience rather than two separate births.

John 4:24 “God is spirit” [\[e\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

*John 4:24: **God is spirit**, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*

This is discussed in the section [“God is spirit” in John 4:24 is misinterpreted](#) which is contained in the article [“Spirit as Essence”](#).

John 5:18 “making himself equal with God” [\[e\]](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

*John 5:18: So the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God**.*

The context tells us that the Jews did not think Jesus was declaring himself to *be* God, but to be the Christ (i.e. the Messiah), the Son of the living God. It was not equality “of one substance” or “of one being” (as Trinitarians would argue), but of Sonship. Peter made that very declaration in the following chapter:

*John 6:68-69: Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”⁶⁹ And we have come to believe and to know that **you are the Christ, the Son of the living God**.”*

John 8:58 “before Abraham was, I am *the one*.” [d]

Claim of divinity. This verse is traditionally translated, “Before Abraham was, **I am**,” and is commonly understood as a declaration of Jesus’ divinity. This interpretation rests on the assumption that the Greek phrase *ego eimi* (“I am”) directly alludes to the divine name YHWH revealed in Exodus 3:14.

“I am.” However, the expression “I am” (*ego eimi*) is also a common form of self-identification in Greek. It appears numerous times in the New Testament and is used by various individuals. Notably, it occurs just ten verses later in John 9:8–9, where the man healed by Jesus responds to those questioning him by repeatedly saying, “I am” (*ego eimi*).

Moreover, within the same chapter (John 8), Jesus uses the same phrase multiple times (see John 8:12, 18, 24, 28). In these instances, there is no indication that his audience interpreted the expression as a claim to the divine name, since no hostile reaction is recorded.

Why, then, did the Jews react so strongly in John 8:58, even to the point of attempting to stone him? Many commentators argue that, in this instance, Jesus’ use of “I am” was understood as a direct claim to divinity—identifying himself with the “I AM” of Exodus 3:14.

Yet this raises an important question: what distinguishes this occurrence from the many other uses of *ego eimi*—including more than twenty instances in the Gospel of John alone? The answer must lie in the immediate context.

One greater than Abraham. The context of the passage helps to explain how the Jews understood Jesus’ statement. It is this: Jesus was not claiming to be God but, rather, to be one greater than Abraham—in which Abraham saw *his* [Jesus’] day and was glad (v.56).

In the dialogue between Jesus and the Jews (in John 8), the person of Abraham was brought up. In v.33 it reads, “We are Abraham’s seed, and we have never been enslaved to anyone”. Later, in v.39, they state, “Our father is Abraham”. The Jews were obviously proud that they were sons of Abraham and inheritors of the promises made to him. But Jesus directs their thoughts to the fact that Abraham had his sights set on the promises to come. As Paul tells us in Galatians,

Galatians 3:8: Now the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.”

Jesus then tells them that Abraham saw Jesus’ day and was glad. It reads in v.56, “Your father Abraham was glad that he would see my day. He saw it and rejoiced.” But the Jews retorted (v.57), “You are not yet

fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?” Obviously, the Jews were twisting Jesus’ words, because Jesus had *not* said that he saw Abraham’s day (looking backward), but that Abraham saw *his* day (looking forward). Nevertheless, what they understood from Jesus was that he was making himself greater than Abraham. But, in their own eyes, no one could be greater than Abraham.

So they picked up stones (v.59). If Jesus was greater than Abraham, then he was also greater than the Jewish leaders he was speaking to—leaders who were themselves sons of Abraham. This is what Jesus affirmed in v.58, and it was a declaration the Jewish leaders could not tolerate. For them, it was a matter of religious and political survival: they could not allow someone like Jesus to usurp their influence and power by declaring himself *greater* than Abraham. This was enough to make them take up stones to kill him.

Other issues with the orthodox interpretation. This supposed claim of divinity in John 8:58 has other problems as well, including:

- (1) Jesus had just said that if he *testified about himself*, his testimony is not true (John 5:31; 8:17-18). But, John 8:58 is a direct contradiction to what he just said.
- (2) Jesus also had just said that if he *glorified himself* concerning who he is, his glory would mean absolutely nothing (John 8:54). But, four verses later (in John 8:58), Jesus contradicts himself by glorifying himself to be the Yehovah of Exodus 3:14.
- (3) It is said that the Jews wanted to stone Jesus after what he said in John 8:58 because they knew exactly what Jesus meant. But this contradicts Jesus’ prior statement (in John 8:43-47) when he told them that they could not understand what he was saying because they were not of God but were children of the devil.
- (4) Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone he was God’s Messiah (Matt. 16:20; Luke 9:20-21). But here in John 8:58 Jesus is telling the Jews, in a very public setting, that he was Yehovah, their God! A complete contradiction of intent and instruction to his disciples.

Jesus’ use of “I am”—claim of Messiahship. Jesus used the term “I am” (*egō eime*) throughout the gospels. Usually translated “I am *he*,” “It is I,” or “I am *the one*.” Most translators make an exception in John 8:58 and translate it as simply, “I am”. Why here and not anywhere else? Putting on my conspiracy hat, I believe it’s because the translators—implicitly or explicitly, knowingly or unknowingly—were looking for a claim to deity from Jesus, and this verse seemed to fit the bill. In other words, there appears to be *translation bias* from the translators in this verse. Rather,

the term “I am” (*egō eime*) is used to express self-identity, and throughout the New Testament it is used precisely in this way. In Jesus’ case, it is best understood to be a claim of Messiahship (i.e. the Christ, the Son of God), as is consistent with the entire gospel of John.

The “I am” metaphors. The term “I am” is used by Jesus twenty-three times in John’s gospel (4:26; 6:20, 35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:16; 15:1, 5; 18:5, 6, 8); seven of which are tremendous metaphors of his saving relationship toward the world. They are as follows:

Reference	“I am” as a metaphor for	Old Testament	Notes
John 6:35	<i>Bread of Life</i>	Ex. 16:4, 15	Manna
John 8:12	<i>Light of the World</i>	Ex. 13:21	Pillar of Cloud/Fire
John 10:7, 9	<i>Door of the Sheep</i>		Protection by the Good Shepherd
John 10:11, 14	<i>Good Shepherd</i>	Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11	
John 11:25	<i>Resurrection and Life</i>	Dan. 12:2	Raising of Lazarus
John 14:6	<i>The Way and the Truth and the Life</i>	Deut. 26:17	Abiding in Christ
John 15:1, 5	<i>True Vine</i>	Ps. 80:8; Isa. 5:1-7	

You will note that in all of the above occurrences of “I am” in metaphorical terms—two instances before John 8:58 and five instances after—no Jew raised an eyebrow or even blinked an eye with regard to Jesus’ supposed claim to deity. This fact alone demonstrates that the Jews had no problem with Jesus’ use of the term “I am” (*egō eime*).

John 10:6 “Jesus spoke to them this proverb.” [\[e\]](#)

The term “proverb” (G3942, *paroimia*) is used in John (John 10:6; 16:25, 29) and Peter (2 Peter 2:22) and nowhere else in the NT. A *proverb* differs from a *parable* (G3850, *parabolē*) as follows:

- **Proverb.** “a common saying, old adage, maxim,” *lit.* “words put forward,” “an enigmatical utterance; a mysterious or oracular saying that requires interpretation.”

- **Parable.** “allegorical or metaphorical narrative, usually having a moral for instruction,” “saying or story in which something is expressed in terms of something else.”

Here is an example of a proverb and a parable:

- *Proverbs 10:20*: The tongue of the righteous is like choice silver. The heart of the wicked is of little worth.
- *Matthew 13:31*: He set another parable before them, saying, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took, and sowed in his field. . .”

The apostle John nowhere uses the term “parable” in either the Gospel of John or his letters. And, thus, it can be said that John never records any *parables* of Jesus (as are found in the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke), but only a few *proverbs*. In contrast, much of John is in figurative or allegorical language; not by way of stories (i.e. parables) but in a few words or actions representing spiritual truths. The term “proverb” in John’s gospel should then be understood as a figure of speech or an allegory (but not consisting of a story).

In the case of John 10:1-6, when Jesus speaks of the door of the sheepfold, he is not telling a *parable* but is giving a **proverb** (or figure of speech) regarding himself. The same is true in John 16:25-30, when Jesus speaks about going to the Father and sending the Paraclete. It is not a *parable* but a *proverb* concerning himself.

John 16:25: I have told you these things in proverbs, but an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in proverbs, but will tell you plainly about the Father.

John 10:30 “I and the Father are one.” [\[↩\]](#)

Some readers approach this verse and mentally supply an added interpretation: “*I and the Father are one* [**God (or essence/nature)**].” However, the immediate context suggests a different understanding. Consider the surrounding passage,

John 10:27–30: My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will certainly never perish, **and no one will snatch them out of my hand**. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, **and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand**. I and the Father are one.

In this context, Jesus speaks of his protective care for his sheep, *alongside the Father’s protective care*. It is in this sense that they are “one”: **both** are united in preserving and safeguarding the sheep. Further-

more, in the broader context of the Gospel, this concept of oneness extends beyond Jesus and the Father *to include believers*. In Jesus' prayer in John 17, it reads:

John 17:21–23: that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you... **that they may be one**, just as we are one—I in them and you in me—**so that they may be perfected into one**.

Thus, just as Jesus and the Father are one, believers are also called to share in that oneness (“I in them and you in me”). This unity is best understood as a unity of purpose, will, and works. This theme of shared purpose and unity is a recurring motif throughout the Gospel of John (see, for example, John 5:17–36; cf. 4:34).

John 12:41 “Isaiah...saw the Lord’s glory” [\[d\]](#)

The full text in context reads as follows:

John 12:38–41: This was to fulfill what had been spoken by Isaiah the prophet: **“Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”** [ISA. 53:1] ³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, for again Isaiah said, ⁴⁰ **“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn back, and I would heal them.”** [ISA. 6:10] ⁴¹ Isaiah said these things when he saw the Lord’s glory and spoke about him.

Trinitarians argue that John’s statement in verse 41 — “Isaiah... saw his glory”—proves that “Jesus is Yehovah,” since the one seated on the throne in Isaiah 6:1–4 is understood to be Yehovah, and Isaiah 6:10 is later quoted in John 12 which is clearly referring to Jesus. However, this interpretation overlooks another possibility: that Isaiah saw Christ’s *future* glory. This parallels the discussion surrounding John 8:58, where Abraham is said to have seen Christ’s day and rejoiced. As Jesus declared in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day; he saw it and was glad.”

It should also be noted that John quotes Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:38, a passage universally recognized as a prophecy concerning the coming Messiah (cf. Isaiah 52:13–53:12). The central theme of Isaiah 53 is the suffering servant and humanity’s rejection of him—not a divine being seated upon a heavenly throne. From Isaiah’s perspective, the Messiah was still a future figure.

John cites two passages from Isaiah to make his point: Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:38 and Isaiah 6:10 in John 12:40. He then states that Isaiah said these things because he saw Christ’s glory. Therefore, whatever “glory”

Isaiah saw must be understood in connection with the themes contained in *both* those passages. Isaiah spoke these words because he foresaw the Messiah's future mission, rejection, and glorification.

The context makes John's purpose quite clear. By quoting these passages, he seeks to demonstrate that the unbelief of the Jewish people had already been foretold by Isaiah and was now being fulfilled. John is not primarily describing an event that occurred during Isaiah's lifetime; rather, he is referring to prophetic visions concerning future events. Isaiah foresaw the coming Messiah, the glory associated with him, and Israel's unbelieving response.

Again, the immediate context centers on belief versus unbelief. Although Jesus had performed many signs, the people still refused to believe in him. John therefore presents this unbelief as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies in Isaiah 6 and Isaiah 53. As John 12:38 states, "This was to fulfill the word spoken by Isaiah the prophet." Isaiah's statements were prophetic, referring to events that would ultimately come to pass in the days of Christ.

Christ's glory. What, then, was the future "glory" Isaiah saw concerning the Messiah? In the context of John's Gospel, it was the glory manifested through Christ's signs, death, and resurrection. Up to this point, the Jews had refused to believe despite the many signs Jesus performed, culminating in the raising of Lazarus. Moreover, within the broader context of John 12:20–13:1, Jesus declares, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified" (John 12:23). Christ's glorification would occur through his suffering, death, and resurrection—events that many would still reject in unbelief.

John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life" [\[e\]](#)

The full text reads as follows:

John 14:16: Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Not heaven, but relationship. The belief that John 14:6 is about getting to heaven depends on one assumption: that when Jesus said "the life," he meant eternal life after you die—a destination, a reward waiting at the end of a road. But John 17:3 dispels that idea. It reads,

John 17:3: And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John does not define life as a place you arrive at after death. He defines it as *knowing*: present tense, relational, not geographic. The word "know" here is not intellectual agreement; it is intimate, experiential

awareness of the source. And John says that *is* what eternal life is—not what leads to it, not what earns it, but what it is.

The life. The word translated “life” in both John 14:6 and John 17:3 is *zoe* (Strong’s 2222), from the verb *zao*, meaning “to live.” Thayer’s lexicon defines it as “the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, which belongs to God.”

Zoe carries a range. It can mean life as opposed to death—that is part of its meaning. But in John’s Gospel, the word narrows. It appears thirty-six times (36x), more than in any other New Testament book. And John opens his entire Gospel with it: “What has come-to-be, in it was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3b-4). *Zoe* was in the word (of God) from the beginning of the gospel. It was not something waiting at the end.

The Greek has three separate words for “life” (*zoe*, *bios*, and *psuche*) where English has only one. John never uses *bios*—not once in his Gospel. When he writes about mortal life laid down (the life a shepherd gives for his sheep in chapter 10), he uses *psuche*. When he writes about the life that belongs to God—the life the Father has in Himself—he uses *zoe*. Every time. Without exception.

English collapsed all three into one word. So, when you read “I am the life” and hear “afterlife,” you are reading *bios* into a verse that says *zoe*. You are reading “where you go when you die” into a word John himself defined as “knowing the only true God.” The difference matters.

- *Bios* is what you spend
- *Psuche* is what you lay down
- *Zoe* is what God has in Himself—and that is the word in John 14:6

In this reading, *zoe* does not correspond to a place you arrive at after death. It corresponds to the animating force already present—the knowing already available. John wrote the definition. He was specific. And it points here, not there.

But if “life” was never about a destination, then what about “the way”? Because the first Christians did something with that word that almost no one teaches.

The way. In Greek, *hē hodos*. The word (“way”) appears six times in the book of Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) to describe the Christian movement in its beginning. Then it disappeared—replaced by a different word (“Christians”), in a specific city (Antioch), at a documented moment (Acts 11:26).

The word translated “way” in John 14:6 is the Greek *hodos* (Strong’s 3598). In English, “way” suggests a road—a path between two places, a

route from here to there. That is part of its meaning. But its figurative range is where it opens up. *Hodos* also means a course of conduct—a way of thinking, feeling, and deciding. Not a road you walk on, but a way you live in. Thayer's lexicon notes that in John 14:6, Jesus is "the way by which one passes...into closest fellowship with God." Not travel to a place—fellowship with a person.

Jesus says, "I am the *hodos*." Within a generation, his followers are called *the hodos*. The word he used for himself became the name they carried. Not a creed. Not a system about where you go when you die. A way of being. In this reading, *hodos* is not a highway to the afterlife. It is a manner of being—something you inhabit, not something you travel on.

The truth. The Greek word is *aletheia* (Strong's 225). Every English Bible translates it as "truth," and that is not wrong—but it does not go deep enough. *Aletheia* is built from two parts: the prefix **a** (not), and **lethe** (concealment, forgetting, hiddenness). In Greek thought, *Lethe* was the river of forgetting. Put together, *aletheia* means *unconcealing*—the removal of the veil. Not merely correct information, but reality itself as it is revealed. Thayer defines it as "what is true," but the root goes further: not just the opposite of a lie, but the opposite of illusion.

John uses this word twenty-five times (25x). And in John 18:38, Pilate stands before Jesus and asks, "What is truth?"—What is *aletheia*? He asks the question while looking at the answer, then turns and walks away. In this reading, *aletheia* is not a belief system you accept. It is unveiled awareness—seeing what is real without the covering.

Three words summarized. Read John 14:6 again with the depth restored:

- I am the way (*hodos*)—the way of being, the pattern of life you inhabit.
- I am the truth (*aletheia*)—the unveiling, reality as it is revealed.
- I am the life (*zoe*)—the divine life, defined by John as knowing.

"No one comes to the Father except through me." The Greek word translated "by" is *dia*, meaning "through" or "by way of"—a channel, not a gatekeeper. The same structure appears in John 10:9: "I am the door." A door is something you pass through, not someone who arbitrarily admits or denies.

And the destination is not heaven—it is the Father. A person, not a place. Jesus confirms this in John 14:23: "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The word for "abode" (*mone*) means to remain, to dwell. The Father and the Son do not ask you to travel to them—they come and remain with you. This verse was never about getting to

heaven. It was about the Father reaching you where you already are.

If this reframes how you hear the verse, consider what is lost when it is reduced to a ticket:

- If “the way” is only a road to the afterlife, you spend your years waiting instead of living.
- If “the truth” is only a system to defend, you miss the unveiling it was meant to name.
- If “the life” is only a future reward, you postpone the knowing that John says **is** life.

But you do not have to wait. You now carry the three words the English compressed: *hodos*, *aletheia*, *zoe*—a way of being, unveiled reality, and the life of God known in the present. The next time someone quotes John 14:6 as a gate, a road, or a ticket, you will hear what the verse actually says: not a destination, but a person—and a relationship that does not begin after death. It begins now.

[The above was adapted from: “*I Am the Way*’ Isn’t About getting to Heaven,” by The Awakened Believer (YouTube video).]

John 14:16-21 “another Paraclete” [\[e\]](#)

The full text reads as follows:

John 14:16-21: And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to abide with you forever. ¹⁷ *This Paraclete* is the spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive, because it neither sees it nor understands it. You know it, because *it* abides with you and will be by [*the side of*] you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am by [*the side of*] my Father, and you by [*the side of*] me, and I by [*the side of*] you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

The subject of the “Paraclete” is covered in great detail in the Resources article, “[Another Paraclete](#)“.

John 15:26 “When the Paraclete comes” [\[e\]](#)

The full verse reads:

John 15:26: When the Paraclete comes, the one I will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he will testify about me.

As in John 14:16-17, the Paraclete and “spirit of truth” are juxtaposed. And, as in the prior reference, the Paraclete is a masculine word while “spirit of truth” is neuter. Here is what we are dealing with:

John 15:26: When the Paraclete comes, **the one** [(pronoun, masc.) i.e. *the Paraclete*]] I will send you from the Father, the spirit of truth **which** [(pronoun, neuter) i.e. *the spirit*]] proceeds from the Father, **he** [(pronoun, masc.)] will testify about me.

The verb form in “**he** will testify” can be used with either a neuter or masculine subject. If the Paraclete is the subject, then “**he** will testify” is the correct translation; otherwise, the “spirit of truth” is the subject and “**it** will testify” is the preferred translation. It seems Paraclete is the subject in this case, which is why “**he** will testify” was chosen.

John 17:5 “before the world [of people]” [\[e\]](#)

Most Bibles translate this verse in a similar form to the following:

John 17:5 (typical translation): And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world was.

The (interlinear) Greek reads as follows:

John 17:5 (Interlinear): and now glorify me you Father **alongside** you to that glory I had before **the** [του] **the** [τον] world **to be** [einai] **alongside** you.

Notice that Jesus is described as being “**alongside**” (*para*) the Father twice. Notice also the double definite article “**the**”—*τοῦ* and *τόν*. The second article (*τόν*) modifies the Greek word *kosmos* (“**the** world”). The first article (*τοῦ*), by contrast, turns the infinitive *einai* (“to be”) into an articular infinitive.

The effect is that the whole phrase — “[the world to be alongside you]”—is governed by that first article “**the**” (*τοῦ*) and so functions as a single noun-like unit, a definite “something.” Because this expression is treated as one definite thing, it takes the article *τοῦ* in front of it.

What this means is that Jesus is saying he had glory “before”—but before *what*? The answer: before **THE** [world coming into being alongside him]. This deserves further examination.

“The world.” Contextually, “the world” in John 17 does not refer to planet earth or the physical universe, but to the (fallen) world *of people*. Here are the instances of this term in the verses following John 17:5:

whom you gave me out of **the world** (v.6)...I am not praying for **the world** (v.9)...I am no longer in **the world**, but they are in **the world** (v.11)...While I was with them in **the world** (v.12)...I say these things in **the world** (v.13)...and **the world** has hated them because they are not of **the world**, just as I am not of **the world** (v.14)...I do not ask that you take them out of **the world** (v.15)...They are not of **the world**, just as I am not of **the world** (v.16)...Just as you have sent me into **the world** (v.18)...so that **the world** may believe (v.21)...and that **the world** may know (v.23).

Clearly, “the world” that Jesus refers to here is not planet earth or the physical universe, but the world *of people* for whom he came to save.

“On earth.” We also encounter this phrase in the prior verse: “I have glorified you **on earth**, having completed the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Jesus glorified the Father on earth by doing the works of the Father in the Father’s name (John 5:43; 10:32; 14:10), and by proclaiming the Father’s words (John 17:8) *to people*.

“With the glory I had with you before the world.” The glory Jesus had with the Father (i.e., alongside the Father) “before the world” is not, therefore, referring to the glory Jesus had before the physical creation of the heavens and the earth. Rather, Jesus was referring to the glory he had with the Father (i.e., alongside the Father) in the works he did before the world *of people*—both those who accepted him and those who rejected him.

The Proper Reading. In light of this, the reading that best captures the verse’s meaning is:

John 17:5 (CHI): And now, Father, glorify me with you with the glory I had with you before the world [*of people*].

Dual glory shared. Note that v.5 parallels the thought of v.1: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that your Son may also glorify you.” This is a **dual glory**: Jesus prays that the Father glorify him so that he, in turn, may glorify the Father. Both work, and both are glorified (cf. John 5:17: “My Father is still working even now, and I too am working”). Moreover, this glory is **shared** with believers, as John 17:22 tells us: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may be one, even as we are one.”

Reference: Brother Kel’s Apologetics, “*The Trinity Delusion on John 17:5*”, (<https://trinitydelusion.net/>)

John 20:28 “My Lord and my God!” [\[e\]](#)

The full verse reads:

John 20:28: In response Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

The traditional Trinitarian interpretation holds that Thomas’ exclamation, “My Lord and my God!” is a direct confession of Jesus’ deity—that Thomas finally realized that Jesus was indeed God! However, several **biblical and contextual issues** call this interpretation into question:

1. **Contextual inconsistency within John’s Gospel.** John’s Gospel consistently distinguishes between **God the Father** and **Jesus the Son**:

- Jesus repeatedly refers to **the Father** as “**the only true God**” (John 17:3).
- Jesus says, “My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).
- Jesus calls the Father “**my God**” (John 20:17; cf. Revelation 3:12).

If Thomas were now declaring Jesus to *be* God Himself, this would stand in tension with these earlier distinctions and with Jesus’ own teaching about his subordinate relationship to the Father.

2. **Immediate context** (John 20:17 vs. 20:28). Just a few verses earlier, Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.” (John 20:17). If Jesus himself acknowledges the Father as *his God*, it would be incongruous for John to depict a disciple, only a few verses later, calling Jesus *God* in that same absolute sense. Such a reading would undermine the theological coherence of the chapter.
3. **Linguistic and emotional expression possibility.** Some scholars propose that Thomas’s words were an **exclamatory expression of awe directed toward God the Father** rather than toward Jesus. Greek has no punctuation to settle the matter, so context must determine the interpretation. Thomas could therefore be saying something like: “My Lord [addressing Jesus], and my God [addressing God in heaven]!” In moments of shock or revelation, it was common in Hebrew and Aramaic idiom to invoke God this way (cf. Psalm 35:23–24).
4. **Absence of an explicit divine declaration.** Jesus does **not affirm** Thomas’s statement as a confession of his deity. He simply replies, “Because you have seen me, you have believed” (20:29). The text

never specifies *what* Thomas believed—only that he now believed what Jesus had earlier said, namely that he was risen. Had Thomas truly confessed Jesus as *God Himself*, one might expect Jesus, or John, to underscore a doctrinal claim of that magnitude.

5. **The Gospel's own purpose statement (John 20:31).** John's purpose statement immediately follows this scene: "But these have been written so that you may believe **that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God**, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John concludes not with "that you may believe Jesus *is God*," but "that Jesus is the Christ, the *Son of God*." This suggests that the evangelist understood Thomas's realization as belief in Jesus' **Messiahship and divine sonship**, not identity as God Himself.
6. **The consistent Christology of John.** Throughout John:
 - Jesus is **sent by God** (John 3:17; 5:36; 7:29; 8:42).
 - He **speaks God's words** (12:49).
 - He **does nothing of himself** (5:19).
 - He calls God his **Father** (5:17–18).

John consistently portrays Jesus as the *revealer* of God rather than *God Himself*. Thomas's confession, then, may reflect a recognition of Jesus as the **visible manifestation** or **representative** of God's authority and presence (cf. 1:18; 14:9–10).

7. **Old Testament parallels to "God" used representatively.** "God" (Hebrew, *Elohim*) is sometimes used in the Old Testament in a generic, representative sense. In the Exodus account, Moses is told, "See, I have made you *Elohim* to Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:1). Similarly, when Jacob wrestled with "*Elohim*" (Gen. 32:22–32), he was in fact wrestling with an angel (Hosea 12:4). Israel's judges were likewise called "gods" (Psalm 82:6; cf. John 10:34–36). Viewed this way, Jesus—like Moses—could be "*Elohim*" to Thomas: a channel, or door, or way to God, rather than God Himself. Calling Jesus "my God" could then express recognition of his **divine commission and authority**, not his identity as Yehovah.
8. **Two entities.** Another possibility is that Thomas was addressing two distinct entities. The transliterated Greek text reads,

"The Lord of-me and the God of-me" (Or, "article, noun, pronoun; and article, noun, pronoun.")

This grammatical construction is used elsewhere to refer to two different things (cf. Matthew 12:47; Mark 3:33; Luke 8:20; John 4:12; Acts 2:17). This is not an absolute rule, however, since the same construction is sometimes ambiguous or used simply for emphasis.

9. **Thematic fulfillment of “seeing and believing”.** The focus of the scene is **faith after seeing**, not ontological identity. Thomas doubted the resurrection, not Jesus’ divine nature. Upon seeing the risen Christ, his exclamation—whether directed toward Jesus or toward God—was an expression of faith that **Jesus truly lives**, confirming his role as the one sent by God.

Summary. Taken together:

- The context of John’s Gospel,
- The linguistic ambiguity,
- The immediate narrative flow, and
- John’s stated theological aim

all point toward interpreting Thomas’s words as **a confession of faith in Jesus as the risen Lord and representative of God**, rather than a declaration that Jesus *is* God Himself.

Notes on Acts

Content [\[e\]](#)

Acts 5:3 “lie to the holy spirit”

[Acts 20:28](#) “with his own blood”

Acts 5:3 “lie to the holy spirit”

In context, the full text reads as follows:

Acts 5:3-4: But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to **lie to the holy spirit** and keep back some of the proceeds of the plot of land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain yours? And once it was sold, was it not under your control? How is it that you have put this thing in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**”

The issue. Trinitarians use Peter’s question to Ananias as “proof” that the holy spirit is a divine being. They say, “One cannot sin against an attribute. One cannot lie to something that is not sentient. Thus, the holy spirit must be a ‘person’ within the Godhead.” But in their attempt to find “proof” for their theory, they ignore the plain meaning of Peter’s words and the overwhelming evidence of other Scriptures and reason.

“Lie to the holy spirit.” To understand what Peter meant by the phrase “*lie to the holy spirit*,” we must examine the surrounding context. At the end of Acts 5:4, Peter makes a parallel accusation: “*You have not lied to men but to God.*” The term “*God*” is translated from *theos*, the general Greek word for deity. In the broadest sense, Peter is accusing Ananias of sinning against God (cf. Gen. 20:6; 39:9; Lev. 6:2; Ps. 51:4).

When Peter later addresses Sapphira, he repeats the accusation in a slightly different form: “*Why is it that you have agreed to put the spirit of the Lord to the test?*” (Acts 5:9). Here, Peter uses “*Lord*,” translated from the Greek *kurios*, meaning “master” or “lord.” In this verse, the holy spirit is presented as belonging to God (“*spirit of the Lord*”).

Thus, across these three parallel statements, Peter clarifies his meaning: Ananias and Sapphira attempted to deceive God, who was present in them and in the apostles through the power of His spirit. Peter’s implicit question is whether they failed to realize that, through His spirit, God knew not only their actions but also their hearts.

Jewish Christians mid-first century. When Acts 5:3–4 is examined from the historical-contextual perspective of mid-first-century Jewish

Christians—without importing later Trinitarian categories—several interpretive challenges emerge.

1. **The Jewish Christian conceptual world was the Old Testament.** Nothing in Jewish theology at the time conceived of **God's spirit as a second divine self**, let alone a third person. For them, *ruach ha-qodesh* ("holy spirit") meant **God in action**, not **God as another individual**.
2. **Holy spirit as functional, not personal.** In Jewish literature of the period, God's spirit is:
 - God's power (Mic 3:8)
 - God's presence (Ps 51:11)
 - God's inspiration (Num 11:25)
 - God's authority at work (Isa 63:10–11)

It is never an independently self-aware being. Even when the spirit "speaks" or "guides," this is understood as God speaking or acting through His spirit.

3. **The Book of Acts is written in a Jewish framework.** Acts is not a philosophical treatise; it is a Hebraic narrative written by Luke about a Jewish messianic movement. Luke assumes **Jewish theological categories**. He never defines "holy spirit" as a separate person. Thus, early Jewish hearers would not hear: "You lied to a divine person distinct from God". They would hear: "You lied in a matter governed by God's own holy power and presence."
4. **Parallelism in the text.** As already stated, the story contains parallelism, not a metaphysical explanation. Lying to the spirit (v.3) = lying in a matter where God's spirit is operating (v.4). Therefore, you have lied to God Himself. This is the same logic found elsewhere: (a) reject God's prophet = reject God (1 Sam. 8:7); (b) disobey the law = disobey God; (c) lie under divine inspiration = lie to God. No new ontology is introduced.
5. **Agency explains the language.** Jewish law recognized the principle: "The agent is as the sender." Examples: (a) Moses speaks → God speaks; (b) angels act → God acts; and (c) prophets judged → God judged. In Acts 5: (a) God's spirit governs the apostolic community; (b) Lying within that sphere = lying to God. This requires authority, not personhood.
6. **Personification was normal thinking.** The Jews of that day were comfortable with **personified abstractions**:
 - Wisdom speaks and teaches (Prov. 8)

- Torah “rejoices”
- Sin “rules”
- Blood “cries out” (Gen. 4:10)

Personification was **rhetorical**, not metaphysical. So “lying to the holy spirit” would not imply: *consciousness, independent will, or personal identity*. It was **relational language**, not doctrinal definition.

7. **Silence where clarification would be expected.** If Acts 5 were teaching a radical new concept—that God’s spirit is a distinct divine person—Jewish believers would have needed: *explanation, defense, and clarification*. Instead: (a) no questions are raised; (b) no controversy follows; and (c) no doctrine is articulated. That silence strongly suggests the passage was understood within existing Jewish categories.

No explicit Trinitarian formula. Acts 5 lacks key elements one would expect if a doctrinal point were being made:

- No distinction of persons
- No triadic formula
- No explanation of the spirit’s self-awareness or will

Doctrine should be derived from clear, didactic passages, not inferred from narrative wording. In short: Acts 5 teaches divine accountability, not divine composition.

Acts 20:28 “with his own blood” [\[Ⓢ\]](#)

The complete verse reads:

Acts 20:28: So keep watch over yourselves and over the entire flock. The holy spirit has appointed you as their overseers, to shepherd the church of our **Lord and God**, which he obtained **with his own blood**.

The phrase “Lord and God” is in the vast majority of MSS [89%], while “God” is in only 7% (X and B) and “Lord” is found in 4% (P74, A, C, D, E). The TR and CT go with the 7% which translates to, “church of God”, implying either that God shed his blood, or that Christ, who shed his blood, is God. However, the fuller reading of the Majority Text, “the church of our Lord and God” or even, “church of our Lord,” (in the 4% of MSS) clarifies the meaning. It is the church of Christ, and it was Christ’s blood that was shed. Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies* (c. 180-185 AD), quoting from a very early manuscript of Acts, wrote:

“Take heed, therefore, both to yourselves, and to all the flock over

which the Holy Spirit has placed you as bishops, to rule the ***Church of the Lord***, which He has acquired for Himself through His own blood.” (Book III, 14).

Notes on Romans

Content [\[↶\]](#) [\[↑\]](#) [\[↓\]](#)

Romans 1:17	“The righteous will live by faith”
Romans 3:24	“being freely set right by his grace”
Romans 3:25-26	“whom God put forward...”
Romans 4:3	“Abraham placed his trust in God”
Romans 9:5	“came the Christ. (God,”
Romans 9:13	“Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”
Romans 14:5	“One day to be more important”

Romans 1:17 “The righteous will live by faith”

In *The Chiastic Bible*, this verse reads:

Romans 1:17: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed—from **being out of** faith into faith, as it is written, “The righteous will live **based on faith**.”

In three other translations, the verse reads as follows:

- *Romans 1:17 (KJV)*: For therein is the righteousness of God revealed **from faith to faith**: as it is written, The just shall live **by faith**.
- *Romans 1:17 (ESV)*: For in it the righteousness of God is revealed **from faith for faith**, as it is written, “The righteous shall live **by faith**.”
- *Romans 1:17 (NIV)*: For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is **by faith from first to last**, just as it is written: “The righteous will live **by faith**.”

Romans 1:17 is often translated in ways that obscure Paul’s meaning because of how the Greek prepositions *ek* and *eis* are rendered in English. The verse contains the phrases ***ek pisteos eis pistin*** (“from faith into faith”) and ***ek pisteos*** (“out from faith”), which are central to understanding Paul’s argument about righteousness, faith, and salvation.

The Greek preposition *ek* means “out of,” “out from,” or “derived from,” indicating source or cause. It conveys the idea of something flowing from or being based on faith. Translating it simply as “by” can be misleading, since English readers may assume a vague instrumental or legal sense rather than a causal one. The second preposition, *eis*, means “into” or “unto” and denotes movement toward or entry into something.

Together, the phrase “from being out of faith into faith,” describes a **transition** rather than a static condition. In context, Paul teaches that the gospel reveals God’s righteousness by **moving people from being out** (or, *outside*) **of faith into faith**. Faith is not merely an intellectual assent but the entry point into a transformed life.

“**The righteous will live based on faith**”. The Greek reads *ek pisteos* (“out from faith”). When Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 — “*The righteous shall live by faith*”—the sense is that the righteous live *out from* faith. Faith is the source, basis, and motivating power of righteous living.

This righteousness is not an imputed status that merely conceals sin, but a lived righteousness expressed in conduct, character, and obedience. Genuine faith in a righteous God naturally produces righteous behavior. Paul’s teaching aligns with the broader witness of Scripture, including Peter and John (e.g., Acts 10:35, 43; 15:9; and 1 John 3:3–9 and 5:4), who likewise emphasize that true belief results in transformed lives.

Thus, Romans 1:17 is best understood as teaching that God’s righteousness is revealed as people enter into faith, and that righteous living flows from faith as its source. When Habakkuk and Paul declare, “The righteous shall live by faith,” the sense is more accurately conveyed as, “The righteous **will live out from faith**,” or “The righteous **will live on the basis of faith**.” Faith is not merely the means of entry but the ongoing source of this new, godly way of life. **Living, active faith naturally produces righteous living**.

Romans 3:24 “being freely set right by his grace” [\[e\]](#)

The full **Romans 3:23-24** text reads as follows:

Romans 3:23-24: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being **set right** by his grace as a gift, through the **liberation from sin** that is *accomplished* by Christ Jesus,

“**Set right.**” The word “*set right*” (or “justified” in other versions) translates the Greek *dikaionomenoi*, which is a **verb**—an action. It carries the sense of *being made right*, *being set straight*, or *being corrected*. It describes the process of making right what was previously wrong or out of alignment.

This verb describes what God is graciously doing in our lives. In response to the statement, “for all have sinned,” we are not merely declared right while remaining unchanged; rather, we are **being righted, set right, and corrected** from the error and sin just mentioned. This justification—this setting right—occurs “*through the release-from-sin that is accomplished by Christ Jesus*.”

“Liberation-from-sin.” The term *“liberation-from-sin”* (or “redemption” in other versions) is the Greek *apolytrōseōs*, used here in Romans 3:24. This word fundamentally means *liberation, release, or freedom*. Notably, Scripture teaches that **final redemption** does not occur until a future event — *“the day of adoption, the redemption of our body”* (Rom. 8:23). Thus, redemption often refers to liberation rather than a completed, once-for-all transaction.

The surrounding context determines whether *redemption* should be understood **literally** or **figuratively**.

Problems with a literal “redemption”. If we interpret redemption **literally** as a payment made to secure release, the verse would effectively read: *“and are being justified by his grace as a gift, through the payment of release that is in Christ Jesus.”* This interpretation raises serious questions:

- To whom was the payment made?
- What exactly was paid?
- Who received the payment?
- From whom were we released, and from what?
- If Jesus paid something, what did he purchase?
- Did he buy our sins?
- Who was the seller?
- If God was the seller, what did God sell?
- Why would God require a payment in order to set us right?
- Would this imply that God sold our sins to Jesus?

Such a model leads to even greater difficulties. It would suggest that God accepted a payment in order to release the guilty, which would directly violate biblical commands against bribery and perverting justice (cf. Deut. 27:25; Prov. 17:15). The idea that Jesus made a literal payment—whether to God or to Satan—introduces theological and moral contradictions so severe that it is difficult to believe anyone would hold this view after carefully considering its implications.

The figurative “redemption”. If, however, we understand redemption **figuratively**, as *release or liberation* from engaging in unrighteousness, the passage becomes clear and coherent. In this case, the verse communicates: *“and are being set right—corrected and restored—by his grace as a gift, through the liberation from sin that is in Christ Jesus.”* This understanding aligns perfectly with Paul’s later teaching in Romans:

Romans 6:17-18: You who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart ... and, **having been set free from sin**, have become slaves of righteousness.

Here, redemption is not a commercial transaction but a **liberation from bondage to sin**. No strained logic is required. There is no buying, selling, or legal fiction—only transformation.

“being set right by his grace.” The redemption mentioned in verse 24 refers to release from the control of sin (and, by extension, the devil). While redemption *can* involve payment in certain contexts, its core meaning is **freedom from domination**.

Jesus demonstrated victory over sin through the cross, and this victory becomes ours as we follow him. To redefine redemption as a literal payment distorts both the text and its message. Such an interpretation implies that Jesus paid God in order to have God declare us innocent despite our guilt. In any real-world judicial setting, this would constitute **bribery**—a serious crime—and would contradict God’s own standards of justice.

Therefore, “*being set right by his grace*” does not mean that God declares something right that is, in fact, wrong. Rather, it means that God **makes us right**—corrects us, restores us, and sets us straight—by his favor (grace) as a gift. This occurs through redemption, that is, **liberation from sin**, which is found in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:25-26 “whom God put forward...” [\[e\]](#)

In two versions (CHI and NASB), the full text reads,

- *Romans 3:25-26 (CHI)*: whom God put forward as the true “mercy seat,” where *covenant* blood is received through faith, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. This unveiling shows how God, in his patient forbearance, released former sins. ²⁶ He did so to prove in the present time that he is faithful and just, and the One who sets right the one who is ^[a]of the faith of Jesus.
- *Romans 3:25-26 (NASB)*: whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God’s merciful restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished; ²⁶ for the demonstration, that is, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

“Mercy seat”. The term “*mercy seat*” corresponds to the Greek word *hilastērion* (G2435). This term appears only twice in the New Testament—Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation

^[a] 3:26 of the faith: —Greek idiom suggesting, “one who belongs to the *class of faith*,” i.e. of the faithful, the believing. Similar in wording to Heb. 10:39.

of the Old Testament), *hilastērion* is used almost exclusively to translate the Hebrew *kappōret* (cf. Exodus 25:17–22; Leviticus 16). The *kappōret* refers to the gold cover of the Ark of the Covenant, commonly known as the “mercy seat,” upon which sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16).

This consistent Septuagint usage constitutes the strongest lexical argument for understanding *hilastērion* as “mercy seat.” This meaning is unambiguous in Hebrews 9:5, where the term clearly refers to the physical mercy seat within the tabernacle. The interpretive question, therefore, concerns its meaning in Romans 3:25.

Does *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25 refer to:

- a **place** (the mercy seat),
- a **thing** (an atoning sacrifice), or
- a **process** (atonement)?

Some scholars argue that it cannot refer to a physical location, since rendering the phrase as “whom God put forward as a mercy seat” may sound awkward to modern readers. Nevertheless, several strong considerations favor the “mercy seat” interpretation:

1. It reflects the dominant usage of *hilastērion* in the Septuagint.
2. The explicit reference to blood (“by his blood”) evokes Day of Atonement imagery (Leviticus 16).
3. It clarifies Paul’s statement that this was done “to demonstrate His righteousness,” suggesting that God publicly reveals what had previously been concealed within the Most Holy Place.
4. It fits the Jewish conceptual and cultic framework more naturally than abstract notions of *propitiation* (i.e. “appeasement”).

Taken together, these points support the view that **Paul is using *hilastērion* metaphorically**, much as he refers to Christ as “our Passover” in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Paul is thus interpreting Jesus through temple imagery that would have been intelligible within Second Temple Jewish categories. In this light, Christ is presented as both the locus and the means of atonement, evoking the mercy seat where blood was applied, resulting in the removal of sin and the public vindication of God’s righteousness.

It should be noted that from the Reformation era through the development of modern Penal Substitution Atonement (PSA) theology, the preferred interpretation has often been that of “appeasement,” hence the widespread use of the term “*propitiation*,” which refers to the turning away of wrath. As a result, common English renderings of *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25 include:

- “propitiation” (KJV, NASB)
- “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV)
- “expiation” (RSV margin)
- “place of atonement / mercy seat” (NET note; NRSV footnote)

Ultimately, the debate centers on whether priority should be given to the Septuagintal background of the term or to later theological frameworks, particularly those shaped by penal-substitutionary categories. The position taken here is that the lexical and cultic evidence strongly suggests that Paul intended the “mercy seat” imagery, employed in a metaphorical sense, to frame his understanding of Christ’s atoning work.

“To demonstrate.” The phrase “*to demonstrate*” derives from the Greek ^[a]*endeixin*, meaning “to show,” “point out,” or “give evidence.” It denotes an objective, observable demonstration—something made evident so it can be recognized and examined by others. It does not refer to an inward feeling or an abstract, invisible concept.

Accordingly, when Paul speaks of “*demonstrating God’s righteousness*,” he indicates that God’s righteousness is made evident through the act of justification—by genuinely setting people right. If justification is understood as a purely legal or positional declaration, however, its demonstrative force becomes unclear. An invisible verdict cannot be observed by others. For justification to function as a public testimony of righteousness, it must be visibly expressed; a merely forensic declaration cannot accomplish this.

Jesus himself affirms that righteousness is meant to be seen: “*Whoever practices the truth comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been done in God*” (John 3:21).

The means of receiving mercy, therefore, is tied to faith in Jesus’ ^[b]**blood as covenant**, not as a sacrificial payment. Faith in a payment

^[a] *Endeixis* (ἐνδειξις). The noun *endeixis* denotes a “showing,” “proof,” or “demonstration” that is objective and publicly recognizable. In Hellenistic and legal contexts, it refers to evidence that establishes a claim through observable confirmation rather than internal intent or abstract status. In Pauline usage (e.g., Rom 3:25–26), *endeixis* emphasizes manifestation—righteousness made evident—rather than a merely notional or hidden declaration. The term therefore resists interpretation as an exclusively invisible or forensic verdict.

^[b] **Blood as covenant.** In biblical thought, “blood” signifies life given in covenantal commitment (Gen 15; Exod 24:8), not a commercial medium of payment. Jesus’ words, “This is my blood of the covenant” (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24), echo Old Testament covenant-ratification language, where blood seals relational fidelity and mutual obligation. Interpreting blood

model emphasizes transaction, whereas faith in Jesus' blood emphasizes covenantal relationship. Jesus says, "*This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many unto the release of sins*" (more literal rendering of Matthew 26:28). Some translations shift the emphasis toward blood as payment, which risks portraying reconciliation primarily as a transaction rather than a restored relationship.

A payment-centered model renders reconciliation largely unnecessary, since compensation satisfies the offended party while leaving the offender relationally unchanged. A blood covenant, by contrast, directly addresses relationship: mercy and reconciliation are obtained by entering into the covenant itself.

Paul's second phrase — "*to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God*" (Rom. 3:25, KJV)—may be rendered more literally as "*into proof (eis endeixin) of his righteousness through the release (paresin) of former sins, through the patience of God.*" This indicates that God's righteousness is demonstrated as former sins are released, revealing his long-suffering patience toward the sinner.

The term ^[a]*paresin* conveys the idea of release or letting go. In this light, the emphasis falls on the sinner abandoning a former life of sin, thereby demonstrating that his God is righteous—a God who patiently endured during the period of sin. This stands in contrast to the notion that God simply "lets us go" because a compensatory payment has been received.

"Righteous." The term "*righteousness*" in Romans 3:25–26 is also used in 2 Peter 2:21: "*It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.*" The underlying Greek word is *dikai-osyne*. Peter describes righteousness as a *way*—a path or direction of life that can be known and walked in. It is therefore not an alien or extrinsic

primarily as payment imports later juridical or commercial categories that are foreign to the covenantal framework of Scripture and risks reducing reconciliation to transaction rather than restored relationship.

^[a] *Paresis* (πάρεσις). The term *paresis* occurs only once in the New Testament (Rom 3:25) and is distinct from *aphesis* ("forgiveness" or "remission"). *Paresis* means "passing over," "letting go," or "release," and carries the sense of restraint or suspension rather than judicial satisfaction. Its usage implies patience and endurance in the face of sin, rather than the execution of penalty upon a substitute. This semantic distinction supports an understanding of God's righteousness as revealed through forbearance and restoration, not merely legal acquittal.

status, nor a legal or accounting abstraction, nor merely a declared positional state. Rather, righteousness consists of consciously acting in accordance with what God has determined to be right. Peter further notes that a person may turn back from this path after having known it, which underscores that righteousness is not a static position or fixed condition, and not a forensic or bookkeeping term, but a lived and practiced reality.

Theological summary. This interpretation departs from classical forensic justification in several key ways:

1. **Demonstration vs. declaration.** Classical forensic models emphasize justification as a legal declaration—an invisible verdict in God’s courtroom. By contrast, Paul’s use of *endeixis* points to righteousness that is *demonstrated* and made publicly evident through transformed lives and restored relationships.
2. **Release vs. penal satisfaction.** Rather than viewing sin as dealt with through penal substitution and payment, the use of *paresis* frames God’s action as patient forbearance culminating in release. The emphasis falls not on punishment transferred, but on sin abandoned and overcome.
3. **Covenant over transaction.** Forensic models often interpret Christ’s blood as a payment satisfying divine justice. This reading insists that blood signifies covenantal union—God and humanity bound together in faithfulness. Mercy is obtained not by trusting in a paid debt, but by entering and remaining in covenant with Christ.
4. **Relational restoration as the goal.** In a strictly legal framework, reconciliation is secondary to acquittal. Here, reconciliation is central: justification is the *means* by which relationship is restored, and righteousness is shown as the believer lives out that restored relationship.

In sum, this approach understands justification *not* as a purely juridical status imputed to the believer, but as **a covenantal, transformative reality that visibly demonstrates the righteousness of God in the world.**

Paraphrase. Here are three paraphrased renderings of Romans 3:25–26 that intentionally reflects the lexical, cultic, and theological reasoning laid out in the above commentary, while remaining close to Paul’s flow of thought and imagery:

- *Romans 3:25-26 (paraphrased):* God publicly set forth Jesus as the true “mercy seat”—the place where covenant mercy is encountered—accessible through faithfulness to his blood, in order

to openly display His righteousness. This unveiling shows how God, in His patient forbearance, released former sins. In doing so, God now makes His righteousness evident in the present time, so that He is shown to be righteous Himself, and to be the One who sets people right as they live by faith in Jesus.

- *Romans 3:25-26 (more literal to the Greek):* Whom God set forth publicly as a “mercy seat” through faith in his blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness—because of the release of sins previously committed, in the forbearance of God—toward a demonstration of His righteousness in the present time, so that He might be shown to be righteous, and the One who makes righteous the person who lives by faith in Jesus.
- *Romans 3:25-26 (Jewish style):* God brought Jesus forward before all as the true mercy seat, where covenant blood is received through faith, so that His righteousness might be made visible. By this act, God revealed how He had patiently endured and released the sins committed in earlier times. Now, in this present age, God makes His righteousness plain—showing Himself to be faithful and just, and setting right those who walk in trust and loyalty to Jesus.

Line-by-line contrast with a standard translation. Using NASB 2020 as a representative forensic translation.

Romans 25-26 (NASB, selected phrases): Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith...for the demonstration of His righteousness...because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed...so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

NASB	Notes-based understanding
“Displayed publicly”	Agreed—but it should be understood as a <i>visible, historical demonstration (endeixis)</i> , not merely a theological “legal” explanation
“Propitiation”	NASB reinterprets the “ <i>mercy seat</i> ” (<i>hilastērion</i>) as appeasement (“propitiation”), ignoring Septuagint (LXX) usage
“In His blood”	Should be understood as <i>covenant blood</i> , not a “propitiatory” payment or transferred punishment as NASB implies
“Through faith”	Read as <i>faithfulness / covenant trust</i> , not belief in a transaction as NASB implies
“Passed over sins”	Clarified as <i>release (paresis)</i> through divine

	patience, not suspended punishment awaiting payment as NASB implies
“Just and the justifier”	NASB wording should be reframed as God shown to be righteous and the One who sets people right , relationally and transformatively

Across all three paraphrased renderings, Romans 3:25–26 portrays Jesus not as a substitute receiving punishment, but as the unveiled mercy seat where covenant mercy is encountered. God’s righteousness is not merely declared in an invisible courtroom but demonstrated openly as former sins are released through patient forbearance and lives are genuinely set right. Justification, therefore, is not a bookkeeping transaction but a covenantal, relational reality in which God is shown to be righteous as His people walk in the way of righteousness.

Romans 4:3 “Abraham placed his trust in God” [\[↩\]](#)

Romans 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24. The focus of this note is on the use of the Greek word *logizomai* in Romans 4 (vss. 3-6, 8-11, and 22-24) with a primary focus on v.3.

In Romans 4, the Greek verb *logizomai* is a key term that requires careful examination. The word fundamentally means *to reason, to consider, to think through, or to draw a conclusion*. It is etymologically related to our English word *logic*. Yet in Romans 4 it is frequently translated as “credited,” “counted,” “reckoned,” “accounted,” or “imputed,” and is then interpreted as an accounting term—suggesting that an external or “foreign” righteousness is transferred to the believer. The word *logizomai* appears eleven times in this chapter, giving the chapter its distinctive forensic and covenantal texture. The verses in question are listed below in the ESV (or verse-faithful paraphrase of the ESV) which is the most common translation/interpretation of *logizomai*.

- *Romans 4:3–6 (ESV)*: For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was **counted** [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not **counted** [*logizomai*] as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is **counted** [*logizomai*] as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God **counts** [*logizomai*] righteousness apart from works:
- *Romans 4:8-11*: Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not **count** [*logizomai*] sin. ⁹ This blessing, then, is it limited to those who are circumcised, or does it also extend to those who

are uncircumcised? For we say that faith was **counted** [*logizomai*] to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰ How, then, was it **counted** [*logizomai*]¹¹—was it after he was circumcised or before? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while still uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, in order that righteousness might be **counted** [*logizomai*] to them as well.

- *Romans 4:22-24*: That is why his faith was **counted** [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness.²³ But the statement, “it was **counted** [*logizomai*] to him,” was not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but also for ours; it will be **counted** [*logizomai*] to us who believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

PSA’s use of *logizomai*. Within Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA) theology, “**counted**” becomes the idea that God credits Christ’s righteousness to the believer’s account. Because PSA proponents deny that a person can be genuinely righteous before God, they are compelled to render *logizomai* in a way that supports this framework. However, this accounting sense is not only the least likely meaning of the word, it is also unnecessary. If Paul intended to teach a literal transfer or crediting of righteousness, he had more precise terms available to him, yet he did not use them.

If Paul had intended to say that righteousness was credited, added, calculated, or transferred, he could have employed any number of more explicit terms, such as:

- *protithemi* (to place or assign),
- *auxano* (to increase),
- *arithmos* (to number),
- *psephizo* (to calculate).

Instead, he consistently uses *logizomai*. Elsewhere in Romans, the word clearly retains its cognitive sense of “reasoning” or “considering” (in the ESV):

- *Romans 2:3*: Do you suppose [*logizē*, from *logizomai*], O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?
- *Romans 3:28*: For we hold [*logizometha*, from *logizomai*] that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.
- *Romans 14:14*: I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks [*logizetai*, from *logizomai*] it unclean.

Only in discussions of justification as found in Romans 4 is the word conveniently treated as an accounting metaphor.

“Counted.” The Greek verb *logizomai* is variously translated as “credited,” “reckoned,” “accounted,” or—most notably in the KJV at Romans 4:22 — “imputed.” While *logizomai* can denote evaluation or assessment, extending it into a technical accounting term is highly questionable and likely unwarranted. Many Greek lexicons reflect this expanded sense, often shaped more by assumptions drawn from penal substitutionary atonement (PSA) than by lexical probability. Lexicographers, like translators, are not immune to theological bias, and such presuppositions can subtly influence semantic judgments.

Abraham’s righteousness. In Romans 4:3b (“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”), the question arises: what brought about Abraham’s righteousness? The key term, *logizomai*, is a verb in the aorist indicative *passive*. The passive voice indicates that Abraham is the recipient of the *reckoning* (or “counted” in the ESV), while the surrounding syntax explains why this *reckoning* occurred. Specifically, the preceding clause—“Abraham believed [*episteusen*] God”—presents belief as the decisive act that precedes and explains the *reckoning*. The verb *episteusen* is aorist indicative *active*, portraying Abraham’s faith as a complete and decisive action. The flow of the sentence presents belief not as a mere mental assent, but as the basis upon which the *reckoning* follows. While the passive form of *logizomai* does not by itself specify agency, the construction clearly links the *reckoning* to Abraham’s act of believing.

Notably, the English preposition “to” in the phrase “counted to him” is not present in the Greek text. The dative pronoun *auto* already conveys the relational direction. More significantly, the phrase traditionally rendered “as righteousness” translates the Greek *eis dikaiosynen*. The preposition *eis* fundamentally denotes movement “into” or “unto” a result or state. While often translated idiomatically as “as” or “for,” the term retains a directional sense, indicating movement toward righteousness as an outcome.

Taken together, the phrase does not require a purely forensic reading in which righteousness is merely assigned externally. Rather, the grammar permits—and arguably favors—a reading in which **Abraham’s believing results in movement into righteousness**. In this sense, faith is not portrayed as acting upon God so that God must declare Abraham righteous, but as a living, active trust that leads Abraham *into* a righteous way of life. His belief “reckoned” him or “reasoned” him toward righteousness because **his faith oriented his life toward faithful obedience**.

Thus, Romans 4:3 can be read as describing righteousness not merely as a legal status credited apart from lived faith, but as the result toward which Abraham's believing moved him. In the most literal sense, Abraham's belief (and trust) in God is what caused him to reason into doing right, meaning that Abraham lived as a righteous man because his living, active faith moved him to live right. Given all this, here is how *The Chiastic Bible* renders Romans 4:3:

- *Romans 4:3 (CHI)*: For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham placed his trust in God, and that trust oriented his life toward right-doing."

Notably, Ellen G. White describes *righteousness* as *right-doing*:

- [COL 312.2](#): **Righteousness is right doing**, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged
- [RH March 18, 1909, par. 9](#): Then "**thy righteousness**"—**your right-doing**, your righteous actions — "shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rereward."
- [RH August 21, 1894, par. 6](#): **Righteousness** means being good and **doing good**.

Romans 9:5 "came the Christ. (God," [\[↵\]](#)

The full text reads,

Romans 9:5: To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, came the Christ. (God, who is over all, be blessed forever. Amen.)

The wording used in *The Chiastic Word* follows the RSV wording and is understood to be a separate doxology to God. It is a *parembole*—a parenthesis that is thrown in for emphasis but is a complete thought in itself. Most translations give it a Trinitarian bias which makes Christ into God. However, it is in reality praising God for all the great things he has done.

Romans 9:13 "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." [\[↵\]](#)

A quote from Malachi 1:2-3. This verse has mistakenly been interpreted by some to mean that God had not destined Esau for salvation. Or, more directly, God predestined Esau for damnation.

Hate does not always mean hate. First of all, in the Scriptures, hate does not always mean hate. For example,

Luke 14:26: If anyone comes to me and does not **hate** his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own

life, he cannot be my disciple.

In the above words, Jesus was obviously employing hyperbolic language. The intent is to contrast our love for Jesus and the love we have for ourselves and our family members. Essentially, we are asked to love Jesus more than ourselves and others. It is not a command to hate our family members or ourselves.

Another example is the case of a man married to two wives, as follows:

Deuteronomy 21:15-17 (WEB): If a man has two wives, the one beloved and the other **hated**, and they have borne him children, both the beloved and the **hated**, and if the firstborn son is hers who was **hated**,¹⁶ then it shall be, in the day that he causes his sons to inherit that which he has, that he may not give the son of the beloved the rights of the firstborn before the son of the **hated**, who is the firstborn;¹⁷ but he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the **hated**, by giving him a double portion of all that he has; for he is the beginning of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his.

This love/hate comparison of these two wives is not that the husband “hated” the one wife, because, if he truly hated her, he had the option to divorce her (according to the Law of Moses). Rather, the wife he “hated” is the one he loved less. Another example is the story of Jacob with his two wives, Rachel and Leah (see Gen. 29:30-31), in which God Himself speaks of Leah as the “hated” one.

Two nations, two peoples. Second, it is obvious from the context of Romans 9:13 that it is not about Jacob and Esau as individual persons, but as representative of two nations and peoples. From birth it was prophesied to Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau,

Genesis 25:23: And Yehovah said to her: **Two nations** are in your womb; **two peoples** will come from you and be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.

And so it was, that Esau (the firstborn) came to serve Jacob (the second born). Not as individuals in their lifetimes (because this did not occur), but in their descendants (the nations and peoples) that followed. The descendants of Esau, the Edomites, were far less favored than the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites. For example, the land given to the Edomites was mountainous, wilderness wasteland in comparison to the fertile land given to the Israelites (see Malachi 1:2-4).

Abraham’s descendants through Isaac. Yet God’s promise was given to Abraham’s descendants through the lineage of Isaac, of which Esau

was the firstborn. How then could it be that Jacob was chosen and blessed, while Esau was not, and this before they were even born; were not *both* worthy of the promise, given that they were both children of the promise?

The point of Paul's argument is that even though *both* were children of Abraham and of the promise, yet only Jacob was chosen. In the same way, although all Israelites are children of the promise, not all will be saved. "For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel" (Rom. 9:6). Indeed, only a few can truly be considered Israelites and be saved. As Isaiah is quoted saying, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved" (Rom. 9:27).

True Israelites are those by faith. Paul follows this line of thinking with,

Romans 9:30-33: What then shall we say? That Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness have obtained righteousness, that is, the **righteousness that is by faith**.³¹ But Israel, although they pursued a law of righteousness, did not attain a law of righteousness.³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works of the law. They stumbled over the stone of stumbling,³³ as it is written, "Behold, I am placing in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, yet no one who believes in him will be put to shame."

The issue then is not works of the law that makes one righteous or, in the case of the nation of Israel, having been *born* an Israelite; but it is all about *faith* in "God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3) that leads to salvation.

Romans 14:5 "one day to be more important" [!\[\]\(348c25c94ee5ca49c1cc96f556376c91_img.jpg\)](#)

The full verse reads as follows:

Romans 14:5: One person considers **one day** to be more important than another, while another person considers **every day** to be alike. Each one should be fully convinced in **his own mind**.

This verse is **not** addressing the seventh-day Sabbath found in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. If Paul were teaching in Romans 14 that the Sabbath commandment is optional, then he would be contradicting Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, the author of Hebrews, the book of Revelation, and God Himself. Such a contradiction does not occur. Therefore, the interpretation that Romans 14 refers to the fourth commandment must be incorrect.

What Romans 14 actually addresses. Romans 14 is not a chapter about the Sabbath. Paul states the topic plainly: "Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of arguing over opinions" (Romans 14:1).

He then identifies the “opinions” or *disputable matters*: whether to eat meat or only vegetables, optional fasting days, and personal devotional practices. These were issues of tension between Jewish and Gentile believers. They were never moral commands.

Paul never mentions the Sabbath, the Ten Commandments, or any change to God’s holy time—not once. Instead, Romans 14 consistently uses the language of **personal judgment** and **voluntary observance**. “Esteem one day” is not the language of command. God never tells His people to decide the Sabbath for themselves; He tells them to *remember* it: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” No one is instructed to be “fully convinced in their own mind” about murder, adultery, idolatry, or the Sabbath. God has already settled those matters.

Paul does not contradict Paul. He asks, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” Romans 14 does not dismantle God’s law—poor interpretation does.

The Sabbath was never a disputable matter. Romans 14 deals with practices God never commanded. The Sabbath, by contrast, is the only commandment that begins with the word *remember*, precisely because God knew it would be forgotten. Treating the Sabbath as a mere personal conviction is not freedom in Christ; it is theological amnesia.

The test of Jesus’ words. Jesus said, “Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle will pass from the law.” Has heaven passed away? Has the earth passed away? No. Then neither has the Sabbath.

The real issue: Authority. This debate is ultimately not about Romans 14—it is about authority. Who determines what is holy: God or man? Grace never erases obedience; grace empowers it.

Conclusion. Romans 14 does not mention the Sabbath, does not cancel the fourth commandment, and does not redefine God’s law. The seventh-day Sabbath stands exactly where it always has: blessed at Creation, written in stone, honored by Christ, kept by the faithful, and restored in eternity. Not because some seventh-day Sabbath keeping denomination says so, but because Scripture does.

Notes on 2 Corinthians

Content [\[↵\]](#)

2 Corinthians 3:17	“the Lord is the spirit”
2 Corinthians 13:14	“the fellowship of the holy spirit”

2 Corinthians 3:17 “the Lord is the spirit”

This refers to the Lord Jesus Christ *who is* the spirit. But what spirit is Paul referring to in this verse? The answer is found in 2 Cor. 3:3, the matching text of this chiasmic structure (2 Cor. 3:1-18), which reads:

2 Corinthians 3:3: You show that you are a letter from Christ, delivered by us, written not with ink, but with **the spirit of the living God**, not on stone tablets, but on tablets of human hearts.

It is **the spirit of the living God** which Christ poured out at Pentecost and continues to pour out at the present time (Acts 2:33, “**having received from the Father** the promise of the holy spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you now see and hear”). The Lord is the spirit because he is both the one who “pours out” the spirit of God and he is the one of which the spirit speaks of (cf. John 15:25; 16:14). The spirit in the believer gives life (v.6) and freedom (v.17).

The new covenant is the ministry of the holy spirit which is contrasted with the old covenant which is the ministry of the Law. The context of this passage also points out that “Only **in Christ** is this veil taken away” (v.14). That is, only when “someone turns to **the Lord**, the veil is taken away” (v.16). The terms “in Christ” and “the Lord” are parallel statements. Which means, when one says, “the Lord is the spirit,” one can also say, “Christ Jesus is the spirit.” As 2 Cor. 4:5 says, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but **Christ Jesus as Lord**.”

2 Corinthians 13:14 “the fellowship of the holy spirit”

The full verse reads as follows:

2 Corinthians 13:14: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and **the fellowship of the holy spirit** be with you all. Amen.

Three powers are mentioned here, but notice, only one of them is called God. One is the Lord, and the other is the holy spirit through which we have communion or fellowship with God and Jesus. The verse does not say fellowship “*with*” the spirit, but fellowship “*of*” the spirit. It is the

fellowship that comes “*of*” or by the spirit such that we can have fellowship *with* the Father and *with* the Son and *with* each other.

1 John 1:3: that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have **fellowship** *with* us; and indeed **our fellowship** is *with* the Father and *with* his Son Jesus Christ.

Again, the spirit is the means by which we have fellowship *with* the Father and *with* the Son and *with* each other. It is by means *of* (or *by*) the holy spirit that fellowship is possible. Also, consider the wording in the following two verses:

- *Ephesians 4:30*: And do not grieve **the holy spirit of God** with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.
- *1 Thessalonians 4:8*: Therefore whoever rejects this command does not reject man but **God**, who has given **his holy spirit** to you.

These two verses indicate that what we are given and what we are sealed with is “the holy spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30) and it is “his holy spirit” (1 Thess. 4:8). Thus, 2 Corinthians 13:14 should be understood as “the fellowship of the holy spirit (*of God*).”

Notes on Philippians

Content [\[↵\]](#)

Philippians 2:5 “Let this mind be in you”

Philippians 2:5 “Let this mind be in you”

This verse in its context reads:

Philippians 2:5-7: Let this mind be in you which *is* also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped [*harpagmos*], but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being-made [*genomenos*] in the likeness of men.

“Which *is* also in Christ Jesus.” Most translators use the word “*was*” instead of “*is*”, while a minority prefer “*is*” (or equivalent reading), to give this clause a present tense meaning. However, neither “*was*” nor “*is*” is in the Greek text. The difficulty here is that the language is ambiguous enough that it can be understood either way. It could either have a past tense meaning (“*was*”), or a present tense meaning (“*is*”). Why this is important is that there are theological implications on which way it is understood and translated.

Did Jesus deliberate? Connected with this past or present tense ambiguity is the question of whether Jesus Christ deliberated on what he should do or not do with regard to “equality with God”? Did he or did he not entertain the notion of grasping for “equality with God”? The apparent answer is that he did not. What v.6 is telling us is that Jesus never entertained—i.e. never considered or regarded — “equality with God” a thing to be grasped. Paul is telling us, not what Jesus was considering, but what he was not considering. In other words, Jesus never gave it a thought or consideration.

“Being in the form of God.” It does not say, “being God” but “being *in the form of God*”. Jesus Christ is in the image of God, in his form, in his likeness.

“Grasp.” Although Jesus Christ was (and is) in the form of God, he did not grasp (Greek, *harpagmos*) to be equal with God. The Greek word *harpagmos* is a noun form of the verb *harpazō*, to snatch up, to seize up. The word is used to refer to a plunder, a booty, prize. It is something which one snatches up or seizes upon to take for himself as one does a plunder or booty.

“Emptied himself.” Quite the opposite of grasping for equality with God, v.7 tells us what Jesus did instead. He “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant...” The form of a servant means to be humble and serve rather than to rule. Serving involves giving, not taking. As the Son of Man, Jesus gave no thought of exalting himself or grasping for equality with God. Rather, he humbled himself becoming obedient to the point of death. Recognizing his humanity, Jesus humbled himself before his Father, serving him, doing his will even in the face of death on a cross.

Putting it all together. We know what Jesus *did not* regard, and we know what Jesus *did* regard. Jesus *did not* regard (or consider) equality with God a thing to strive for and grasp. Rather, Jesus *did* regard the life of a humble servant. Jesus valued a life devoted to the will of God, even if it meant obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The question of tense, whether Jesus “is” or “was” in the form of God, is then answered by understanding the contrast that Paul is making with that of being in the “form of a servant.” It is not a *state of being* that Paul is contrasting, but a state of doing or *function*. Paul’s appeal to the Philippians is that they should follow Jesus’ footsteps. Rather than striving for equality with God, they should be striving for a life of humble service. If a Christian lives a life of humble service (as Jesus did), then in due time he will be exalted. “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Matt. 23:12). “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb. 5:8). So, although Christians are sons of God, there is no reason to be high-minded. Rather, they are to live a life as **servants of God**.

Notes on 1 Thessalonians

Content [\[↵\]](#)

1 Thessalonians 4:14 “God will take with him”

1 Thessalonians 4:14 “God will take with him”

The complete verse reads as follows:

1 Thessalonians 4:14: For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised, so also **God will take** with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

“God will take.” The word “take” in the Greek is *agō* (G71) and can mean, “bring, lead, lead away, or take.” The question is: To bring or take from where? Paul does not specify, and scholars are divided along creedal lines as to what it means.

The context gives us the answer. This verse starts with Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension. Then it says, “so also God will take with him”. That is, what happened to Jesus “in the same way” will happen to Christians, which is that if they die, they will be resurrected and taken to heaven just as Jesus was. The next question is: When? Again, the context gives us the answer. Verse 16 tells us,

1 Thessalonians 4:16: For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, **and the dead in Christ will rise first.**

It is at the Second Coming (the *Parousia*) when the dead in Christ will be resurrected. There are other places in the NT that tell us the same thing. Some examples,

- *John 5:25:* “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it will live.
- *John 5:28-29:* Do not marvel at this, because an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.
- *1 Corinthians 15:22-23:* For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

Notes on 1 Timothy

Content [\[e\]](#)

1 Timothy 2:5	“one mediator”
1 Timothy 2:15	“saved through the birth of the Child”
1 Timothy 3:16	“which was manifested in <i>the</i> flesh”
1 Timothy 6:15	“only Potentate”

1 Timothy 2:5 “one mediator”

The full text reads,

1 Timothy 2:5: For there is one God and **one mediator** between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,

This verse identifies three entities: one God, one mediator, and men. Jesus is the sole mediator (“one mediator”) between God and men. As mediator, he stands between two parties: the “one God”—here best understood as shorthand for the Father specifically, in keeping with Paul’s usage elsewhere (compare 1 Corinthians 8:6, “one God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ”)—and “men.” Christ’s fitness to mediate rests on his standing with both sides: **he shares deity with the Father**, and, as “the man Christ Jesus,” **he shares humanity with those he represents**.

The verse also hinges on a subtle but important grammatical point in the Greek text underlying the phrase “*the* man Christ Jesus.” The Greek reads *ánthrōpos Christós Iēsoûs*—without the definite article (*ho*, “the”) before *ánthrōpos* (“man”). Literally, it says “man Christ Jesus,” not “*the* man Christ Jesus.” English translations, including the KJV, insert “the” for smoother reading, but no article is present in the original.

That absence is worth pausing on, though it should be weighed carefully. In Greek, a noun without the article can sometimes emphasize *quality* or *category* rather than pointing to one definite, particular referent among others—a pattern grammarians such as Daniel Wallace describe as the “qualitative” force of an anarthrous noun. On this reading, the phrase isn’t primarily saying “this specific man” (singling him out from other men); it’s characterizing **what Christ is by nature—man**. It’s fair to note that appositional nouns attached to a proper name, as *ánthrōpos* is here attached to *Christós Iēsoûs*, are often anarthrous simply as a matter of Greek convention, so the grammar alone can’t carry the full theological weight; but taken together with the verse’s own logic—that a mediator must have standing on both sides—the qualitative reading fits naturally. Jesus Christ was born a man and remains a man in Heaven, mediating

between God and men. There are no other human mediators in Heaven or on Earth—no Mary, no saints, no earthly priests. Christ Jesus alone mediates and intercedes for mankind (Romans 8:34).

Paul isn't saying "the mediator is this particular man, as opposed to that other one." He's saying **the mediator's qualifying nature**—his fitness to mediate—is that he is *man*: fully, genuinely human, sharing that nature with the "men" side of the equation, just as he shares deity with the "one God" side. The mediator's dual standing—God and man—is precisely what Paul's argument requires: a mediator must belong to both parties he stands between.

1 Timothy 2:15 "saved through the birth of the Child" [↩]

The full text reads,

1 Timothy 2:13-15 (CHI): For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and fell into transgression, ¹⁵ but **she will be saved through the birth of the Child**, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with sobriety [*with soundness of mind*].

The "she" in v.15 is Eve, and by extension "they"—Adam and Eve, and mankind in general—will be "saved" through the birth of the promised Messiah (cf. Gen. 3:15). Most translations render the term *teknogonia* [G5042] as "childbearing"—as in "saved through childbearing." But this would contradict the gospel teaching that salvation comes through faith in Christ *alone*, and would also invalidate Paul's counsel to virgins and widows in 1 Corinthians 7. The NET Bible entertains the idea that it refers to women being delivered or preserved through "child-rearing," with the idea that this is a woman's submissive role in relation to men. However, the term *teknogonia* is rare and unclear enough that this idea (and interpretation) cannot be fully substantiated. The term for "saved" (*sōthēsetai*) in this verse is singular and normally would refer back to Eve, the subject of the sentence. In this case, Eve's salvation was indeed through the birth of the promised Seed.

1 Timothy 3:16 "which was manifested in the flesh" [↩]

The full text reads,

1 Timothy 3:16 (CHI): Beyond all question, great is the mystery of godliness, **which was manifested in the flesh**, vindicated by the spirit, seen by angels, preached among nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

In contrast, the NKJV reads (also the KJV and others),

1 Timothy 3:16 (NKJV): And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: **God was manifested in the flesh**, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.

There are some Greek manuscripts which have the reading, “**God** was manifested in *the* flesh,” instead of “**which** was manifested in *the* flesh,” which the KJV and other English translations use. However, the consensus among Greek scholars is that this reading is a corruption.

Historical evidence. When the Christological controversies occurred in the fourth century (i.e. in the Nicaean Council, 325 AD period), we do not find even one solitary person making a reference to the “**God** was manifest in *the* flesh” version of this verse as evidence for identifying Jesus as “God.” This fact itself undeniably shows that it was unknown to them. If indeed it did read this way, then this passage would have been brought forward as “Exhibit A”. Yet no one mentioned it, even though this passage more than any other would have supported the teaching that in the incarnate, Christ was “God”. Of all the documentation that we have on what was argued in these debates at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD, this verse was never mentioned. It was never mentioned because it did not exist.

The word “God” did not appear in 1 Timothy 3:16 until much later. Bruce Metzger writes about this in the following,

“Thus, no uncial (in the first hand) earlier than the eighth or ninth century (Ψ) supports θεός [God]; all ancient versions presuppose ὁς or ὅ and no patristic writer prior to the last third of the fourth century testifies to the reading θεός. The reading θεός arose either (a) accidentally, through the misreading of OC as ΘC, or (b) deliberately, either to supply a substantive for the following six verbs, or, with less probability, to provide greater dogmatic precision.” — Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, p. 641.

Most modern English translations side with this view and generally translate it as, “He [Or, *Who*] was manifested in the flesh.” This quite plainly indicates that even staunch Trinitarian translation scholars do not regard the version, “*God* was manifested in the flesh,” as authentic, even though it would clearly support their doctrinal view.

Contextual meaning. Again, the full verse reads as follows:

1 Timothy 3:16 (CHI): Beyond all question, great is the **mystery** of godliness, **which was manifested in the flesh**, vindicated by *the* spirit, seen by angels, preached among nations, believed on in *the*

world, taken up in glory.

Paul's reference to this "mystery" is found in his other letters, and helps us to understand the meaning and context of this "mystery."

- *Ephesians 1:9-10*: He made known to us the **mystery** of his will, according to his good pleasure, **which he purposed in Christ** ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of times, to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth.
- *Ephesians 3:9*: and to bring to light for everyone the plan of the **mystery** that has been hidden for ages in God, who created all things **through Jesus Christ**.
- *Ephesians 5:32*: This is a profound **mystery**, but I am talking about **Christ** and the church.
- *Colossians 4:3*: At the same time pray for us as well, that God may open to us a door for the word so that we may speak the **mystery of Christ**, for which also I am bound.

It is evident from the above references that Paul communicates God's mystery as being Christ, and all that God has done and will do through and for him. The verse that comes the closest in construction to 1 Timothy 3:16 is Colossians 1:27 which reads as follows:

Colossians 1:27: To them God resolved to make known what are the riches of the glory of this **mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ** among you, **the hope of glory**.

The relative pronoun used here is the masculine relative pronoun *hos* ("which"), that refers back to the neuter noun "mystery". This verse also ends with "glory" (i.e. "the hope of glory") and is similar to "taken up in glory" as is found at the end of 1 Timothy 3:16.

Internal evidence. The reading, "*God* was manifested in *the* flesh," has the associated problem of making no sense with the rest of the verse. It makes no sense to say,

- *God* was manifested in the flesh,
- [*God was*] vindicated by *the* spirit,
- [*God was*] seen by angels,
- [*God was*] preached among nations,
- [*God was*] believed on in *the* world,
- [*God was*] taken up in glory.

However, it makes perfect sense when one understands it to mean, "*the* man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Manuscript support. Our selection of “which” for 1 Timothy 3:16 is supported by manuscripts: Codex Claromontanus, Peshitta, Coptic, Ethiopic, Sahidic, and Gothic. The modern English translations that use “He” (or “Who”) have support from the Alexandrian text-type family of manuscripts: Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Alexandrinus, and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus. In this case, we do not side with the majority of later manuscripts which contain “*God*” for the reasons already cited.

1 Timothy 6:15 “only Potentate” [\[e\]](#)

In context, the text reads,

1 Timothy 6:14-16: that you keep the commandment unspotted and above reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which *God* will bring about in his own time—he who is the blessed and **only Potentate**, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or is able to see. To him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

Many (if not most) translations leave no ambiguity as to the “only Potentate” being God the Father. However, the few (more literal) translations may cause some readers to interpret it differently. For example, notice the wording in the following two major translations, the ESV and NASB:

- *1 Timothy 6:14-16 (ESV):* to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lord, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.
- *1 Timothy 6:14-16 (NASB):* that you keep the commandment without fault or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

The (supplied) underlined phrase “which he will display” (ESV) and “which He will bring about” (NASB) in the above quotation could lead the reader to believe that the antecedent to the “he” is Jesus, therefore the “only Sovereign” must be Jesus. But this would be incorrect, as explained

in the following.

The “he” in v.15 is made clear by what is found in the next verse, v.16. Read again v.16 and consider the following two clauses in this verse:

1. **“Who alone has immortality.”** If Jesus *alone* has immortality, then God the Father must not possess immortality. But the opposite is found in Scripture. For example, “For he [*Jesus Christ*] was crucified through weakness, yet he lives through the power of God” (2 Corinthians 13:4).
2. **“Whom no man has ever seen or is able to see.”** If no man has ever seen or is able to see Jesus, then what was his life on earth and the Resurrection all about? Obviously, the disciples saw Jesus both before and after the Resurrection, and before he ascended to Heaven. Hence, it cannot refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and must refer to God the Father. See also: Colossians 1:15 (“the invisible God”); John 1:18 (“No one has seen God at any time”); John 5:37 (“You have neither heard his [the Father’s] voice at any time, nor seen his form”); 1 John 4:12 (“No one has seen God at any time”).

Moreover, in this same letter, 1 Timothy 1:17 says, “Now to the King of the ages, **immortal, invisible**, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” The only immortal, invisible is the only wise God, the Father. The only rational understanding of this verse is that the “only Potentate” is referring to God the Father.

Further still, the phrase “only Potentate (or Sovereign)” is in the Greek, *monos dunastes*, and can be translated as only “Potentate” or “Sovereign” or “Ruler,” etc. The word “Potentate” closely approximates the intent of the Greek since this English word refers to potency or power. In his trial before the chief priests, the elders, and the whole council, Jesus said that “you will see the Son of Man **sitting at the right hand of Power**, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). This is an obvious reference to the Second Coming, and “sitting at the right hand of Power” is telling us that Jesus will be sitting at the right hand of God the Father when he comes.

Summary. It is God who causes Jesus to appear in His (i.e., God’s) own timing. This declaration is followed in the balance of vv.15-16 with an exalted description of God Himself. Many interpreters treat these two verses as a hymn, and some translations reflect this understanding by putting these verses in poetic format, such as the Jerusalem Bible, Contemporary English Version (CEV), and the International Standard Version (ISV).

Notes on Titus

Content [\[↵\]](#)

Titus 2:13

“appearing of...glory”

Titus 2:13 “appearing of...glory”

The full text reads,

Titus 2:13: as we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of our great God and Savior’s glory—Jesus Christ,

It is the “*appearing of...glory*” not the “*glorious appearance of*” as some versions read. If the term “*glorious*” were intended, then the Greek word *endoxos* would have been used, instead of *doxa*. That is, Jesus will come in God’s glory—he who is the radiance of God’s glory (Heb. 1:3), and who will come in the glory of the Father (who is our great God and Savior). See Matt. 16:27; Titus 2:10. Also, it is in line (chiastically and thematically) with v.10’s “God our Savior” and the “saving grace of God”.

Notes on Hebrews

Content [\[e\]](#)

Hebrews 1:6 “again brings his firstborn into the world [*to come*]”

[Hebrews 1:8](#) “Your throne, O God”

[Hebrews 2:7](#) “a little lower than the angels”

[Hebrews 9:14](#) “eternal spirit”

Hebrews 1:6 “again brings his firstborn into the world *to come*”

The full verse reads:

Hebrews 1:6: And when he **again** brings his **firstborn** into the **world to come**, he says, “Let all the angels of God worship him.”

Within the context of Hebrews 1, this verse is best understood as referring not to Christ’s incarnation but to his resurrection, exaltation, and heavenly enthronement. The preceding verse (Hebrews 1:5) quotes Psalm 2:7 — “You are My Son; today I have begotten You”—a passage that Acts 13:33 explicitly applies to Christ’s resurrection. Hebrews thus presents the resurrection as the occasion on which the Father publicly declares and exalts His Son as the promised Davidic King.

The Greek term translated “world” here is *oikoumene* (G3625), not *kosmos* (the created world) or *aion* (an age). While *oikoumene* ordinarily denotes the “inhabited world,” Hebrews qualifies it as “the world **to come**” (Hebrews 2:5), referring to the future order over which Christ now reigns. Hebrews later portrays this coming realm as the heavenly assembly of God’s people and angels gathered around the heavenly Zion (Hebrews 12:22–23).

The link between Hebrews 1:5 and 1:6. Hebrews 1:5 reads:

Hebrews 1:5a: For to which of the angels did God ever say, “**You are my Son; today I have begotten you**”?

This quotation comes from Psalm 2:7, which Acts 13:33 explicitly applies to Christ’s resurrection:

Acts 13:30-37: But God raised him from the dead,³¹ and for many days he was seen by those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people.³² And we preach to you the good news that what God promised to our fathers, he has fulfilled to us, their children, by raising up Jesus,³³ **just as it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you.’**³⁴ As for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no longer

to return to corruption, God has spoken in this way: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’³⁵ Therefore it also says in another place: ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’³⁶ For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep, was added to his fathers, and saw corruption.³⁷ But he whom God raised up did not see corruption.

Resurrection and exaltation, then, form the central movement of Hebrews 1. Having conquered death, Christ is declared the Son in power, enthroned at the Father’s right hand, and worshiped by the angels. This **resurrection-glory theme** is reinforced by the New Testament’s repeated description of Christ as “the **firstborn** from the dead”:

- *Romans 8:29*: Because those whom he foreknew he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the **firstborn** among many brothers.
- *Colossians 1:18*: He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead**, that in all things he might be preeminent.
- *Revelation 1:5*: and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, **the firstborn from the dead**, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and washed us from our sins with his blood

The entire chapter, then, centers on Jesus and his resurrection glory. He is the firstborn from the dead, whom the angels are to worship (v. 6); he is exalted by God to sit at His right hand, and so is above the angels (v. 13) and worthy of worship.

Not “begotten” but “I have begotten.” In Hebrews 1:5 and Acts 13:33, the word translated “begotten” is not the Greek *monogenēs* but *gegennēka* — “I have begotten,” the perfect tense of *gennaō* (“to beget”), quoted directly from Psalm 2:7. Revelation 1:5 uses a third term, *prōtotokos*, “firstborn.” Each of these three terms carries a distinct meaning, and the distinctions matter for interpretation.

In both Greek and Hebrew culture, the firstborn (*prototokos*) received the birthright (*prototokia*) from his father, while an only son would be described as *monogenes*, “only-begotten.”

Commentators generally understand the citation of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 to refer not to Christ’s original birth but to his resurrection and exaltation. On this view, the Father’s declaration, “Today I have begotten you,” marks the public inauguration of the risen Messiah as heir of the Davidic covenant promised in 2 Samuel 7:14. Through his resurrection, Christ becomes “the firstborn from the dead” (cf. Revelation 1:5), inheriting the royal authority promised to David’s Son and

becoming “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” By virtue of his victory over death, Christ rightfully supersedes Satan as ruler of this world. Romans 1:3–4 reflects the same idea:

Romans 1:3-4: concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh ⁴ and **who was declared to be the Son of God in power** according to the spirit of holiness **by the resurrection from the dead**, Jesus Christ our Lord,

The application of Psalm 2:7 in Hebrews 1:3–5, then, speaks not of Christ’s physical birth but of his exaltation to a new phase of his mediatorial ministry. Following his ascension, Christ received from the Father the authority associated with his messianic reign, poured out the promised holy spirit upon his disciples, and commenced his ministry both as our great High Priest (Hebrews 2:17) and as the rightful ruler of humanity, for “he is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36).

Acts 13:33, specifically, speaks of the Father “raising up” (Greek, *anistemi*) Jesus and thereby “begetting” (Greek, *gennaō*) him—language set within the context of the Messiah fulfilling the kingly role promised to David and prophesied in Psalm 2:7.

Summary thought. Here then is the distinction: The Son of God in heaven (pre-Incarnation) became the Son of Man on earth (through his mother Mary in the Incarnation), and in the Resurrection and Ascension became the **firstborn** of many sons of God (i.e., “the firstborn among many brothers”).

Witness Lee gives us a similar perspective:

- On the one hand, John 3:16, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” This verse indicates that Christ was God’s only Son. On the other hand, Romans 8:29 says, “That He might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Have you ever considered that Christ is the Son of God in two ways? In the first way, He was God’s only begotten Son, and in the second way He is the firstborn Son among many sons. Romans 8:29 says that **the believers are to be conformed not to the image of the only begotten Son but to the image of God’s firstborn Son**. —Witness Lee, *The Secret of Experiencing Christ*, p. 41.
- Eternally speaking, Christ is the only begotten Son of God. This is His eternal status. But through resurrection he, as a man, was born to be the firstborn Son of God. The word *firstborn* indicates that **God now has many sons** (Hebrews 2:10). Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 1:6 both speak of Christ as the Firstborn. We who believe in Christ are the many sons of God and the many brothers of the Lord, the many

brothers of the firstborn Son of God (Romans 8:29). —Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of the New Testament*, p. 2994.

Hebrews 1:8 “Your throne, O God” [4]

In the ESV the full verse reads as follows:

Hebrews 1:8-9 (ESV): But of the Son *he says*, “**Your throne, O God**, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; **therefore God, your God**, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

A citation, not a direct declaration. Verse 8 functions as a **citation** rather than a direct declaration. The phrase “*he says*” is absent from the original Greek, meaning the text does not depict God the Father actively addressing the Son as “God” in real time. Instead, the phrasing serves as a **citation** formula: “but *concerning* the Son [*Scripture says*] . . .”

This distinction shifts the weight of the passage: rather than the Father personally identifying the Son as God, the author of Hebrews is applying an Old Testament passage (Psalm 45:6–7, originally directed to a Davidic king using exalted court language) typologically to Christ. Consequently, the passage focuses less on establishing an ontological statement about the Son’s essential deity and more on applying messianic and royal enthronement language to Jesus.

The Psalm being cited. The author of Hebrews is quoting Psalm 45:6-7:

Psalm 45:6-7 (ESV): Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; ⁷ you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

Psalm 45 is a royal wedding song that has also been read messianically, including by some Jewish interpreters. In Hebrew, Psalm 45:6 reads literally, “*Your throne God forever and ever.*” The word rendered “God” is *Elohim*. Most translations, including the ESV, take it as vocative (“O God”). Others read it as descriptive — “your divine throne” or “your god-like throne” — and still others take it as a construct or genitive relationship — “your throne is of God” or “your throne is God’s throne.”

Robert Alter argues that the traditional rendering “Your throne, O God” is *anomalous*, since it would place a direct address to God in the middle of a psalm that is otherwise addressed entirely to the king or his bride. He instead renders the line “Your throne *of* God is forevermore,” taking the king’s throne as belonging to, or deriving its authority from, God. This departs from most modern translations, including the KJV,

ESV, NIV, and NET. Of the two more defensible readings — (1) “God” as a title applied to the king, or (2) God as the *source* of the king’s authority—the latter fits the context of the psalm more naturally.

“Your throne, O God” in the New Testament quotation. The Greek of Hebrews 1:8 reads *ho thronos sou ho theos* (“your throne **the God**”). The phrase *ho theos* (“the God”) overwhelmingly refers to God the Father elsewhere in the New Testament. Most translations, however, take their cue from the traditional vocative reading of Psalm 45:6 rather than treating the phrase as a construct or genitival relationship. Read that way, the Son’s throne—his kingly power and authority—is *of* God, consistent with the point that follows: there is only one throne in heaven.

One throne. There are not *two* thrones in Heaven, but one—the throne of God the Father. Jesus sits *at the right hand* of that throne: “After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3), and “Jesus . . . is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). On this reading, Hebrews 1:8 is not addressing Jesus directly as “God” enthroned in his own right, but describing the resurrected Jesus who sits at the right hand of God’s throne. This coheres with what follows a few verses later, where the Father says to the Son, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Hebrews 1:13).

Hebrews 2:7 “a little lower than the angels” [↵]

This is a quote from Psalm 8:6 which is the reading found in all the old Greek translations, as well as the Targum. The Hebrew, however, reads, “a little lower than God [Heb. *Elohim*].” The implication here is that this is referring to the *abstract* qualities of God, such as angels possess in an inferior form; namely, heavenly, spiritual, incorporeal natures. Man, in his original creation, was set next beneath them. So, the man Jesus, though Lord of angels, when he emptied himself of the externals of his divinity, was in his human nature “a little lower than the angels”; though this is not the primary reference here, but man in general. When understood this way, the argument posed by the author of Hebrews is not affected by the difference in translation. Indeed, this reading enhances still more the position assigned to man.

Hebrews 9:14 “eternal spirit” [↵]

The text reads:

Hebrews 9:14 (CHI): how much more will the blood of Christ, who through *the eternal spirit* offered himself without blemish to God, purify your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?

In the Greek, the noun translated “spirit” has no article—literally “through eternal spirit,” not “through *the* eternal spirit.” The article’s absence is best explained by taking the phrase *generically* or *qualitatively*, describing the *kind* of spirit at work rather than pointing to one specific, previously-mentioned spirit. A close parallel is Hebrews 7:16, where Christ is described as one who has become a priest “not through a legal requirement concerning physical descent, but through the power of an *endless life*.” In both passages, Hebrews contrasts what is temporal and earthly with what is eternal and divine.

The phrase, “offered himself without blemish to God,” may encompass not only Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross but also his presentation before the Father as the heavenly High Priest. The efficacy of Christ’s blood is eternal not merely because he physically died, but because his self-offering was accomplished through the eternal spirit. It was the spirit [*of God*] which empowered and characterized his perfect sacrifice, giving it everlasting efficacy. The spirit is eternal and can alone be efficacious in eternal things.

This stands in contrast to the Levitical sacrifices, whose efficacy was inherently limited and had to be repeated—a limitation Hebrews elsewhere ties to their inability to perfect the conscience of the worshiper (9:9–10; 10:1–4), and which this reading extends to the animals’ own perishable nature (i.e., the *fleeting spirit* of the animals).

Notes on 2 Peter

Content [\[↗\]](#)

2 Peter 1:1 “our God”

2 Peter 1:19 “morning star”

2 Peter 1:1 “our God”

The full verse reads:

2 Peter 1:1 (CHI): Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained a faith as precious as ours because of the righteousness *shown by* our God and *our* Savior Jesus Christ:

Literally, “the God of us and Savior Jesus Christ.” This verse does not read, “the God and Savior of us, Jesus Christ,” which would apply both titles to Christ alone. Instead, Peter appears to identify two entities—the Father and the Son—as is typical in New Testament greetings. Notably, “God” (Greek *theos*) is never applied to Christ (*christos*) this way elsewhere, while “Lord” (Greek *kurios*) is applied to him constantly, including in the very next verse (v.2). By comparison, the same construction appears in 2 Thessalonians 1:12, “the God of us and the Lord Jesus Christ,” which is generally understood to mean two entities.

2 Peter 1:19 “morning star”

The full verse reads:

2 Peter 1:19 (CHI): So we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the **morning star** rises in your hearts.

“Morning star” from *phōsphoros*. The term “morning star” is translated from the Greek word, *phōsphoros* [G5459]. It is derived from *phōs* light + *pherein* to carry, bring; thus, light-bearing or light-bringing. This term is rightly understood to refer to Jesus, since Jesus himself identifies himself in this way in the Book of Revelation,

Revelation 22:16 (CHI): “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. **I am** the root and offspring of David, **the bright morning star**.”

Lucifer as the “morning star”. The Latin Bible of the Catholic Church, the Vulgate (current edition is the *Nova Vulgata*), translates *phōsphoros* in 2 Peter 1:19 as “*et lucifer oriatur in cordibus vestris*”, which in English

means: “and **lucifer** arise in your hearts”. Why does the Vulgate use “lucifer”, which is understood to refer to Satan, and not “morning star” which refers to Jesus? The answer is in the origin to the term “Lucifer”.

Origin of “Lucifer.” The word “Lucifer” comes from two Latin words. These two words are: Lux-lucis (=light) + ferre (=to bring, bear; carry off). Thus, the name “Lucifer” means “Light-bearer” or “Light-bringer”. As it turns out, this is exactly what the Greek term *phōsphoros* means, as already mentioned. The Vulgate, then, is not incorrect in translating *phōsphoros* as Lucifer, since *phōsphoros* is simply “Lucifer” in Latin. Moreover, it is consistent with how the Vulgate translates Isaiah 14:12 from the Greek Septuagint which also uses the same Greek word, *phōsphoros*, albeit an old Greek version of it (i.e. *eosphoros*).

Isaiah 14:12. The older Greek form of *phōsphoros* is *eosphoros* which is the term found in the Greek translation (the Septuagint) of the Hebrew text in Isaiah 14:12. In the KJV, it is translated as follows:

Isaiah 14:12 (KJV): How art thou fallen from heaven, O **Lucifer** [Greek, *eosphoros*], son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

The problem. Given the context of Isaiah 14:12, there is no question that “Lucifer” in this passage refers to Satan, but “Lucifer” refers to Jesus in 2 Peter 1:19. How then can “Lucifer” (or “morning star” or “day star”) be Satan in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament? We have an obvious problem of *interpretation* between the Old and New Testaments regarding this term. The way most English translators handle this problem is that they don’t. Both Isaiah 14:12 and 2 Peter 1:19 as essentially translated the same way, with only the KJV and NKJV as exceptions (see table below).

<i>Bible</i>	Isaiah 14:12	2 Peter 1:19
KJV	O Lucifer	Day star
NKJV	O Lucifer	Morning star
ESV	O Day Star	Morning star
NASB	You star of the morning	Morning star
NIV	Morning star	Morning star
CSB	Shining morning star	Morning star
NET	O shining one	Morning star
WEB	Shining one	Morning star

But this does not deal with the major problem of *interpretation*. From a

translation basis, all these Bible versions are doing a fine job. But from an *interpretation* basis, they are at odds with each other; one referring to Satan and the other to Jesus.

The solution. The answer is found in the translator’s reliance on the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). To begin with, the Septuagint is a very poor quality and highly unreliable translation of the Hebrew Bible. With respect to the term *phōsphoros*, the following evidence will show how unreliable the Septuagint can be.

The Septuagint uses the term *phōsphoros* (actually its older version “*eosphoros*”) seven times to translate **six different Hebrew words** of the Old Testament. As the following table shows, each of the first six were *mistranslations*.

#	Scripture	Hebrew	Septuagint (LXX) notes
1	1 Sam. 30:17	<i>nesheph</i> (“twilight”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>
2	Job 3:9	<i>aphaph</i> (“eyelids”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>
3	Job 11:17	<i>boqer</i> (“morning”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>
4	Job 38:12	<i>shachar</i> (“dawn”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>
5	Job 41:18	<i>shachar</i> (“dawn”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>
6	Psalm 110:3	<i>mishchar</i> (“dawn”)	Mistranslated to <i>eosphoros</i>

This leaves us with the seventh and final instance of *eosphoros* in the Septuagint: Isaiah 14:12. In this verse, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word *heylel* [H1966, *hêlēl*] to *eosphoros*. So, what does the Hebrew word “*heylel*” mean? Unfortunately, we don’t know. We don’t know because this is the only time this word is used in the Hebrew Bible.

In this case, the only way we can determine its meaning is to: (1) examine the root or root words from which it is formed, and (2) examine the context. This effort was done at length by Frank W. Nelte (see the link: tinyurl.com/yc49ctcn). This researcher was able to find two potential root words, which are: “*halal*” and “*yalal*”. And they have emphatically different meanings but, surprisingly, both meanings could be applied to Satan.

If the word “*heylel*” is derived from the word “*halal*” it **applies perfectly** to Satan; and if the word “*heylel*” is derived from the word “*yalal*” it **applies equally perfectly** to Satan.

The two possibilities convey complementary messages. So, in giving us the word “*heylel*” but allowing the origin of this word to be obscured, God in effect said: to know what I really mean when I call Satan “*heylel*”, **you can take your pick** from the two possibilities, because **both of them**

apply.

Further, the researcher concluded that “*heylel*” can in no way mean “morning star” or “day star”, because neither the word “day” nor the word “star” has any connection to either of the two potential root words for *heylel*. Likewise, “*heylel*” cannot possibly mean “Light-bringer” or “Lucifer”, because neither potential root verb (“*halal*” or “*yalal*”) in any way implies “bringing” anything, or “carrying” anything.

Additionally, the researcher makes clear that the word “*heylel*” is **not a name** for the individual being spoken about (i.e. Satan), **but a descriptive term** applied to that individual, intended to sum up all the attributes exposed by the next two verses.

Finally, he offers the following translation for the closest meaning he was able to determine for “*heylel*” in Isaiah 14:12. It is this,

Isaiah 14:12 (proposed translation): “How are you fallen from heaven, **you incredibly arrogant and mad boaster. . .**”

Takeaways. Here are the important takeaways:

1. The “morning star” of 2 Peter 1:19 refers to Jesus and Jesus alone. There is absolutely no connection with the mistranslated Isaiah 14:12.
2. The mistranslated Isaiah 14:12 is found in nearly *all* English versions, since they all lean on the Septuagint (LXX) rendering of the Hebrew word *heylel*. The few exceptions are those who transliterate the word.
3. The term “Lucifer” is a made-up Latin word of the Greek word *phōsphoros*, which is found in 2 Peter 1:19. However, because “Lucifer” is generally understood to refer to Satan by referencing the mistranslated Isaiah 14:12, it should never be used in the context of 2 Peter 1:19.

Notes on 1 John

Content [\[e\]](#) [\[↑\]](#) [\[↓\]](#)

- 1 John 5:6 “water and blood”
[1 John 5:7-8](#) “For there are three that testify”
[1 John 5:20](#) “true God”

1 John 5:6 “water and blood”

The text reads as follows:

1 John 5:6: This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only but by water and blood. It is the spirit which testifies to this, because the spirit is the truth.

The terms “water” and “blood” are metaphors drawn from the Jewish sacrificial system, in which water and blood rituals were required before a priest could enter the Tabernacle (the Tent of Meeting containing the Holy and Most Holy Places). Both sets of rituals took place in the courtyard in front of the Tabernacle: blood sacrifices at the Bronze Altar, and washings at the Bronze Laver.

Two washings. The priests practiced two distinct types of washing at the Bronze Laver. At consecration, a priest received a full-body washing; afterward, he needed only to wash his hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle. These two washings correspond to two distinct Greek terms. *Louo* [G3068] is a primary verb meaning “to bathe” or “to wash” the whole body—it can also describe washing a corpse or cleansing blood from a wound. *Nipto* [G3538] means to wash or rinse a specific body part, such as the face, feet, or hands, typically used just before or after an activity like coming in from outside or preparing to eat.

Symbolically, *louo* is completed once for the believer—when the sinner is justified and receives the righteousness of Christ in the new-birth experience. The ceremony of baptism (whole-body immersion) corresponds to this. Thereafter, daily cleansing, or *nipto*, continues—the pattern Jesus points to in John 13:10, where “he who is bathed (*louo*) needs only to wash (*nipto*) his feet.” Both washings are tied to the operation of the holy spirit (Titus 3:5).

Dual atonement. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, a two-way imputation occurs: our sins are imputed to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. The work of Christ was not only to forgive our sins but to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). In the

same way, the sanctuary service was not limited to the daily blood sacrifice at the Bronze Altar—there was also a yearly blood sacrifice and cleansing service on the Day of Atonement, dealing with the problem of sin fully and forever.

1 John 5:7-8 “For there are three that testify” [⚡]

In the KJV, this passage contains additional wording that is commonly referred to as the “Johannine Comma” (henceforth, “the Comma”). The KJV reads as follows (with the Comma enclosed in square brackets and *italicized*):

1 John 5:7-8 (KJV): For there are three that bear record [*in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*⁸ *And there are three that bear witness in earth*], the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

The evidence *against* this “Comma” wording is the rarity of Greek manuscripts that contain it.

- **No Comma before 10th century.** The earliest manuscripts, earlier than the 10th century, *do not* contain the Comma. They include the following 12 manuscripts: 01, B, A, 048, 0296, L, P, K, Ψ, 049, 056, and 0142.
- **Only 10 manuscripts contain the Comma.** Of all the Greek manuscripts (post 10th century), only ten contain the Comma. Sometimes an eleventh Greek manuscript (GA 635) is cited as having the Comma (written in the margin), but it does not.
- **Of these 10, five are “marginal notes.”** (See below.)
- **Of the 5 that remain, three are copies of the TR.** Thus, only two manuscripts are worthy of consideration—i.e., GA 629 and GA 61.

Marginal notes. Of the Greek manuscripts that *do* contain the Comma—a total of ten—five of them include the Comma *in the margin as a later addition*. (See “Table 1” below.)

Manuscripts with the Comma in the body of the text. The other five Greek manuscripts that contain the Comma in the body of the text itself. (See “Table 2” below.)

Thus, the evidence in support of the Comma is practically non-existent. Of the ten manuscripts that include the Comma, half of them (i.e. 5 manuscripts) have it in the margin and *all* of these marginal notes are insertions from a later date. Of the ones that do include the Comma within the body of the text, only GA 629 and GA 61 are of any importance, given

that the other three are of a late date and are likely copies of some version of the Textus Receptus.

Only two manuscripts to consider. We are then left to consider manuscripts **GA 629** and **GA 61** and, as noted in the footnotes,

these two manuscripts are of Roman Catholic provenance and give strong evidence of being translations of the Latin into Greek.

Rather than demonstrating authenticity, these two manuscripts are Greek translations of Latin copies of some prior Latin manuscript (or manuscripts) containing an interpolated Comma of unknown origin.

Reference: [“The Greek Manuscripts of the Comma Johanneum \(1 John 5:7–8\)” by Elijah Hixson, January 7, 2020.](#)

Concluding thoughts. The issues are summarized as follows:

1. The Comma Johanneum supports the doctrine of the Trinity, but appears only in ten late Greek manuscripts; five of which contain the Comma in the margin.
2. The oldest manuscript (**GA 629**) containing this passage is from the 14th century, while all the others are even later.
3. The passage is absent from earlier (pre-14th century) Greek manuscripts and Church Fathers’ writings, which is significant as they would have likely quoted it if it were original.
4. It is believed that the Comma Johanneum entered the Greek text through Latin translations, where it appeared as an allegory for the Trinity.
5. Erasmus, a key figure in the development of the Textus Receptus, included the Comma Johanneum in his third edition under pressure from the Catholic Church, but initially excluded it due to the lack of Greek manuscript support.
6. Modern advocates of the Textus Receptus and KJV argue for the Comma Johanneum based on the assumption that these versions represent the original text, which is a circular argument.
7. Ultimately, the historical evidence does not support the Comma Johanneum as part of the original text, and faith should be rooted in history rather than circular arguments.

Only 10 Greek manuscripts contain the “Johannine Comma”

Table 1. Manuscripts that contain the Comma *in the margin as a later addition*.

Mss	Century	Name	As a marginal note
^a GA 221	c. 10 th		Margin: c. 1854
^b GA 177	11 th	BSB Cod. graec. 211	Margin: 1785
GA 88	c. 12 th	Codex Regis	Margin: 16 th century
GA 429	c. 14 th	Codex Guelferbytanus	Margin: 16 th century. Copied from Erasmus' 3 rd edition and explicitly cites Erasmus
^c GA 636	15 th		Margin: 15 th – 16 th century

Table 2. Manuscripts that contain the Comma *in the body of the text*.

Mss	Date	Name	Notes
^d GA 629	1362–1363	In the Vatican Library as Ottob. gr. 298.	Earliest known manuscript which contains the embedded Comma
^e GA 61	c. 1521	Codex Montfortianus (aka Codex Britannicus)	Presented to Erasmus as textual proof of the Comma
^f GA 918	1573–1578	Codex Escorialensis Σ.I.5	Likely copied from Erasmus' 3 rd edition
^g 2473	1634		Likely copied from the TR
^h 2318	18 th		Likely copied from the TR

Notes on the “Comma” manuscripts

^a **GA 221** is the oldest manuscript (10th century) with the youngest margin Comma (c. 1854). It's in Oxford, and Klaus Wachtel (*Der byzantinische Text*, 319–320) observed that Henry Coxe's catalogue of manuscripts printed in 1854 explicitly states that this manuscript lacks the Comma. Thus, the Comma must have been added after 1854.

^b **GA 177** is of 11th century origin but the Comma in the margin is authored by Ignatius Hardt (1749–1811), Catholic priest of the city of Munich, in the year 1785, June the 20th. The form of this Comma is unique among the manuscripts and is closest to the Complutensian Polyglot (of Spanish origin). It does not have v.8 at all.

^c **GA 636** is a 15th century manuscript. The Comma lacks the definite articles so it could be an independent translation of the Latin. We know that the manuscript came to the Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples (where it is Ms. II. A. 9) from an Augustinian Monastery associated with what is today the Church of San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples. That seems to give the manuscript itself a 15th-century Roman Catholic provenance, though it is unclear when the marginal addition was written.

^d **GA 629** is a Latin-Greek diglot (i.e. a bilingual text). The contention among those who reject the Comma is that it was originally in Latin and translated to the Greek, which this document exactly looks like. The Greek text has no definite articles for the three heavenly witnesses and, since Latin has no definite articles like Greek, the lack of articles in the Greek suggests that it was a translation from Latin. Also, the Greek text of this manuscript has at least eight (8) differences with the Textus Receptus version. In short, this manuscript appears to be a Roman Catholic manuscript that has an unusual form of the Comma as a result of translation from Latin to Greek.

^e **GA 61** is the manuscript presented to Erasmus which he used on his third edition of the Greek New Testament (1522). This manuscript is of Franciscan provenance (i.e. place of origin). The manuscript was copied by a Franciscan in the window of 1495–1521 (date based on the watermarks of the paper and that Erasmus seems to have known about it by 1521). We know it is a Franciscan production because the copyist wrote “Jesus, Mary, Francis” in it, which is apparently a thing that Franciscans often did. This manuscript also reflects a translation from Latin into Greek by the lack of definite articles. Only four differences between this manuscript and the Textus Receptus can be seen, but four differences is still a lot for a passage of this size. Also interestingly, this manuscript appears to be a copy of 326 in the Catholic Epistles which does not contain the Comma but does contain the Latin-derived readings of the Vulgate.

^f **GA 918** is a manuscript with a Spanish Catholic provenance from the 1570s. This manuscript has the exact same Comma form as Erasmus’ 3rd edition, so Erasmus is the likely source of this Comma. We know that the scribe is one Nicola’s de la Torre. Nikolaos was born in Crete, but he worked for Philip II of Spain at the Library of El Escorial beginning in 1573. Nikolaos’ dated manuscripts have a range of 1562–1586, but given the ties to El Escorial (where the manuscript remains to this day), and given what we know about Nikolaos employment there and travels elsewhere, the likely date of the manuscript is between 1573 and 1578.

^g **2473** is dated 1634 and considered to be a copy of one of the later editions of the Textus Receptus based on its textual affinity (*Der byzantinische Text*, 320). Moreover, by this time the KJV was already in circulation by a couple of decades.

^h **2318** is dated in the 1700s. It is a commentary manuscript as coming from Oecumenius. It has a clear non-Protestant provenance.

1 John 5:20 “true God” [e]

The full text reads as follows:

- *1 John 5:20*: And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true [*by being*] in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

The closing sentence, “This is the true God,” is one of the more genuinely disputed pronoun references in the Johannine corpus. Commentators divide over whether “this” (Gk. *houtos*) points back to “his Son Jesus Christ”—the nearest preceding noun—or to “him who is true,” the Father, named twice earlier in the same verse.

The case for “Jesus Christ” as the antecedent. The strongest argument on this side is simply the ordinary rule of Greek pronoun reference: a demonstrative pronoun normally points to the nearest preceding noun, and here that noun is “his Son Jesus Christ.”

The case for “the Father” as the antecedent. The counter-argument does not deny the ordinary pronoun rule; it argues that the rule is a default, not an absolute, and that several features of the passage override it here.

1. The rule of nearest antecedent is not exceptionless in Johannine usage. B. F. Westcott, in his classic Greek commentary on the epistle, argued that a demonstrative pronoun in John’s writing regularly refers not to the nearest noun but to the subject “dominant in the mind of the writer”—and pointed to other places in John’s letters (e.g., 2:22; 2 John 7) where this holds. A. T. Robertson likewise granted that *houtos* could grammatically point either way, while judging the Father the more likely referent. So, the nearest-antecedent rule, while a reasonable starting presumption, is a presumption that can be overridden by contextual considerations, especially in the kind of pronoun-dense, deliberately compressed prose 1 John is known for.

2. The immediate double use of “him who is true” creates its own gravity. Before the disputed clause, the verse already uses “him who is true” twice, both times of the Father: “that we may know him who is true, and we are in him who is true.” The Son is introduced only in a subordinate, appositional phrase—“by being in his Son Jesus Christ”—modifying *how* believers are in the Father, not replacing him as the subject under discussion. On this reading, the third occurrence of the “true” language most naturally continues the same referent as the first two, rather than shifting to the appositional phrase sandwiched between them.

3. Verse 21 supports a Father-referent. The very next verse — “Little children, keep yourselves from idols”—makes best sense as a contrast with “the true God” just named: the true God versus false gods, echoing the Old Testament category of Yehovah as “the true God” over against idols (cf. Jeremiah 10:10). That is a title-of-contrast far more naturally applied to the Father, the referent of “him who is true” throughout the passage, than to a fresh, unprepared identification of the Son.

4. John 17:3 supplies the closest verbal parallel in the Johannine corpus, and there the referent is unambiguous: Jesus himself, in prayer, calls the Father “the only true God” and distinguishes him from “Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” The vocabulary — “true,” “God,” “eternal life,” paired with “Jesus Christ” in the same breath—is close enough to 1 John 5:20 that many read the epistle’s closing line as a deliberate echo of Jesus’ own prayer. If so, consistency with John’s own usage elsewhere favors reading 1 John 5:20 the same way.

Notes on Jude

Content [↶](#) [↑](#) [↓](#)

Jude 1:9 “Michael the archangel”

Jude 1:9 “Michael the archangel”

The word “Michael” is a proper name and occurs several times in the Scriptures, but is applicable to an angel only in the Book of Daniel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1), Jude 1:9 and Revelation 12:7. The Hebrew meaning of the name Michael is “who is like God.” The Greek word for “archangel” (*archaggelos*) means “chief angel” or “chief messenger.” The word “archangel” is not used to describe him in the Old Testament, but another angel calls him the first of the chief princes (Dan. 10:13, YLT translation). In Daniel he is also referred to as the prince of the people of Israel (Dan. 10:21; 12:1). Calling Michael “first of the chief princes” implies that Michael has peers. However, Michael is the only one called an archangel—no other angels in the Bible are given this title. But, in Revelation 12:7-9 we learn that there was war in heaven where “Michael *and his angels*” fought and drove out “the dragon *and his angels*” from heaven. This implies that the dragon, identified as the devil and Satan, also called Lucifer (Isa. 14:12-15), may have been a rival archangel to Michael.

“Michael the archangel” and “the angel of Yehovah.” Both these terms seem to refer to the same pre-incarnate Jesus. Given that many names and titles were given to Jesus, these two additional terms should not be surprising. The following discussion defends this idea.

“The angel of Yehovah” as the pre-incarnate Jesus. The term the “angel of Yehovah” (*mal’ak Yehovah*) appears numerous times in the Old Testament. Although the precise identity of the “angel of Yehovah” is not given, there are many important “clues” to his identity. The angel of Yehovah speaks as Yehovah, identifies himself with Yehovah, and exercises the responsibilities of Yehovah (Genesis 16:7-12; 21:17-18; 22:11-18; Exodus 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 5:23; 6:11-24; 13:3-22; 2 Samuel 24:16; Zechariah 1:12; 3:1; 12:8). In several of these appearances, those who saw the angel of Yehovah feared for their lives because they had “seen Yehovah.” It is generally believed that these appearances were manifestations of Jesus before his incarnation. Jesus himself declared to be existent “before Abraham” (John 8:58), so it is logical that he would be active and manifest in the world. Also, because the word “angel” means messenger, this description of the pre-incarnate Jesus fits him perfectly. Who better to communicate a message from God than the Son of God himself.

“Michael the archangel” as the pre-incarnate Jesus. There are also “clues” to Michael the archangel being the pre-incarnate Jesus. Note the following:

1. **Michael as the prince of princes.** The term “the prince of princes” in Daniel 8:25 is paired with the term “the prince of the host” in Daniel 8:11; the “host” referring to the angelic host. This fits well with Michael in Revelation 12:7 and with Jesus’ return when he comes “from heaven with his mighty angels” (2 Thess. 1:7). Then, Daniel 10:13 tells us that Michael is the first of the chief princes, and Daniel 12:1 of Michael being, “the great prince” of God’s people. Finally, Daniel 9:25 tells us of the coming “Messiah the prince” which makes him the greatest of princes, or the prince of princes.
2. **Michael as the protector of Israel.** Daniel 12:1 speaks of Michael as the great prince who stands guard over God’s people.
3. **“Arch” in archangel.** “Arch” is from the Greek prefix *archi*, but related words such as *arche* and *archon* should also be considered. *Arche* means beginning, and can also involve the ideas of rule and authority. Jesus our Lord is called “the beginning” [*arche*] (Col. 1:18; Rev. 21:6; see also Rev. 22:13). *Archon* is often rendered “ruler” or “prince”. In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is “the prince [*archon*] of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5).
4. **Jesus returns with the voice of the archangel (1 Thess. 4:16).** Given that Michael is the only archangel mentioned in the Bible, Jesus will come with the voice of Michael. But Jesus is above the angels, even an archangel. It would be beneath him to speak with the voice of any created being. What this is referring to is that Jesus will speak with the voice of command over his angels; and they will respond, such as they would respond to the voice of an archangel.
5. **Michael and his angels (Rev. 12:7).** Michael is the leader of an army of faithful angels. Revelation also has Jesus as the leader of an army of faithful angels (Rev. 19:14-16). While Michael has “his angels,” Jesus also has “his angels” (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:31; 1 Peter 3:22). Therefore, it is logical to conclude that Michael is the same Jesus in his pre-incarnate form.

{1:9} “The Lord rebuke you!” These are the only words spoken by Michael as found in the Bible. They are three words in the original Greek, *epitimēsai soi kurios*.

Notes on Revelation

Content [\[e\]](#) [\[↑\]](#)

Revelation 1:4	“seven spirits”
Revelation 19:10	“the spirit of prophecy”
Revelation 20:14	“the second death”

Revelation 1:4 “seven spirits”

Occurrences. There are four references to “seven spirits” in the Book of Revelation, as follows (in context):

- *Revelation 1:4-5*: John to the seven churches in Asia: Grace to you and peace from God, who is and who was and who is to come, and from the **seven spirits before his throne**, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.
- *Revelation 3:1*: To the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘These are the words of him who has the **seven spirits of God** and the seven stars:
- *Revelation 4:4-5*: Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and sitting on the thrones were the twenty-four elders. They were clothed in white garments and had golden crowns on their heads. ⁵ From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne; these are the **seven spirits of God**.
- *Revelation 5:6*: Then I saw a Lamb that looked like it had been slain; he was standing among the elders in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the **seven spirits of God** sent out into all the earth.

On Revelation 4:4-5: Per Revelation 4:4-5, around the throne there are 4 living creatures, 24 elders, and 7 lamps (“these are the seven spirits of God” v.5). No other beings mentioned besides the myriads of angels around the throne (Rev. 5:11). This becomes important in the discussion that follows.

On Revelation 5:6: According to this verse, the seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, are sent out into all the earth. This corresponds with Zechariah 4:2-10 which speaks of the lampstand with seven lamps as “Yehovah’s eyes, which run back and forth through the whole earth” (Zech. 4:10). Yehovah’s eyes are also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 16:9,

“For Yehovah’s eyes run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” The Lamb is seen as having seven horns and seven eyes. The horns represent strength (or ruling power) and the eyes represent vision (or knowledge or discernment power).

The problem. At issue is where do we find any mention of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation. This is important from a Trinitarian perspective. The problem: The Holy Spirit is not mentioned *anywhere* in Revelation. At least, not explicitly. When the seven churches are addressed in Revelation 1:4-5, only God, the seven spirits of God and Jesus Christ are mentioned. When the throne of God is described in Revelation 4:4-5 only 4 living creatures, 24 elders, 7 lamps, and myriads of angels are mentioned. No Holy Spirit. The only solution to this dilemma is that the “seven spirits” of God *must* represent the Holy Spirit. To arrive at this conclusion, the “seven spirits” are then viewed as one spirit having seven *attributes*. These *attributes* are said to be found in Isaiah 11:2 as follows,

Isaiah 11:2: Yehovah’s spirit will rest on him:
the spirit of **wisdom** and **understanding**,
the spirit of **counsel** and **might**,
the spirit of **knowledge** and of the **fear** of Yehovah.

The problem with this interpretation is that the above verse gives us only *six* descriptions or attributes, not seven.

Seven spirits as distinct spirit beings. There is no valid textual reason why these seven spirits should not be taken literally as seven spiritual beings. E. W. Bullinger, at one time the secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society in England, defended the position that the seven spirits were in fact seven distinct spirit beings. He wrote:

“This fact that they are ‘before’ or in the presence of, God’s throne, shows that they occupy the position of servants (see 1 Kings 10:8), and of created beings (Rev. 4:5, 10; 7:9, 15; 8:2; 11:4, 16; 12:10; 14:3, 5, 10; 20:12). This one fact ought to have precluded the idea that these seven could be one, and that one Divine! . . . On the other hand, angels are constantly represented as occupying this position. And angels are again referred to in Revelation 4:5 under the symbol of seven lamps (to which other spiritual creatures are likened in Ezekiel 1:13).” —E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 140.

Jesus Christ has the seven spirits. Revelation speaks of Jesus Christ having (or possessing) these seven spirits—i.e. “him who *has* the seven spirits and the seven stars” (Rev. 3:1) and “[The Lamb]...*had*...seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God” (Rev. 5:6). Thus, apparently,

Jesus Christ was given these seven spirits to be used in some way. And, since they are the seven spirits *of God*, God must have granted them to him. In the same way that Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand (Rev. 1:20) which represent the angels of the seven churches. Yet, they are “spirits of God” in the same way that angels are the “angels of God” (Gen. 28:12; Luke 15:10). They are spirits who have their allegiance to God and thus are God’s spirits (cp. “men of God”).

Book of Enoch connection. Although the Book of Enoch (1 Enoch, before the Christian era) is not canonical scripture by either Jews or Christians, a short section of 1 Enoch (1:9) is cited in the New Testament Epistle of Jude, Jude 1:14–15, and is attributed there to “Enoch the Seventh from Adam” (1 Enoch 60:8). It has also been alleged that the First Epistle of Peter (1 Peter 3:19–20) and the Second Epistle of Peter (2 Peter 2:4–5) make reference to some Enochian material. With this background, in 1 Enoch 46:1–2 a reference to “the Lord of the spirits” is made:

“There I beheld the Ancient of Days, whose head was like white wool, and with him another, whose countenance resembled that of man. . . Then I inquired of one of the angels, who went with me, and who showed me every secret thing, concerning this Son of man; who he was; whence he was and why he accompanied the Ancient of days. He answered and said to me, This is the Son of man, to whom righteousness belongs; with whom righteousness has dwelt; and who will reveal all the treasures of that which is concealed: for **the Lord of spirits has chosen him**; and his portion has surpassed all before **the Lord of spirits** in everlasting uprightness.”

Also, the Book of Enoch 9:1 and 40:9 list seven angels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Suriel, and Phanuel. The concept of these seven figures appears not only in 1 Enoch, but also in other Jewish para-biblical books. It is at least conceivable that first-century Jews (including John, the Jew, who authored the Book of Revelation) had a similar concept in mind when he spoke of the seven spirits before the throne of God (compare Rev. 1:4–5 with 1 Enoch 20:1–8). In so doing, John may have been describing the heavenly court assembled and ready to act.

On Revelation 8:2: This verse reads, “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God,” but you will notice that before this time there are no “seven angels” mentioned, only “seven spirits”. Also, the use of the definite article, “the” seven angels, is potential evidence for identifying the seven spirits with “the” seven angels.

Angelic interpretation. It seems that the best interpretation of these seven spirits is that they are seven angels with special duties that they perform as ministers for both God and Jesus Christ. However, because

Revelation is not specific as to their identity, one cannot be dogmatic on this interpretation.

Revelation 19:10 “the spirit of prophecy” [\[↵\]](#)

According to the Book of Revelation, the two identifying characteristics of the remnant people in the last days are that they (1) keep the commandments of God, and (2) have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:17). We are further told that the testimony of Jesus is “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

Context. The term “the spirit of prophecy” is found only once in the entire Bible, so care must be taken when arriving at an interpretation. Scripture must be compared with Scripture. Here is how Revelation 19:9b-10 reads in context:

Revelation 19:9b-10: He [*the angel*] also said to me, “These are **the true words of God.**”

¹⁰ Then I fell at his feet to **worship him**, but he said to me, “Do not do that! I am a fellow servant of yours, and of your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. **Worship God.**”

For the testimony of Jesus is **the spirit of prophecy**.

“The testimony of Jesus.” Before we can understand the term “the spirit of prophecy,” we need to understand the meaning of “the testimony of Jesus.” This testimony is first referenced at the very beginning of the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 1:1-2: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ² **who testified to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ**, even to all that he saw.

The testimony of Jesus is, then, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. This testimony encompasses the entire Book of Revelation. The testimony *is* the revelation, which originated with God, who gave it to Jesus Christ, who gave it to his angel, who gave it to John, who in turn gave it to us. The testimony of Jesus therefore originates with the words of God—which is why the parallel thought in Revelation 19:9 is, “These are the true words of God.”

The testimony of Jesus is like the testimony of the holy prophets of old who spoke for God (Heb. 1:1). The clearest parallel to Revelation 19:9–10 is found in Revelation 22:6–9:

Revelation 22:6-9: Then the angel said to me, “**These words are trustworthy and true.** The Lord God of **the spirits of the prophets**, has **sent his angel** to show his servants what must soon take place.⁷ “Behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who keeps **the words of the prophecy of this book.**”⁸ I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me.⁹ But he said to me, “Do not do that! **I am a fellow servant of yours, and of your brothers the prophets**, and of those who keep the words of this book. **Worship God.**”

Although this passage refers to a separate event, its language closely parallels Revelation 19:9–10. The table below sets the two side by side. Note especially the references to “spirit” and “prophecy”: while “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10) occurs only this once in the Bible, “the spirits of the prophets” (Rev. 22:6) also appears in 1 Corinthians 14:32 and is echoed in 1 John 4:1.

<i>Subject</i>	Revelation 19:9-10	Revelation 22:6-9
God’s words	These are the true words of God.	These words are trustworthy and true
Worship the angel	Then I fell at his feet to worship him [<i>the angel</i>]	I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel
Do not	but he said to me, “Do not do that!”	But he said to me, “Do not do that!
Servant	I am a fellow servant of yours	I am a fellow servant of yours
Brothers	and of your brothers	and of your brothers the prophets
Testimony	who hold to the testimony of Jesus	those who keep the words of this book
Prophecy	the spirit of prophecy	the spirits of the prophets
Worship God	Worship God	Worship God

Given this parallelism, it is reasonable to conclude that “the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets” (22:6) must also be understood as the source of “the spirit of prophecy” (19:10). The two phrases are not strictly identical in grammar—one names the prophetic *spirit* in the singular, the other names the *spirits of the prophets themselves*—but John places them in the same structural role across two closely parallel scenes, which suggests he intends them to be read together, each illuminating the

other. On this reading, “the spirit of prophecy” that characterizes true prophetic testimony is itself an expression of “the spirits of the prophets,” which belong to the Lord God—the same God who gave the revelation to Jesus Christ, who gave it to his angel, who gave it to John, whose record becomes “the words of this book.” The testimony of Jesus, then, is bound up with the spirit of prophecy because both trace back to the same source: the Lord God of *the spirits of the prophets* (Rev. 22:6).

“Spirit of prophecy.” We are now ready to answer the question, “What is the spirit of prophecy?” The spirit of prophecy is the mechanism by which God communicates with mankind: He speaks His words to Jesus Christ, the one and only Mediator, who in turn uses angels to communicate them to man. Jesus is the “ladder” that connects heaven to earth, upon which the angels ascend and descend (John 1:51).

Therefore, the remnant at the end of time will be a people who have the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17), which is “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10)—the same “spirit of the prophets” that comes from the Lord God, through Jesus Christ, through angels (Rev. 22:6). This means the end-time saints will proclaim the words of God directly, for they are among the “brothers, the prophets” (Rev. 22:9). Direct revelation will be given to these “brothers” to communicate to the world, and this revelation will come through the ministration of angels—angels giving the saints dreams and visions from God through Christ, just as the apostle John received in the book of Revelation.

It will be a re-enactment of Pentecost in Acts 2. It will be the second fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32, but with greater power—the latter (greater) rain of spiritual manifestation, when God will pour out His spirit on all flesh, and “your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).

Ministry of angels. With regard to the ministry of angels, it is noteworthy that non-canonical “prophets” have themselves claimed to have been given revelation by visiting angels.

- *Muhammad.* The Islamic prophet Muhammad claimed that the Archangel Gabriel was revealed to him and instructed him to begin writing the *Quran*.
- *Joseph Smith.* Joseph Smith claims the Angel Moroni visited him beginning on September 21, 1823. According to Smith, the angel was the guardian of the golden plates, buried in the hill Cumorah near Smith’s home in western New York; Latter-Day Saints believe the plates were the source material for the *Book of Mormon*.

- *Ellen G. White*. In her writings, Ellen G. White mentions her “accompanying angel” about 58 times. She uses, “said the angel” some 382 times; she writes, “I was shown” 1,491 and “I saw” 3,265 times.

Apart from dreams and visions, it appears that revelations from God (“the spirit of prophecy”) are also a part of the ministry of angels. This is certainly true of the revelation given to John, as John himself testifies, “He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John” (Rev. 1:1).

Revelation 20:14 “the second death” [\[e\]](#)

The term, “second death,” is only found in the Book of Revelation in four instances as follows:

- *Revelation 2:11b*: He who overcomes will never be harmed by the **second death**.
- *Revelation 20:6*: Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection. The **second death** has no power over them...
- *Revelation 20:14*: The **second death**, the lake of fire.
- *Revelation 21:8*: ...their portion is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the **second death**.

In the first two instances, it tells us that the second death will have no power over those who will rise in the first resurrection—i.e. the righteous. Only the last two verses give us some definition of what the second death actually is.

Bible commentators clarify the difference between the first and second deaths by noting that the *first death* is the death from which a resurrection occurs (for both the righteous and the wicked), while the *second death* is determined solely for the wicked, in which no resurrection follows. There is sound biblical evidence for this conclusion (1 Cor. 15:12-21, 42-49; 1 Thess. 4:16; Rev. 2:11, 20:5, 6, 14, and 21:8).

While the Bible does not use “second death” language in any other place, Jesus actually described the two deaths (first and second) in Matthew 10:28 when He said:

Matthew 10:28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul, but rather fear him who can destroy both the soul and the body in Gehenna.

Christ makes a distinction between two types of death. The first in which only the body is destroyed and the second in which both the body and soul are destroyed. The word “soul” is the Greek word *psuche* which means “mind, identity, individuality”. We can now piece together three

demarcating features of the second death.

The second death is:

- 1. The lake of fire
- 2. Death without resurrection
- 3. Death which destroys both body [G4983, *soma*] and soul [G5590, *psuche*; mind, identity, individuality]

Were any of these identifiers met when Jesus died? Answer: No! The Bible makes a strong case that Jesus did not “die” the second death. How do we know? Because the “lake of fire” is a future event and Jesus died 2,000 years ago. Second, because Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. And, third, because Jesus’ identity was restored to him in his resurrection on the third day. Whatever death Jesus experienced, it was *not* the second death.

The difference between Christ’s death on the cross and the second death of the wicked is summarized in the table below.

Theme	Christ’s death on a cross	Second death of the wicked
Death	Christ died from the anguish caused when the Father <i>withdrew</i> his presence (Mark 15:34)	The wicked will die when the Father’s presence is <i>revealed</i> and the wicked are cast into the lake of fire (2 Thess. 2:8)
Trust	Christ died <i>trusting</i> the Father (Luke 23:46)	The wicked die <i>distrusting</i> the Father (Rev. 6:16)
Presence	Longed to <i>see</i> the Father (Mark 15:34)	Long to <i>hide</i> from the Father (Rev. 6:16)
Timespan	<i>Three days</i> (Luke 24:1-8)	<i>Eternally</i> (Mal. 4:1-3; Rom. 6:23; James 1:15; 2 Peter 3:10-12)
Selfish-ness	<i>Love</i> overcame selfishness (John 3:16; 10:17-18; 1 John 3:16)	Overcome by <i>selfishness</i> (Rev. 21:8)

It should be obvious from the above polar opposite differences, that Christ’s death on the cross was not the second death. Rather, the second death will be an extinction event. There is no coming back from the second death. It will be the loss of soul (i.e. identity) and body, forever.

“First death.” The first death can be called “sleep-death.” It is this death which God has the power to bring about, and has brought about throughout human history. There are numerous examples in the Bible where God directly or indirectly caused this kind of death. Here are a few notable examples:

God-directed first (or “sleep”) deaths		
Incident	Method	Reference
Noah’s Flood	Drowning	Gen. 6-9
Sodom & Gomorrah	Fire from Yehovah	Gen. 19:24
Lot’s wife	Pillar of salt	Gen. 19:26
Firstborn of Egypt	Yehovah smote	Ex. 12:29
Egyptian army	Drowning	Ex. 14:28
Nadab & Abihu	Fire from Yehovah	Lev. 10:2
Ten spies	Plague	Num. 14:37
Korah, Dathan, Abiram	Buried alive	Num. 16:32-33
24,000 immoral Israelites	Plague	Num. 25:9
Uzzah, touched the ark	Yehovah smote	1 Sam. 25:38
70,000 Israelites	Pestilence	2 Sam. 24:15
42 youth mock Elisha	Two female bears	2 Kings 2:23-24
185,000 Assyrians	Yehovah’s angel	2 Kings 19:35
Ananias & Sapphira	Unspecified	Acts 5:1-10
Herod	Angel of the Lord	Acts 12:23

This first death, however, is not really death, since all who experience it will be resurrected — “some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). The first death is a kind of suspended animation in which a person awaits their appointed resurrection. The second death, however, is the true death. It is the second death that the wages of sin brings. It is this second death that Satan causes—and that Christ came to destroy.

- *1 Corinthians 15:26*: The last enemy to be abolished is death.
- *2 Timothy 1:10*: but has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The “second death” was already covered above. This second death is eternal death. It is the state of annihilation from which there is no return. This death is the result of unremedied sin and is the fruit of Satan’s power to alienate people from God, the source of life. **This death will occur, not when God uses his power to inflict it, but when he stops using his power to prevent it.** In other words, God has been using his power to hold at bay what sin produces, until such a time that this probationary period of grace is completed. In the end, the final end—the Day of Judgment—God “lets go” and surrenders the persistently rebellious to reap the

full consequences of what they have insisted upon, separation from Him, the source of life, and they die eternally.

God is the source of life; Satan and sin are the source of death. It was not God who killed Jesus, but Satan, who “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44). EGW believed the same thing:

[DA 761.2](#): Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. **He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God**, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted.

► Introduction to the Study Guides

This section gathers five study guides—God of the Bible, Christology, Atonement, Spirit as Essence, and Apostate Adventism—into a single, connected course of study. Each guide can stand alone, but together they form a deliberate progression: they begin with the identity of God, move through the person and saving work of Christ, examine the nature of the Holy Spirit, and conclude by asking what these doctrinal foundations mean for the church today. This introduction explains how the five guides are organized, how they relate to one another, and how a group or an individual can put them to use.

How the Guides Are Organized

Each guide follows the same basic architecture, so that once a group is comfortable with one, the rest feel familiar:

- **Sessions**—Every guide is divided into a small number of self-contained sessions (four to six, depending on the guide), each built around a single overview, several numbered teaching points, key Scripture references, and a closing set of discussion questions.
- **Overview**—Each session opens with a short paragraph orienting participants to what the session covers and why it matters, so a leader can read it aloud as an introduction.
- **Teaching content**—The body of each session works through Scripture, biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek terms are explained as they arise), and supporting quotations—chiefly from Ellen G. White’s writings and, where relevant, Catholic or evangelical scholarship—building an argument step by step rather than simply asserting conclusions.
- **Discussion questions**—Every session ends with four or five questions designed for group conversation. They move from comprehension (“What does the text say?”) to application (“How does this change how you live or pray?”), and are written to invite honest disagreement rather than to presuppose a single correct answer.

The table below summarizes the five guides at a glance.

Study Guide	Core Question	Best Used
God of the Bible	Who is the God of the Bible, and what do His names and the relational grammar of Scripture reveal about His nature?	As the foundation— read first

Study Guide	Core Question	Best Used
Christology	Who is Jesus — in nature, in his saving work, and in his relationship of agency to the Father?	Second, building on the first study guide
Atonement	Why did Jesus have to die, and how does his death restore the broken relationship between God and humanity?	Third—the longest, most detailed guide
Spirit as Essence	Is the Holy Spirit a third, coequal divine Person, or the power and presence of the Father and the Son?	Fourth, after the Godhead and Christ studies
Apostate Adventism	Has the modern Seventh-day Adventist Church departed from the doctrinal foundations laid by its Pioneers?	Last—applies the earlier studies to a historical and institutional case

How the Guides Relate to One Another

Although each guide can be read independently, they are built on a shared theological framework and are best understood as a single, cumulative argument:

- **God of the Bible**—lays the foundation by establishing who God is—one singular Person known by the names Yehovah and Elohim—and by tracing a pattern of relational duality between the Father and the Son that runs throughout Scripture.
- **Christology**—builds directly on that foundation, examining the nature of Jesus as the literal Son of God, the meaning of his death, and his role as the Father’s authorized agent (*shaliach*) rather than as a coequal, self-existent member of a Trinity.
- **Atonement**—expands on Christology’s third session by giving a full, six-session treatment of why Jesus died, tracing the concept from its Old Testament typology and Hebrew word studies through the New Testament and into the distinctively Adventist teaching of a two-phase (“dual”) atonement.
- **Spirit as Essence**—completes the study of the Godhead begun in Session 1, applying the same method—close attention to Hebrew and Greek terms, to what Scripture does and does not say, and to Ellen G. White’s own language—to argue that the Holy Spirit is best understood as the power and presence of the Father and the Son rather than a third, distinct Person.
- **Apostate Adventism**—brings the doctrinal material of the first four guides to bear on a historical and institutional question:

whether the Seventh-day Adventist Church's twentieth-century adoption of Trinitarian theology, together with related shifts in Christology, atonement, and church governance, represents a departure from the faith of its Pioneers.

Because of this progression, the guides are cross-referential—later guides assume familiarity with terms, texts, and conclusions introduced earlier (for example, the concept of divine agency introduced in Christology reappears in Apostate Adventism's discussion of church governance, and the dual-atonement material from the Atonement guide underlies an entire session of Apostate Adventism).

Suggested Order of Study

For a group or individual working through all five guides, the sequence in which they appear in this volume reflects the order in which the material was designed to be studied:

1. **God of the Bible** (4 sessions)—establishes the doctrine of God.
2. **Christology** (4 sessions)—establishes the doctrine of Christ.
3. **Atonement** (6 sessions + glossary)—establishes why Christ died and how atonement works.
4. **Spirit as Essence** (6 sessions)—establishes the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.
5. **Apostate Adventism** (overview + 6 sessions)—applies the preceding doctrines to a study of Adventist history and the present state of the church.

A group meeting weekly would complete the full series (twenty-six sessions in all, plus two overview sessions) in about six to seven months. Groups that want a shorter commitment can treat each guide as its own short course and select among them according to interest; a group that only wants the doctrinal material, for instance, could complete the first four guides and set Apostate Adventism aside, or begin directly with whichever guide addresses the question most pressing to them.

Using the Guides in a Group Setting

- **Preparation**—Ask participants to read the session and its cited Scripture passages in advance when possible. The teaching content is dense enough that a first, cold reading in the room will leave little time for discussion.
- **Pacing**—A single session usually fits comfortably into a sixty- to ninety-minute meeting. Longer or unusually rich sessions (particularly in the Atonement and Apostate Adventism guides) may be split across two meetings — each guide's overview says as

much where relevant.

- **Leading discussion**—The discussion questions are starting points, not a script. Leaders are encouraged to let the conversation follow the group's own questions and concerns rather than working mechanically through every question in order.
- **Posture**—The Apostate Adventism guide states a posture worth applying to all five studies: every claim should be tested against Scripture and the historical record, disagreement should be welcomed rather than suppressed, and the goal of a session is not to settle every question in one sitting but to equip participants to search the Scriptures for themselves.

Using the Guides for Individual Study

An individual reader can use the same material profitably alone. A few adjustments are worth making:

- Read the discussion questions before the session content, not just after—they preview what to watch for.
- Look up the key Scripture references rather than reading only the verses quoted in the text; several sessions depend on context that the guide summarizes but does not reproduce in full.
- Keep a notebook or document of personal answers to the discussion questions. Several of the guides return to earlier questions in later sessions (and later guides return to earlier guides), so a written record makes those connections easier to trace.
- Where a guide references a book-length source (for example, *Atonement and Reconciliation* by Kevin George, or Conrad Vine's arguments in *Apostate Adventism*), treat the guide's summary as an entry point and consult the original source for a fuller treatment.

A Note on Perspective

Readers should know before beginning that these guides argue consistently for a particular set of theological positions—a non-Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead; the view that the Holy Spirit is God's power rather than a third divine Person; a dual-phase understanding of the atonement; and, in the final guide, a critical assessment of the modern Seventh-day Adventist Church's doctrinal and institutional direction. These are minority positions within contemporary Adventism, and each guide's discussion questions are written to invite participants to weigh the arguments for themselves rather than to accept them uncritically. Groups with members who hold differing views may find the richest discussions precisely where they disagree with the material as presented.

A Closing Word

Each of the five guides closes with a single verse that captures its central concern—John 17:3 for the knowledge of God, John 3:16 for the meaning of Christ’s death, and Isaiah 8:20 for the final call to test all things by Scripture. That last verse is a fitting charge for the series as a whole: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Whatever conclusions a group or individual reaches, that is the standard these guides ask to be measured by.

► Study Guide: God of the Bible

Sessions:	
SESSION 1	Introduction: Knowing the God of the Bible
SESSION 2	God as Yehovah and Elohim
SESSION 3	The Grammar of God: plurality, duality, & relational pairs
SESSION 4	God as Theos, God is Love, God with Us & in Christ

SESSION 1: Introduction—Knowing the God of the Bible

Overview. This opening session lays the groundwork for the entire study. Before we can understand what the Bible says about God, we need to understand how and why we study God at all—and where our knowledge of him comes from. This session introduces the discipline of theology and establishes the Bible as our primary source for knowing God.

1. What Is Theology? The word theology comes from two Greek words: *theos* (“God”) and *logos* (“word” or “reason”). Theology, then, literally means “the study of God” or “the word concerning God.” The suffix -ology, derived from logos, appears in many English words denoting the study of a particular subject (e.g., biology, geology, psychology).

It is entirely fitting to begin a study of the Bible with an understanding of the God the Bible reveals. All other Christian doctrines—salvation, creation, ethics, eschatology—are grounded in our understanding of who God is.

2. God’s Self-Revelation. Although God can be perceived through the natural world (Romans 1:20), our clearest and most reliable knowledge of him comes from His word, the Bible. The Christian Bible is composed of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible, or Tanakh) and the New Testament (27 books, originally written in Koine Greek). Together, these Scriptures declare that God is:

- The Creator of all things
- The Savior of humanity
- The Lawgiver
- The ultimate Judge

Why this study matters. Ellen G. White, in *Ministry of Healing*, writes:

“A knowledge of God is the foundation of all true education and of all true service. It is the only real safeguard against temptation. It is this alone that can make us like God in character.” —Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 409.

This means that knowing God is not merely an academic exercise. True knowledge of God is:

- The foundation of authentic education and moral formation
- The only reliable safeguard against temptation
- The transforming power that shapes our character into God’s likeness

Outline of the Study. The major topics this study will cover are:

TOPIC	DESCRIPTION
GOD AS YEHOVAH	His personal name and what it reveals
GOD AS ELOHIM	The Hebrew generic name and its significance
GOD AS THEOS	The New Testament Greek term for God
GOD IS LOVE	What Scripture (not philosophy) teaches
GOD-LIKENESS	Being transformed into His image
GOD WITH US	Reconciliation and restored fellowship
GOD WAS IN CHRIST	Christ as the mediator of all divine revelation

Key Scripture

- *Romans 1:20:* For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.
- *John 17:3:* And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- *Proverbs 9:10:* The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Discussion Questions — Session 1

1. What does the word “theology” mean, and why is it significant that we begin a Bible study with the study of God rather than another topic?
2. Romans 1:20 says that God can be “perceived through the things that are made.” What does this mean in practice? Have you ever experienced this personally? Why is the Bible still our most reliable source?
3. Ellen White says that a knowledge of God is “the only real safeguard against temptation.” Do you agree? How does knowing God protect us from temptation in a way that rules or willpower alone cannot?
4. Jesus defines eternal life as knowing “the only true God” (John

- 17:3). What does it mean to truly “know” God, as opposed to merely knowing facts about God? How does this distinction affect how we approach Bible study?
5. Looking at the list of topics, this study will cover (Yehovah, Elohim, Theos, God is Love, etc.), which topic are you most curious or uncertain about, and why?

SESSION 2: God as Yehovah and Elohim [\[e\]](#)

Overview. This session explores the two primary Hebrew names for God—Yehovah and Elohim—and what each reveals about His character and nature. We will discover that the God of the Bible is emphatically one singular Person, and explore how these names reflect His covenant relationship with His people.

1. The Name Yehovah (The Tetragrammaton). The Tetragrammaton יהוה—transliterated as YHVH—is the most common name for God in the Old Testament, appearing 6,828 times in the Hebrew Bible:

- 1,820 times in the Pentateuch
- 3,523 times in the Prophets
- 1,485 times in the Writings

Scholars believe the name’s pronunciation is closer to “Yehovah” than other forms (such as “Yahweh,” which appears to have Samaritan and pagan origins according to scholars like Dr. Nehemiah Gordon).

The Tetragrammaton is thought to be an abbreviated form of three Hebrew phrases:

- “He who will be” (*yihyeh*)
- “He who is” (*hoveh*)
- “He who was” (*hayah*)

This matches the New Testament description in Revelation 4:8: “Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.”

2. God Is One. The God of the Bible is emphatically monotheistic — “one God,” not a pantheon of many gods. The central Jewish prayer, the Shema, proclaims this:

Deuteronomy 6:4: Hear, O Israel: Yehovah our God, Yehovah is one.

The word “one” here is *echad* in Hebrew—the numerical one. Jesus himself affirmed this when he recited the Shema in dialogue with a scribe (Mark 12:28–32). Notably, the scribe replied, “he is one, and there is no other besides him”—using the singular pronoun, not the plural.

Additional New Testament texts confirming one God:

- *1 Corinthians 8:6:* yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus

Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

- *1 Timothy 2:5*: For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

3. God the Father. The title “God the Father” is especially prominent in the New Testament, but its roots are found in the Old Testament as well:

Isaiah 63:16: For you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us... you, O Yehovah, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

Jesus repeatedly addressed God as Father and invited his followers to do the same (Matthew 6:9). After his resurrection, Jesus told Mary Magdalene: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17).

4. God as Creator and Savior. Both Testaments declare that Yehovah created the world—though the New Testament reveals that the agent of Creation was His Son (Hebrews 1:2; Colossians 1:15–17). The Old Testament is equally clear that there is no savior apart from Yehovah:

Isaiah 43:11: I myself am Yehovah, and apart from me there is no savior.

Yet Yehovah also sent human “saviors” to Israel, and ultimately sent His Son as the supreme Savior:

1 John 4:14: And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

5. God as Elohim. Elohim is the generic Hebrew name for God and appears in both singular and plural senses. The “-im” ending is plural in form, but Elohim functions as a “uniplural” word—its singular or plural meaning is determined by the verbs, adjectives, and pronouns that accompany it.

Two foundational examples:

- *Genesis 1:1*: “In the beginning God created [*bara Elohim*]” Here, the verb *bara* is third-person singular, confirming *Elohim* is singular (“God,” not “gods”).
- *Genesis 1:26*: “Elohim said [*vayomer*]—Let us make man...” Again, a singular verb controls *Elohim*; the “us” likely addresses the Son (cf. Hebrews 1:2; Ellen G. White, EW 145.1).

The story of Elijah on Mount Carmel is an excellent illustration. The people cried out, “*Yehovah hu ha-Elohim*” — “Yehovah he is God.” The pronoun *hu* (he) confirms singular meaning. If plural were intended, it would read *hem* (they) (1 Kings 18:39).

Key Insight: Compound Unity and its Limits

Some argue that the Hebrew word *echad* (“one”) implies a “compound unity” (e.g., “one flesh” in marriage = two people). However, the material shows that this logic applies because of the collective noun being modified, not because *echad* itself carries plural meaning. When the Shema says “Yehovah is one,” the context of the entire Hebrew Bible points to a singular Person, not a compound group.

Discussion Questions — Session 2

1. The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) appears nearly 7,000 times in the Old Testament. Why do you think God placed such emphasis on His personal name? What does a name communicate that a title like “God” does not?
2. The Shema (“Hear, O Israel: Yehovah our God, Yehovah is one”) was central to Jewish daily prayer. Jesus affirmed it. How should this monotheistic conviction shape how we pray, worship, and think about the nature of God?
3. 1 Corinthians 8:6 makes a distinction between “one God, the Father” and “one Lord, Jesus Christ.” How do you understand the relationship between the Father and Jesus Christ based on this verse? What does it teach about each one’s role?
4. In Genesis 1:26, God says “let us make man in our image.” Who do you think the “us” refers to? What implications does your answer have for how you understand the relationship between the Father and the Son?
5. Isaiah 43:11 says there is no savior apart from Yehovah, yet 1 John 4:14 says the Father sent His Son to be the Savior. How do these two statements fit together? What does this tell us about the relationship between the Father and the Son in the plan of salvation?

SESSION 3: The Grammar of God—multiplicity, duality, and relational pairs [\[↩\]](#)

Overview. This session takes a deeper look at how the Hebrew word *Elohim* points to God’s nature through the concept of “multiplicity” and “duality.” We will also examine how the relational patterns God embedded throughout creation serve as a kind of grammar for understanding who He is and how He relates to His Son and to humanity.

1. Elohim as “Multiplicity.” Just as certain Hebrew words are plural in form but singular in concept—yet express genuine multiplicity—so *Elohim* reflects this quality in God. The parallel Hebrew words are:

- *mayim* (מים)—water: always flowing, moving, changing
- *shamayim* (שמים)—sky/heaven: constantly changing clouds, colors, light

- *panim* (פנים)—face: ever-expressive, always in motion
- *hayyim* (חיים)—life: constantly changing, never static

Each of these is firmly singular in concept, yet takes a Hebrew plural form because no single snapshot can capture its reality. Similarly, God is one—yet He is not static or fixed. He is dynamically involved in human history, responding relationally to prayer, repentance, and rebellion. Theologians call this **divine accommodation**.

Divine Accommodation Defined

Divine accommodation is the theological principle that God condescends to human modes of understanding—using human speech, imagery, institutions, and cultural forms—without compromising His divine truth or authority. Adaptation is relational, not ontological: God’s character does not change, but His relational stance responds to real human actions.

2. Elohim as “Duality”. Beyond multiplicity, the word Elohim also carries a sense of duality — “twoness”—that is reflected throughout the Creation account:

- The waters were divided into two on Day 2 (above and below the expanse)
- Day 4 produced two lights: the Sun (day) and the Moon (night)
- Living creatures were created in two: male and female
- Paired features: two eyes, two ears, two lungs, two kidneys, two hands, two feet

This duality in creation is not coincidental. It reflects the image of its Creator—the relational duality between the Father and the Son. Jesus himself is described as the “express image” of God (Hebrews 1:3).

3. The ‘-ayim’ Suffix: Duality in Hebrew. Hebrew possesses a dual suffix, ‘-ayim,’ used specifically for pairs. This appears in body-part vocabulary:

- Ear (ozen, singular) → oznayim (ears, dual)
- Eye (ayin, singular) → enayim (eyes, dual)
- Hand (yad, singular) → yadayim (hands, dual)
- Foot (regel, singular) → raglayim (feet, dual)

Even the name Jerusalem appears in the dual form Yerushalayim, possibly pointing to the two Jerusalems (earthly and heavenly) or the two hills (Mount Zion and Mount Moriah) it contains.

4. Relational Pairs in Nature. Creation consistently illustrates meaning through relational pairs—not as rivals, but as complementary partners. Five types of relational pairs are evident:

Complementary Relationships: Two distinct elements that are incomplete in isolation but whole in relation.

- Male and female: mutually necessary for the generation and continuity of life
- Positive and negative electric charges: opposites that create stability and energy when joined
- Roots and leaves: each depends on the other for the tree's life

Synergistic Relationships: The whole exceeds the sum of its parts.

- Cells forming tissues: tissues perform what no single cell can
- Bees and flowering plants: together they sustain entire ecosystems
- Hydrogen and oxygen: alone they are gases; together they form water with radically new properties

Greater-Lesser Relationships: Hierarchy without domination.

- Brain and body: the brain coordinates; the body enacts
- Mountain and river: the mountain gives rise to the river; the river reshapes the mountain

Source-Recipient Relationships: Life flows from giver to receiver.

- Sun and photosynthesis: the sun gives energy; plants receive and transform it
- Mother and unborn child: life flows from source to dependent recipient

Outer-Inner Relationships: Form protects and serves essence.

- Seed and fruit: outer shell protects; inner life generates growth
- Bark and sap: bark protects; sap nourishes

5. The Theological Significance. These relational patterns point beyond mere biology or physics. They reflect the image of the Creator. The primary duality in God's own being is the relationship between the Father and the Son, which then extends outward to the Father's relationship with the human race ("adopted sons of God"). Creation's relational grammar teaches us that:

- Existence is not isolated but relational
- Meaning emerges through complementarity, not competition
- Hierarchy exists for service, not exploitation
- Giving and receiving, not hoarding, is the nature of true love
- Inner reality is expressed through outer form

Discussion Questions — Session 3

1. The Hebrew words for water (*mayim*), sky (*shamayim*), face (*panim*), and life (*hayyim*) are all plural in form yet singular in concept, because they express constant multiplicity and movement.

In what ways does this description also fit our experience of God? How have you seen God's dynamic, responsive nature in your own life?

2. The material describes "divine accommodation": God adapts His relational stance (though not His character) in response to human actions like prayer and repentance. How does this truth affect your prayer life? Does it change how you think about whether prayer "works"?
3. Duality—twoness—is a pervasive pattern throughout Creation: day and night, male and female, two eyes, two ears, etc. The study suggests this reflects the Creator's own relational duality (Father and Son). Do you find this argument compelling? Why or why not?
4. The five types of relational pairs in nature (complementary, synergistic, greater-lesser, source-recipient, outer-inner) are presented as illustrations of how God works and relates. Which of these five resonates most with you as a picture of your relationship with God, and why?
5. The study says: "Order requires hierarchy, but hierarchy exists for service, not exploitation." How does this principle apply to how we understand the relationship between God and humanity, or between Christ and the Church?

SESSION 4: God as Theos, God is Love, God with Us & God in Christ [\[e\]](#)

Overview. This concluding session brings together the New Testament dimensions of God's nature and mission. We move from the Greek term for God (*theos*) to the central biblical declaration that "God is love," then explore what it means to be transformed into God's likeness and how Christ serves as the mediator through whom God has always communicated with humanity.

1. God as Theos. The Greek word *theos* is the generic New Testament term for "god" and appears 1,315 times. To distinguish the true God from the many Greek deities, the New Testament writers used *ho theos* — "the God"—to stress that He alone is God.

Crucially, whenever *ho theos* appears in the New Testament, it refers to a single member of the deity—and in all cases, that member is the Father. While a handful of verses (seven total, including John 1:1, 18; Romans 9:5; Hebrews 1:8) are sometimes read as applying *theos* to the Son, a careful examination of each passage shows that the Father is the intended referent. The testimony of the New Testament thus agrees with the Old: God ("the God") is one singular Person, not a plurality or a trinity.

2. God Is Love: What the Bible Actually Teaches. 1 John 4:8–10 is the key passage:

1 John 4:8-10: He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. This is how God showed his love to us: When he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The biblical meaning of “God is love” is not an abstract philosophical claim about internal divine relationships. It is concretely revealed in the plan of salvation: the Father sends His Son so that we might live through him. John 3:16 makes the same point.

Some theological traditions (particularly Trinitarian ones following Augustine) argue that “God is love” requires three persons—a Lover, a Beloved, and the love shared between them. The study critiques this view as rooted in Neoplatonic philosophical categories rather than in careful biblical exegesis. The Bible never defines God as an internal “communion of love” among divine persons; that concept comes from later philosophy, not Scripture.

The Biblical Formula for “God is Love”

Three entities appear in the salvation formula: the Father, His Son, and the human race. Not three divine Persons, but two divine Persons—manifesting love outward to mankind, with mankind given the option to return that love. This is the relational grammar of God’s love.

3. God-likeness: Being Transformed. Knowing God is not merely intellectual—it is transformative. Paul captures this beautifully:

2 Corinthians 3:18: And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from the Lord who is the spirit.

Jeremiah provides the Old Testament complement to this vision:

Jeremiah 9:23-24: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows me—that I am Yehovah who exercises covenant-love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

To know God is to love what He loves and delight in what delights Him. This includes His covenant-love (*hesed*), justice (*mishpat*), and righteousness (*tsedaqah*). As believers grow in this knowledge, their character is progressively conformed to His.

4. God with Us: Restored Fellowship. What was lost in the Fall of Man was direct communication and fellowship with God. This is what Christ came to restore. Reconciliation is complete when Christ dwells in us through his spirit:

2 Corinthians 5:19: God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

The Plan of Salvation was designed to restore our fellowship with the Father and with His Son. The spirit that believers receive is not an independent third person—it is the spirit of the Father, shared to us through His Son (Acts 2:33):

Acts 2:33: Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received from the Father the promise of the holy spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you now see and hear.

5. God Was in Christ: Christ as the Mediator of All Revelation. One of the most profound conclusions of this study is that all divine revelation in human history has come through Christ. Ellen G. White writes in *Patriarchs and Prophets*:

“Since the sin of our first parents there has been no direct communication between God and man. The Father has given the world into the hands of Christ, that through His mediatorial work He may redeem man... All the communion between heaven and the fallen race has been through Christ.”

—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 366.

This means:

- The patriarchs (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses) communicated with Christ, not directly with the Father
- The angel who led Israel through the wilderness and spoke from Sinai was Christ—the Angel in whom was the name of Yehovah
- The law given at Sinai was delivered by Christ on behalf of His Father
- All Old Testament prophecy was spoken through the spirit of Christ in the prophets (1 Peter 1:10–11)

Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1–18)—so named because God’s revelations in all ages came through him.

Discussion Questions — Session 4

1. The New Testament consistently uses *ho theos* (“the God”) to refer to the Father as a single Person. How does this shape your understanding of Jesus’ relationship to God? How do you reconcile Jesus’ divine nature with the Bible’s consistent monotheism?
2. The study argues that the Augustinian/Trinitarian idea of God’s love as an internal “communion” of three Persons is rooted in Neoplatonic philosophy, not Scripture. Do you agree? What difference does it make—practically—whether we ground the statement “God is love” in philosophy or in the biblical plan of salvation?

3. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says we are “being transformed” into God’s image from one degree of glory to another. In your experience, what practices or disciplines have most contributed to this transformation? What hinders it?
4. Jeremiah 9:24 says the highest glory is to know God—specifically, to know His covenant-love, justice, and righteousness. How would you describe the difference between knowing about these qualities in God and actually knowing God through them?
5. The study concludes that all divine revelation throughout history has come through Christ. How does this affect the way you read the Old Testament? Does knowing that the patriarchs, prophets, and Israel at Sinai were all encountering Christ change how those stories feel to you personally?
6. Looking back across all four sessions: What is the single most significant thing you have learned or had confirmed about God? How do you want it to change the way you live, pray, or relate to others?

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” — John 17:3

► Study Guide: Christology

Sessions:	
SESSION 1	Introduction to Christology
SESSION 2	The Nature of Jesus (Ontological Christology)
SESSION 3	Salvation and Why Jesus Died (Soteriology)
SESSION 4	Agency, Divinity, and the Son of God

SESSION 1: Introduction to Christology

What Is Christology? Christology is the branch of theology that studies Jesus Christ. It examines who Jesus is, what he did, and what his life means for our salvation. This study covers three main dimensions:

- *Ontological Christology*—the nature or being of Jesus (who he is)
- *Functional Christology*—the works of Jesus (what he did)
- *Soteriological Christology*—the salvific perspective (what his life means for our salvation)

Topics Covered in This Study Series. Over four sessions, we will explore the following major themes from the source material:

- The nature of Jesus—human and divine
- Salvific perspective—what salvation means and how it works
- Why Jesus died—the theological purposes of the cross
- The agency concept—Jesus as God’s authorized representative
- Christ’s divinity—biblical evidence and the major views

A Brief History: The Early Church Debates. From the 2nd through the 5th centuries, the human and divine nature of Christ was fiercely debated. Three major positions emerged:

- *Chalcedonian (hypostatic union)*: Jesus has two natures—one human and one divine—‘united with neither confusion nor division.’ This became the dominant position of most major Christian denominations.
- *Miaphysitism*: Held by many Oriental Orthodox Churches; Jesus is fully human and fully divine but in one unified ‘nature’ (*physis*).
- *Adoptionism*: Jesus was a mere man ‘adopted’ by God at his baptism, resurrection, or ascension. This minority view has little biblical support.

This study series sets aside the Chalcedonian position in favor of the

Arian interpretation—that Jesus is the literal, begotten Son of God, subordinate to the Father. As we explore the material, we will examine the biblical reasoning behind this position.

Key Terms to Know. Before diving in, familiarize yourself with these distinctions:

- **Sinful**—having a sinful human nature (a tendency toward sin), not necessarily the act of sinning
- **Sinless**—incapable of sinning; God and pre-Fall Adam fit this description
- **Sinfulness**—the state of actually practicing sin
- **Sinlessness**—the state of not committing sin, whether or not one has a sinful nature

The position of this study is that Jesus was born with a sinful (fleshly) human nature capable of temptation, yet he maintained a perpetual state of sinlessness—he was tempted but never yielded. This is described in the source material using Ellen G. White:

“In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. He was subject to the infirmities and weaknesses by which man is encompassed... He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He knew no sin.” (1SM 256.1)

The “born again” nature of Jesus. The study introduces an important concept: Jesus had neither a pre-Adamic (sinless) nature nor a fully post-Adamic (‘under the power of sin’) nature. Instead, he had what the source describes as a “born again” nature—the same kind of divine nature available to us when we are born again (2 Peter 1:4).

This has profound implications: Jesus’ life is not an impossible standard but a genuine example for born-again believers. He lived with the same resources available to us—dependence on the Father, the Word of God, and faith.

Discussion Questions — Session 1

1. Before this study, how would you have described Jesus—mostly human, mostly divine, or equally both? How does this session challenge or confirm your previous understanding?
2. Why does it matter whether Jesus had a “sinful” human nature that he never acted on? What would be at stake for his role as our example if he were not truly tempted?
3. The source distinguishes between being “sinful” and being “sinful in the sense of practicing sin.” Does this distinction make sense to you? Can you think of a practical example from your own life?
4. How does the concept of Jesus having a “born again” nature change the way you think about your own spiritual life? Is this encouraging

or challenging—or both?

5. What questions do you have coming into this study about the nature of Jesus that you hope the following sessions will help answer?

SESSION 2: The Nature of Jesus (Ontological Christology) [d]

Jesus' Sinful Sinlessness. Session 2 explores one of the most nuanced aspects of Christology: how Jesus could be born “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) and yet never sin. The key insight is the difference between having a capacity for temptation and yielding to it.

Jesus had no disposition or inclination toward sin—he was not “under the power of sin” as fallen humans are (Romans 3:9–10). Yet the temptations were real. He faced them with:

- *Declarations from the word of God*—not intellectual arguments with the devil
- *Faith in his Father's purposes*—trusting God's will even to the point of death
- *Dependence on the divine nature*—not on his own willpower alone

Neither Pre- nor Post-Adamic. The study draws a careful distinction between three states of human nature:

- *Pre-Adamic (Adam and Eve before the Fall):* A sinless nature—no propensity to sin, no temptation to lie, steal, or kill. Sin would have been abhorrent to them.
- *Post-Adamic (fallen humanity):* “Under the power of sin”—controlled and dominated by a sinful nature.
- *“Born again” (Jesus, and born-again believers):* A sinful nature that has been given a divine nature. Capable of temptation but empowered to resist.

Jesus exemplified the “born again” nature perfectly because he never once yielded his divine nature to his human nature. His life was not a battle against sin in the way fallen humans experience it, but a battle to maintain and strengthen his “born again,” divine nature.

The Virgin Birth. The virgin birth is explained in the source using the concept of a surrogate mother: God created women with the biological capacity to carry a child not genetically their own. Mary's pregnancy by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18) was a unique, supernatural creation event. Jesus was a special creation—just as Adam was—though born through an imperfect human mother.

The Risk of the Incarnation. Perhaps one of the most striking claims in the material concerns what was at stake for Jesus in the Incarnation. The source argues that Jesus genuinely risked everything:

“Christ risked all; ‘tempted like as we are,’ he staked even his own eternal existence upon the issue of the conflict. Heaven itself was imperiled for our redemption.” (GCB December 1, 1895, par. 23)

This was not a predetermined outcome. The test was real. Had Jesus sinned, the source argues that his divinity itself would have been lost—he would have ceased to exist forever. But because he did not fail, Jesus lives and is able to offer eternal life to all who believe.

This parallels the test given to Adam and Eve—the choice to remain loyal to God or suffer death through disobedience. Jesus’ test was infinitely greater, but of the same type. And this same test (in type) is given to every member of the human family.

The Problem with “100% God, 100% Man”. The study challenges the popular theological language of Jesus being “100% God and 100% man,” pointing out that:

- This language is logically problematic (it implies a 200% being)
- It is not found anywhere in Scripture
- It is absent from the writings of Ellen G. White
- The proper framework is that Jesus had two natures—human and divine—just as born-again believers do

The difference between Jesus and us is not in the kind of natures involved, but in the perfect consistency with which Jesus maintained his divine nature over his human nature throughout his entire life.

Key Scripture References

- Romans 8:3—Jesus came “in the likeness of sinful flesh”
- Romans 3:9–10—All humanity is “under sin”
- 2 Peter 1:4—Believers can be “partakers of the divine nature”
- John 3:5–6—The concept of being “born again”
- Luke 22:42 — “Not my will, but thine be done”—Jesus’ ultimate act of loyalty

Discussion Questions — Session 2

1. How does understanding Jesus’ “born again” nature change the way you think about his temptations? Does it make them feel more real or less real to you?
2. The source says Jesus’ life is an example we can actually follow because he used the same resources available to born-again believers. Do you find this encouraging or do you struggle with it? Why?
3. What do you think it means that “Christ risked all” and “heaven itself was imperiled”? Does this make the Incarnation feel more significant? Does it raise any theological concerns for your group?

4. In what ways does the concept of “maintaining a divine nature over a human nature” describe your own daily spiritual experience? When do you feel this most acutely?
5. If the “100% God, 100% man” language is problematic, how would you explain the nature of Jesus to someone outside the church in simpler terms?

SESSION 3: Salvation and Why Jesus Died (Soteriology) [\[e\]](#)

What Is Soteriology? Soteriology is the study of salvation—the act of rescuing human beings from sin and its consequences (death and separation from God). It is closely tied to Christology because Jesus is the means and the center of God’s saving work.

Salvation is offered freely by God’s grace through Jesus, whom God presented as a ‘mercy seat’ (Greek: *hilastērion*) for our sins (Romans 3:25).

The Mercy Seat: What It Means. The term *hilastērion* (“mercy seat”) appears twice in the New Testament:

- *Hebrews 9:5*—refers to the physical mercy seat in the tabernacle
- *Romans 3:25*—used metaphorically of Jesus himself

As the mercy seat, Jesus is both the location and the means of atonement. In the Day of Atonement ceremony, the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to satisfy the claims of God’s law and publicly vindicate God’s righteousness. Jesus is the true mercy seat to which that entire service pointed.

Key insight from Romans 3:25–26: It is God—not Jesus—who shows mercy. God forgave sins “in his patient forbearance.” Jesus is the means by which God can both be just and extend mercy. Satan claimed these two things were incompatible; the cross proves they are not.

The Problem Satan Raised

“Satan claimed that the human race must be forever shut out from God’s favor. God could not be just, he urged, and yet show mercy to the sinner.” (DA 761.4)

The cross is God’s answer to this accusation. Through Christ, God demonstrates that justice and mercy are not opposites—they are harmonized at the cross.

Fifteen Reasons Jesus Died—An Overview

The source material (adapted from *Atonement and Reconciliation* by Kevin George) presents fifteen theological purposes of the cross, organized into eight major categories:

I. Christ as the New Adam

1. To take Adam's place as a faithful man—reversing Adamic disobedience (1 Cor. 15:22, 45–49; Phil. 2:8–11)

II. Justified and Reconciled to God

2. To set us right by faith—justification flows directly from the cross (Gal. 2:21; 2 Cor. 5:14–15)
3. To reconcile us to God—removing enmity, guilt, and separation (2 Cor. 5:17–21; Eph. 2:13–16; Rom. 5:6–10)

III. Atonement, Sin, and Moral Transformation

4. To stop sin—dealing with sin's guilt, power, and defilement (Matt. 26:27–28; Rom. 6:6–14; 1 Pet. 2:24)
5. To triumph over the power of sin—believers are no longer enslaved to sin (Rom. 6:10–11)

IV. Covenant, Law, and Priesthood

6. To supersede the Mosaic law with a blood covenant—exhausting the law's condemning power (Eph. 2:13–17; Gal. 3:13)
7. To become our High Priest—offering direct access to God (Heb. 10:19–22)

V. Victory Over Evil, Death, and the Powers

8. To defeat the powers of evil—disarming spiritual powers that wield accusation and fear (Col. 2:15)
9. To defeat death—death is rendered powerless through resurrection (Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:26)
10. To crush the serpent's head—fulfilling the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15

VI. Resurrection and New Creation

11. To become the firstborn from the dead—establishing the pattern of resurrection (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18)
12. To bring resurrection—the cross plants the seed of new creation (1 Cor. 15:20–22)

VII. Revelation of God's Love and Moral Example

13. To express God's love—the cross is the supreme revelation of divine love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8)
14. To be our Example—modeling humility, obedience, and self-sacrificial love (1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:4–10)

VIII. Mission and Drawing Humanity to God

15. To draw others to himself—the lifted-up Christ draws all people into reconciliation (John 12:32–33)

The Day of Atonement Typology. The Old Testament sacrificial system provides rich symbolic background for understanding Jesus' death:

- Throughout the year, the sins of the people were symbolically transferred to the sanctuary through blood offerings
- On the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat
- The sins were then transferred to a “scapegoat” sent into the wilderness to die
- The source identifies the scapegoat as symbolizing Satan—the originator of sin—who will ultimately bear the final penalty

Christ's priestly ministry in heaven is an ongoing fulfillment of this typology. At its conclusion, Christ will lay aside his priestly robes, return as King of kings, and gather his people.

The Robe of Righteousness. Salvation also involves two kinds of ‘cover’ represented by the mercy seat:

- Probationary mercy—God restrains immediate judgment and gives humanity time to repent
- The robe of righteousness—Christ's own righteousness placed upon every repenting, believing soul (Revelation 3:18)

Human beings cannot transform themselves. God accomplishes the transformation of the human heart through his Son. By receiving Christ—through faith—we are empowered to live his life (Galatians 2:20).

Discussion Questions — Session 3

1. In your own words, how would you explain to a friend why God needed Jesus to die—rather than simply forgiving everyone directly?
2. The source says Satan claimed that justice and mercy are incompatible. Do you ever feel that tension yourself—between God's justice and his mercy? How does the cross resolve it for you personally?
3. Which of the fifteen reasons Jesus died resonates most with you? Is there one that surprises you or that you hadn't thought about before?
4. The Day of Atonement imagery places Satan as the ultimate “scapegoat.” How does knowing that Satan will ultimately bear final responsibility for sin affect how you think about sin, suffering, and accountability?
5. What does it mean practically in your daily life that Christ's righteousness is placed on you as a “robe”? Does it change how you approach God?

SESSION 4: Agency, Divinity, and the Son of God [d]

The Jewish Concept of Agency (*Shaliach*). In ancient Jewish culture, the shaliach (‘agent’) was a legally authorized representative who acted fully on behalf of another. The key rabbinic principle was:

“The agent of a person is as the person himself.”

This concept is crucial for understanding much of what Jesus said and did. Rather than interpreting his words and deeds as proof of his ontological identity with God, the agency framework helps us see him as acting on behalf of God—his authorized representative.

Jesus’ Authority to Forgive Sins. The healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1–12; Matthew 9:3; Luke 5:21) is a key passage:

- Jesus tells the paralyzed man, “Your sins are forgiven”
- The scribes object: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
- Jesus responds: “The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10)

The source makes an important observation: the scribes’ challenge is not presented as a theological teaching Jesus affirms. The key word is authority—something that can be granted or delegated. The passage emphasizes function, not ontology.

Matthew 9:8 is particularly telling: After witnessing the miracle, the crowd ‘glorified God, who had given such authority to men.’ The crowd does not conclude Jesus is God—they recognize that God has granted authority to a human being.

Precedents: Prophets, Priests, and Disciples. Declaring forgiveness through delegated authority was already established in Hebrew Scripture:

- *2 Samuel 12:13*—Nathan tells David, “The Lord has taken away your sin.” Nathan announces God’s forgiveness as his authorized representative, not independently.
- *Leviticus 4–5*—Priests declared individuals clean or forgiven after prescribed sacrifices. Their declarations were authoritative but derived from God.
- *John 20:23*—Jesus tells his disciples: ‘If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.’ If forgiving sins proved deity, the disciples would also be divine — but this conclusion is never drawn in the New Testament.

The pattern is consistent: forgiveness is exercised through delegated authority, not as an inherent divine prerogative of the individual declaring it.

Delegated Authority Throughout the New Testament. Several key passages show Jesus' authority as received, not inherent:

- *Matthew 28:18* — “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Given—not always possessed.)
- *John 5:26–27*—The Father “has granted the Son to have life in himself” and “has given him authority to execute judgment.”
- *Acts 2:22*—Peter: “a man attested to you by God with mighty works... that God did through him.”

Six Views on the Divinity of Christ. The source outlines six major positions:

- *Trinitarian*—Jesus is God in ‘Being,’ distinct in ‘Person’; three persons, one Substance (homousia). The dominant view in Christendom.
- *Tri-theistic*—Three distinct Gods (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The Mormon view; effectively polytheistic.
- *Modalist*—One God in three modes through time: Father in OT, Son in NT, Holy Spirit now.
- *Unitarian*—Jesus was fully human, filled with divine inspiration; some see him as a demi-god or as the archangel Michael.
- *Greco-Roman*—Jesus as a deified hero (“god-man”), like Hercules or Perseus.
- *Arian*—Jesus is the literal begotten Son of God, subordinate to the Father. The position favored in this study.

The Arian perspective in detail. The Arian view holds that Jesus possesses many divine attributes, but not all of them equally as the Father does. Because Jesus is God's ultimate agent—his Son rather than the Father himself—certain essential attributes of God do not apply to Jesus in the same way:

- Jesus is not the ultimate Creator or possessor of ultimate authority in the same sense as the Father.
- Jesus was “made perfect” (Hebrews 5:9) and “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8), suggesting that his moral perfection was developmental, not simply inherent.
- Jesus' temptations were genuine—consistent with the Arian view that he did not possess the same intrinsic immunity to temptation as the Father (James 1:13: “God cannot be tempted”).

“Son of God” vs. “God the Son”. An important terminological distinction:

- **“Son of God”**—A biblical expression found throughout both the Old and New Testaments. In the NT, it is a Messianic title affirming Jesus as the Father's appointed representative, the begotten heir of all things.

- **“God the Son”**—Does not appear verbatim in the Bible. Developed centuries later to express Trinitarian doctrine. It is a theological formulation, not a Scriptural title.

Jesus most often referred to himself as the “Son of Man” (over 80 times in the NT). Others called him the “Son of God.” The source argues this distinction matters significantly for how we understand his nature.

The Meaning of “The Messiah”. Christ means “the anointed one”—a divinely appointed savior prophesied to be a prophet, priest, and king. To be anointed means to be chosen and equipped by God for a specific role. Examples of anointed figures in the Old Testament:

- **Cyrus**—anointed to restore God’s people to their land (Isaiah 45:1)
- **Aaron and his descendants**—anointed as priests (Exodus 28:41; 30:30)
- **Saul and David**—anointed as kings of Israel

The source makes a pointed argument: By definition, the Christ (Messiah) cannot be God, because it is God who anointed him. The Christ was put to death by crucifixion—and God cannot die. “Jesus is the Christ of God, never the Christ who is God.”

- *Luke 9:20*—Peter: “The Christ of God.”
- *Revelation 11:15* — “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ”

The Father’s Testimony. How do we know Jesus was more than just any human anointed by God? The Father’s own testimony:

- **At Jesus’ Baptism** — “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17; Mark 1:10–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34)
- **At the Transfiguration** — “This is my beloved Son; listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; 2 Peter 1:17–18)
- **Through miraculous works** — “the works that the Father has given me to accomplish... testify that the Father has sent me.” (John 5:36–37; Acts 2:22)
- **Through the Resurrection** — “declared to be the Son of God in power... by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:3–4; Acts 2:32–33)

The conclusion of 1 John 5:9–12 summarizes it powerfully: God’s own testimony is greater than human testimony. Life is found in his Son. To believe this testimony is to possess life; to reject it is to call God a liar.

Of God. Being “of God—of His own divine substance,” Jesus was truly divine. Yet because divinity cannot die, this underscores why the Incarnation was such a staggering act—and why the Arian perspective, rather than the hypostatic union, is the position this study commends.

Discussion Questions — Session 4

1. Does the concept of Jesus as God's 'agent' or authorized representative change the way you read passages where he claims authority? Does it resolve any difficulties—or raise new ones?
2. The source points out that Jesus granted his disciples the authority to forgive sins (John 20:23). If this doesn't make the disciples divine, what does it tell us about the nature of Jesus' own authority to forgive?
3. How do you respond to the distinction between "Son of God" (biblical) and "God the Son" (theological formulation)? Does this difference matter to you in practice?
4. The source argues that "the Christ cannot be God, because God cannot die." How do you process this argument? How does your group navigate the relationship between Jesus' divine identity and his genuine death on the cross?
5. After four sessions, how has your understanding of Jesus changed—or been deepened? What remaining questions do you want to continue exploring, and what passages of Scripture would you want to study further?

A Note for Group Leaders

Each session is designed to be self-contained, though all four build on one another. Feel free to adjust the pace of discussion for your group's needs. Sessions may be split across two meetings if the discussion is especially rich.

Encourage participants to read the source material and the cited Scripture passages in advance when possible. The discussion questions are starting points—follow the spirit of your group's conversation wherever it leads.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." — John 3:16

► *Study Guide: Atonement*

Sessions:	
SESSION 1	Introduction: What is Atonement?
SESSION 2	Atonement in the OT and Covering Typology
SESSION 3	Atonement in the NT and Romans
SESSION 4	Faith Alone and Righteousness by Faith
SESSION 5	Dual Atonement in Adventism
SESSION 6	The Law, the Atonement and Cosmic Restoration
APPENDIX	Quick-Reference Glossary

SESSION 1: Introduction: What is Atonement?

Session Goals

- Understand the biblical and linguistic foundation of the word “atonement.”
- Grasp the central question atonement theology is trying to answer.
- Distinguish atonement from forgiveness and from legal/penal models.
- Introduce the Adventist framework of atonement as a comprehensive, relational process.

Part 1—Defining Atonement. Begin by asking the group: ‘In one sentence, what does atonement mean to you?’ Collect a few answers, then introduce the formal definition from the article:

“Atonement is the covenantal and relational work by which God addresses sin in order to restore humanity to fellowship with Himself.”

Point out two important elements in this definition: (1) it is covenantal—situated within a relationship God established, not a business deal; and (2) it is relational—the goal is restored fellowship, not merely legal acquittal.

Atonement vs. Forgiveness. Atonement and forgiveness are related but not identical. Forgiveness is one essential component of atonement, connected to repentance and confession (1 John 1:9). But atonement is broader: it describes the entire means by which the breach between God and humanity is addressed and healed. Reconciliation—the restoration of ‘at-one-ness’—is the ultimate result.

Part 2—The Central Questions. The article identifies one master question at the heart of atonement theology:

Why did Jesus have to die, and how does God—in a manner faithful to His covenant, just in His judgment, and gracious in His mercy—restore the broken relationship between Himself and humanity through the death of His Son?

This question unfolds into seven derivative questions that the article will address across multiple sessions:

1. What is the fundamental problem requiring atonement? (Not just guilt, but enslavement to sin, death, and exile.)
2. How can a holy God dwell with a sinful people without ceasing to be holy?
3. What does God require to remain righteous while forgiving? How can justice and mercy meet without contradiction?
4. How do sacrifice, blood, and death actually ‘work’?
5. Who performs the atonement—is it solely God, or does man play a part?
6. How does Jesus’s death make sense within Israel’s covenant story?
7. What kind of people does atonement create? (Reconciled people become reconcilers; cleansed people become holy dwellings.)

Part 3—Linguistic History of “Atonement.” The word “atonement” is a native English construction: at + one + ment—meaning “the state of being at one,” i.e., reconciliation and restored unity. This original meaning is relational, not legal. Three key figures shaped the word’s development:

John Wycliffe (c. 1320–1384). Wycliffe’s Middle English Bible used phrases like “to make accord” and “peace made betwixt God and man” to convey the idea of reconciliation. He laid the relational groundwork before the technical term existed.

William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536). Tyndale introduced the English word “atonement” in his 1526 New Testament translation of Romans 5:11, translating the Greek *katallagē* (reconciliation). He explicitly defined it: “Atonement is that thou shouldest be at one with God.” For Tyndale, it meant the ending of enmity and the restoration of relationship—not payment, not punishment, not satisfaction of wrath.

Later theological shift. Over time, especially in post-Reformation scholastic theology, “atonement” became a technical umbrella term for satisfaction, substitution, and penal categories—a meaning Tyndale never intended. This later shift is important to understand, because it explains why many Christians assume atonement means “penal substitution,” when the English word originally meant something quite different.

Part 4—The Adventist Framework. In Seventh-day Adventist theology, atonement is understood as a comprehensive process, not a single

moment. It includes:

- **Forgiveness**—sins are pardoned through Christ’s sacrifice.
- **Moral Renewal**—the believer is transformed into a new person.
- **Final Vindication (Judgment)**—sin is brought to its final resolution.

Adventist theology stands in contrast to Penal Substitutionary Atonement (PSA), which interprets atonement primarily in legal and punitive terms—emphasizing the satisfaction of divine justice through the payment of sin’s penalty. The article argues that PSA is both anti-atonement and unbiblical (addressed in a separate resource).

It is also essential to situate atonement within the biblical framework of covenant. Atonement is not an isolated mechanism; it functions within the relational context established by God’s covenants.

Discussion Questions — Session 1

1. Before reading this material, how would you have defined “atonement” in your own words? How does the English origin of the word (“at-one-ment”) change or deepen your understanding?
2. The article distinguishes between atonement and forgiveness. Why do you think these two concepts are often confused, and why does the distinction matter for Christian living?
3. The article frames atonement as a “covenantal and relational” work rather than a legal transaction. What practical difference does this make in how you relate to God?
4. What surprised you most in this overview? What questions do you most want to explore in the upcoming sessions?
5. How does understanding atonement as a “comprehensive process” (forgiveness, moral renewal, and final vindication) shape your view of what salvation looks like in daily life?

SESSION 2: Atonement in the Old Testament and Covering Typology [\[e\]](#)

Session Goals

- Understand how atonement functioned within the Old Testament sacrificial system.
- Distinguish expiation from propitiation and identify which better fits the biblical data.
- Trace eight “covering” typologies from Genesis through Leviticus and their connection to Christ.
- Grasp the significance of atonement as covenantal renewal rather than divine appeasement.

Part 1—Atonement in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, atonement occurred at the altar, was ritual and covenantal, and restored

access to God’s presence. Three critical points challenge common assumptions:

Not a Payment. No biblical passage describes sacrifices as a payment for sin. Nor does Scripture portray the suffering or death of the animal as the atoning act itself, or depict the animal as absorbing God’s wrath. The blood was applied to the altar and the sanctuary furnishings—not to the individual sinner.

Cleansing, Not Punishment. On the Day of Atonement, two complementary rites addressed accumulated impurity: sacrificial blood cleansed the sanctuary, while the scapegoat bore the confessed sins of the people and was sent into the wilderness. The model is purification and removal, not penal substitution.

Covenantal Renewal. The Hebrew concept of ‘covenant’ (berit) is associated with “cutting,” an act that brings forth blood. Sacrificial blood sealed covenantal commitment. The sacrificial system was not about paying a debt or exacting punishment, but about maintaining fidelity to a covenantal vow and restoring a broken relationship.

Part 2—Expiation vs. Propitiation. This distinction is foundational to understanding biblical atonement:

EXPIATION	PROPITIATION
Removes sin	Appeases wrath
Cleanses guilt	Satisfies punishment
Restores relationship	Resolves legal penalty
Sin-centered	Wrath-centered
Emphasizes healing	Emphasizes retribution

Many scholars argue that biblical atonement language is primarily expiatory—especially in the Old Testament—and that propitiation is a later interpretive overlay. Expiation allows forgiveness to be relational, restorative, and covenantal. It avoids the logical problem with propitiation: if punishment is already exacted on a substitute, forgiveness becomes a legal fiction rather than a genuine act of mercy.

Importantly, not a single biblical passage describing atonement explicitly links the atonement process with appeasing God’s wrath. What truly pleases God is not payment, but faith and obedience: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

Part 3—Atonement as Covering Typology. The Hebrew verb *kaphar* (to atone) fundamentally means: to cover, to conceal, or to wipe away by means of covering. Eight covering types in Scripture build a composite picture of what atonement accomplishes:

1. Garments of Light (Pre-Fall). Adam and Eve were originally clothed with garments of light symbolizing their innocence (Ellen G. White). After the Fall, that covering departed.

2. Garments of Skin (Post-Fall, Genesis 3:21). God provided garments of skin to replace the fig-leaf coverings Adam and Eve fashioned. According to Ellen G. White, Adam—not God—performed the first sacrifice, raising the knife himself. This typologically prefigures how it was humanity’s hand (not God’s) that caused Christ’s death (Acts 2:36). The skin coverings also point forward to Christ providing the robe of his own righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

3. The Ark: Pitch as Covering (Genesis 6:14). The Hebrew word for “pitch” is *kapar*—the same root as “atonement.” Covering the ark with pitch kept the waters out. Those inside were safe. Atonement covers and protects those who are “inside.”

4. The Passover Blood (Exodus 12). The blood of the lamb was applied to the doorposts. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13). Judgment passed over because death had already occurred in the lamb. This blood had to be applied—pointing to how Christ’s sacrifice must be “applied” through faith. “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

5. The Veil of the Tabernacle. The veil separating the Holy from the Most Holy Place was called “the covering veil.” Christ’s divinity was veiled in humanity—his flesh was our covering. When he died, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51), signifying a better offering had been made.

6. The Mercy Seat (*kappôret*). The gold lid of the Ark of the Covenant—its name comes from *kapar*. Inside the Ark was the Law. The mercy seat covered the Law, symbolizing that God’s mercy is extended without abolishing justice. On the Day of Atonement, blood was sprinkled here to cleanse the sanctuary. Ellen G. White teaches that the earthly mercy seat typifies Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, where he presents his blood before the Father.

7. The High Priest’s Linen Garments. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest exchanged his glorious golden vestments for plain white linen—humiliation precedes atonement. This anticipated Christ’s self-emptying (Philippians 2:6–8), who laid aside his glory to accomplish atonement through humility and purity.

8. The Cloud of Incense. Before applying blood in the Most Holy Place, the high priest burned incense to create a protective cloud over God’s presence. In Scripture, incense represents prayer and intercession. This means the intercession (incense) precedes and enables the atonement (blood)—the Person of Christ makes the work of Christ effective. In New Testament terms, Christ is both the sacrifice (blood) and the intercessor (incense).

Discussion Questions — Session 2

1. The article argues that Old Testament sacrifices were not “payments” for sin but acts of covenantal renewal. How does this reshape your understanding of why animal sacrifice was required?
2. Discuss the difference between expiation (removing sin) and propitiation (appeasing wrath). Which model do you find better reflected in passages like Psalm 51 and Leviticus 16? Why?
3. The article says atonement was an act of ‘personal dedication and renewed faithfulness.’ How is this similar to—or different from—how we might think about confession and repentance today?
4. Several typological ‘coverings’ are discussed (garments of light, skin coverings, the ark, the Passover blood, the mercy seat). Which covering image speaks most powerfully to you, and why?
5. How does the idea that ‘man caused the death of Christ’ (Acts 2:36), prefigured in Adam slaying the sacrifice, affect your sense of personal responsibility for Christ’s death?

SESSION 3: Atonement in the New Testament and Romans [\[↩\]](#)

Session Goals

- Survey the New Testament vocabulary for atonement and reconciliation.
- Understand how the Greek prepositions *dia*, *hyper*, and *peri* shape what it means that Christ died “for” us.
- Examine the key atonement passages in Romans through a covenantal and transformative lens.
- Recognize why the New Testament does not require penal substitution at the grammatical level.

Part 1—New Testament Atonement Vocabulary. The New Testament does not use a single word equivalent to “atonement.” Instead, it uses a cluster of relational terms that together form a rich picture:

***katallagē* — Reconciliation.** Romans 5:10–11: “We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son.” This is restoration of relationship, an exchange of hostility for peace. The emphasis is on relational repair, not legal transaction.

***hilaskomai* / *hilasmos* / *hilastērion*—Mercy/Atoning Sacrifice.** Often translated “propitiation” or “atoning sacrifice,” but the root meaning is “to show mercy” or “to deal graciously with sin.” In Romans 3:25, God presented Christ as *hilastērion*—a reference to the mercy seat (the Ark’s cover), the place where cleansing and forgiveness occur. The emphasis is that God provides the means of mercy; humanity does not appease a wrathful deity.

aphiēmi—Forgiveness. Meaning “to release” or “to let go.” Matthew 26:28: “This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” The emphasis is release, not punishment.

Part 2—Christ Died “For” Our Sins: Greek Prepositions. The single English word “for” obscures three distinct Greek prepositions in statements about Christ’s death. Understanding the differences is crucial:

Greek	Core Meaning	Nuance in Christ’s Death
<i>dia</i>	Because of / on account of	Explains WHY Christ died: our sins were the reason (Romans 4:25). Not substitution—Christ is not said to die instead of sinners.
<i>hyper</i>	On behalf of / for the sake of	Emphasizes BENEFIT and REPRESENTATION. Christ died for our sake (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4). Does not inherently encode exchange.
<i>peri</i>	Concerning / with reference to	Frames Christ’s death as a SIN-OFFERING, addressing the problem of sin itself (1 Pet. 3:18). Topic-oriented, not person-exchanged.

The Greek word *anti* (meaning “instead of”/“in place of”) is the preposition that grammatically encodes substitution—as in Matthew 5:38, “an eye in place of an eye.” Significantly, *anti* is never used even once in any New Testament statement about Christ dying “for us” or “for our sins.” If penal substitution is affirmed, it must be argued from broader theological context and sacrificial typology—not from the grammar of these prepositions alone.

Part 3—Atonement Passages in Romans. Romans is the primary text used to construct Penal Substitutionary Atonement. The article offers alternative readings of four key passages:

Romans 1:17—Righteousness by Faith. The phrase “out of faith into faith” (*ek pisteos eis pistin*) describes movement from outside faith into a life grounded in faith. Righteousness is not merely an imputed status but a lived expression of faith, manifest in conduct, obedience, and character (cf. Acts 10:35; 1 John 3:3–9).

Romans 3:24—Justification as Being Set Right. The term *dikaioomenoi* (justified) is a verb meaning “to set right, correct, restore.” Justification is not merely being declared righteous—it means being made right in reality. “Redemption” (*apolytrosis*) is not a commercial transaction but liberation from sin’s power (cf. Romans 6:17–18).

Romans 3:25–26—Christ as the Mercy Seat. The Greek term *hilastērion* most naturally refers to the mercy seat of the Ark—not “propitiation” in the sense of appeasing wrath. Christ is the place and means of

atonement, the public demonstration of what was once hidden in the temple. God's righteousness is demonstrated through transformed lives, not merely declared in a legal verdict.

Romans 4:3—Abraham's Faith. The term *logizomai* means "to consider, reason, conclude." Abraham's faith did not trigger a legal credit; it oriented his life into right-doing. Faith is active, directional, and transformative—the cause of righteous living.

In summary: Paul's theology in Romans is best understood as covenantal and transformative. The righteous will live out from faith—not merely declared righteous, but made and lived as righteous through a dynamic, ongoing relationship with God.

Discussion Questions — Session 3

1. The article shows that the Greek prepositions *dia*, *hyper*, and *peri*—all translated "for"—carry distinct meanings. How might this nuance change the way you read New Testament verses about Christ dying "for" us?
2. The Greek word *anti* (meaning "instead of") is never used in statements about Christ dying for sins. What are the implications of this grammatical fact for Penal Substitutionary Atonement?
3. In Romans, Paul's theology is described as "covenantal and transformative rather than purely forensic." What does "forensic" mean in this context, and why does the distinction matter?
4. Romans 3:24 says we are "freely set right" by grace. How does understanding justification as being "made right in reality" (not just declared right) change the way you pursue holiness?
5. The article interprets Romans 4:3 (Abraham's faith) as faith orienting life "toward right-doing." How does this active, directional view of faith challenge a passive "believe and be saved" understanding?

SESSION 4: Faith Alone and Righteousness by Faith [\[e\]](#)

Session Goals

- Understand the Protestant doctrine of sola fide (faith alone) and how it differs from the Catholic view.
- Explore the landmark 1888 message of Jones and Waggoner on righteousness by faith.
- Distinguish between imputed righteousness as a legal declaration vs. a transformative reality.
- Understand why genuine faith necessarily produces a changed life.

Part 1—Salvation Is of God. Salvation is entirely the work of God for humanity, not a work of humanity to appease God. Just as God made garments of skin to cover Adam's nakedness, it is God through Christ who

forgives sin and makes humanity righteous (Ephesians 2:8–10). Any model of atonement that makes human effort the basis of acceptance with God distorts this foundational truth.

What Is Faith? Faith is not merely intellectual belief (“the devils also believe, and tremble”—James 2:19), nor merely behavioral adherence to commandments. Faith is relational—it is a living, abiding relationship with God in which the believer:

- Longs to commune with God through prayer.
- Longs to be cleansed of sin and given a new heart.
- Yields his will to God’s will, trusting fully in God’s power.

A believer’s emotions may sometimes resist this surrender, but it is the force of the will that matters. The will is the rudder of the ship; the ship of the soul will ultimately adjust course.

Part 2—Faith Alone: The Formula. The Protestant understanding of sola fide can be expressed in a simple formula:

Faith → Salvation + Good Works

(NOT: *Faith + Good Works → Salvation*)

Faith itself is saving and life-changing. Good works are the fruit of salvation, not its condition. The Catholic view (Council of Trent) taught that both believing AND performing good works are required for salvation, and that one cannot be certain of salvation until the final judgment. Protestants respond that assurance of salvation is available from the beginning—and that focusing on behavior rather than relationship leads to spiritual pride or despair.

However, the article carefully notes: perseverance matters. It is perseverance in faith—not ‘once saved, always saved’—that characterizes genuine Adventist theology. As Job declared: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15).

Part 3—The 1888 Message: Righteousness by Faith. The 1888 Minneapolis General Conference was a landmark event. A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, supported by Ellen G. White, presented a renewed emphasis on “righteousness by faith” that challenged prevailing legalistic tendencies in Adventism.

Faith Makes One a Right-Doer. The terms “just” and ‘righteous’ are synonyms in the Old Testament. The famous verse “the just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4) can equally be rendered “the righteous will live by faith.” The English expression that captures both is “right doer.” Justification, then, is the action or process of being changed into a right-doer—not merely being declared one. Romans 5:16, 19 supports this: “many will be made righteous” through Christ’s obedience (not merely declared righteous).

Righteousness Is Imputed. The article defines “imputation” carefully: righteousness is credited (imputed) to the obedient, and only to the obedient. What is being rejected is the idea that justification is a mere legal declaration over someone who continues to live unrighteously. Jones wrote: “justification (being made righteous) by faith...means in itself the total abandonment of sins.” 1 John 3:7: “He who does right is righteous, even as he is righteous.”

Forgiveness Is a Reality, Not a Legal Fiction. Waggoner argued that when Christ covers us with the robe of his own righteousness, “He does not furnish a cloak for sin but takes the sin away.” Forgiveness is not a mere entry in heaven’s ledger—it is a real, radical change of the heart, filled with new desires, new thoughts, and new motives.

A Justified Person Does Not Continue in Sin. Jones was emphatic: Does Christ justify people so they may continue to transgress? “God forbid.” Ellen G. White added: “No one can believe with the heart unto righteousness, and obtain justification by faith, while continuing the practice of those things which the word of God forbids.” Salvation results in transformation; it is an ongoing, persevering faith—not a one-time declaration.

A Helpful Analogy. A patient is not free of cancer by the doctor merely declaring him cancer-free. He must actually be free of cancer for the declaration to make sense. In the same way, to be declared righteous means one is truly a right-doer. “The imputed righteousness of Christ will become implanted righteousness, if they will continually follow in His steps” (Ellen G. White).

Discussion Questions — Session 4

1. How would you explain “sola fide” (faith alone) to someone who confuses it with “faith + good works = salvation”? Use the formula from the article in your answer.
2. The article contrasts Protestant and Catholic views of justification. Where do you personally find the most compelling arguments on each side?
3. The 1888 message emphasized that righteousness is “imputed to the obedient and only the obedient.” Does this feel like it is adding works to salvation, or is it something different? Explain.
4. Waggoner wrote that when Christ covers us with righteousness, “He does not furnish a cloak for sin but takes the sin away.” How does this understanding guard against cheap grace or antinomianism?
5. What does it mean practically that “the imputed righteousness of Christ will become implanted righteousness”? Can you share a personal example of this transformation?

SESSION 5: Dual Atonement in Adventism [\[e\]](#)**Session Goals**

- Understand the Adventist teaching of a two-phase atoning ministry of Christ.
- Connect the typology of the daily sacrifice and the Day of Atonement to Christ's cross and heavenly ministry.
- Trace the historical development and internal debates around dual atonement.
- Reflect personally on the meaning of Christ's ongoing intercession.

Part 1—Two Phases of Christ's Atoning Work. Dual Atonement is a distinctively Adventist framework describing Christ's saving work as unfolding in two inseparable phases:

Phase 1: The Completed Sacrifice (At the Cross). Adventists fully affirm that Christ's death on the cross was once-for-all, complete, and sufficient as a sacrifice for sin. Through his death, Jesus provided full provision for forgiveness and victory over sin and death. This corresponds typologically to the *daily* sacrificial aspect of Old Testament worship: two lambs offered daily (Numbers 28:1–8), one in the morning and one in the afternoon—prefiguring Jesus being nailed to the cross in the morning and dying in the afternoon.

Phase 2: The Ongoing Heavenly Ministry. Distinctively, Adventists also emphasize Christ's continuing ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, drawing on the typology of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). In this ongoing phase, Christ:

- Applies the benefits of his sacrifice to believers (forgiveness, victory over sin).
- Ministers as High Priest—interceding and mediating on behalf of believers.
- Conducts the “investigative judgment”—a pre-Advent review of believers' lives.

Ellen G. White wrote: “The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven.”

Part 2—Two Necessary Atonements. In the Levitical system, two separate atonements were required. The first was necessary for forgiveness (Leviticus 4; the daily sacrifice). The second was necessary for cleansing (Leviticus 16; the Day of Atonement). The letter to the Hebrews addresses both:

- *Hebrews 8:3*—speaks to the first (something necessary to offer).

- *Hebrews 9:23*—speaks to the second (the heavenly things themselves purified with better sacrifices).

As 1 John 1:9 beautifully summarizes both: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just **to forgive us** [*first atonement*] our sins and **to cleanse us** [*second atonement*] from all unrighteousness.”

Ellen G. White explained: “The blood of Christ...was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement.” The Day of Atonement represents this final resolution—the complete eradication of sin, not just its forgiveness.

Part 3—Historical Development of the Debate. The dual atonement teaching has been debated within Adventism across four distinct historical periods:

Early Adventist Consensus (Mid–Late 19th Century). Early Adventists, supported by Ellen G. White, articulated a two-phase understanding: sacrificial atonement at the cross, then final atonement in the heavenly sanctuary linked to the investigative judgment beginning in 1844.

Evangelical Engagement (1940s–1950s). Dialogue with evangelical scholars Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse led to *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), which emphasized that atonement was completed at the cross—aligning more closely with mainstream Protestant language. The heavenly phase was reframed as “application of a finished atonement” rather than a distinct second atoning act.

Internal Tension (1960s–1980s). After *Questions on Doctrine*, Adventism experienced polarization. Traditionalists maintained dual-phase language; reform-minded theologians increasingly adopted “single atonement” language. Desmond Ford argued atonement was fully completed at the cross and that the investigative judgment lacked strong biblical support. This culminated in the Glacier View Conference (1980), where Ford’s views were rejected by church leadership.

Ongoing Scholarly Development (Late 20th Century–Present). Many Adventist theologians now prefer “completed atonement at the cross + ongoing ministry in heaven,” avoiding the phrase “dual atonement.” In practice, much Adventist preaching sounds closer to a Protestant single-atonement emphasis, while officially affirming Christ’s heavenly ministry.

Part 4—Theological Emphasis. Dual atonement reflects Adventism’s broader concern that atonement is not a legal transaction but a restorative process—bringing about actual reconciliation, transformation, and ultimately the complete eradication of sin from both individuals and the universe. The goal is a people who “live in harmony with God and reflect His character before the universe.”

Discussion Questions — Session 5

1. Adventism teaches a “dual atonement”—a completed sacrifice at the cross AND an ongoing heavenly ministry. Does the idea of Christ’s continuing high-priestly work encourage or challenge you? Why?
2. How does the typology of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) help explain what Christ is doing in the heavenly sanctuary right now?
3. The article notes that the *Questions on Doctrine* (1957) reframed the heavenly phase as “application of a finished atonement.” Do you see this as a clarification or a departure from the original Adventist understanding?
4. The dual atonement framework connects salvation to a pre-Advent “investigative judgment.” How do you personally reconcile the assurance of salvation with the reality of judgment?
5. How does the idea that atonement is a “restorative process” rather than a “legal transaction” affect the way you think about your own sanctification journey?

SESSION 6: The Law, the Atonement and Cosmic Restoration

Session Goals

- Understand the role of God’s Law as a revelation of His character in the plan of salvation.
- See how Christ’s death upholds rather than abolishes the Law.
- Connect personal transformation to the broader cosmic context of the Great Controversy.
- Synthesize the entire study by reflecting on the ultimate goal: restoration of the image of God.

Part 1—God’s Law: A Transcript of His Character. In Adventist theology, the Law of God—especially the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20)—is not merely a legal code. It is a revelation of God’s own character and nature. Three principles define God’s character as revealed in the Law:

- **Love**—love to God and to humanity, expressed in concrete action.
- **Truth**—a life free from lies and deception.
- **Freedom**—the ability to make choices without coercion.

Satan rejected these principles and sought to overthrow God’s government by claiming it was restrictive and unjust. The Law is therefore not arbitrary—it is the blueprint of divine character. To live in harmony with it is to live in harmony with God Himself (Romans 13:10).

The Law also plays a diagnostic role: it reveals sin. As Paul writes,

“through the Law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). The Law does not save; it points us to Christ. But once saved, the Law becomes the guide for new covenant living—written on the heart by the spirit (Jeremiah 31:33).

Part 2—Christ’s Work and the Law. Far from abolishing the Law, Christ’s atoning work simultaneously accomplishes two things:

- It demonstrates the immutability of the Law—the Law could not simply be set aside. God did not wave His hand and ignore sin. The Law’s claims had to be met.
- It demonstrates the self-sacrificing love of God—meeting the Law’s just claims through the gift of His own Son (Romans 3:25–26).

Thus, salvation does not abolish the Law; it upholds it while providing forgiveness for those who have broken it. This answers the theological challenge: How can God be both just and the justifier of the ungodly? By meeting the Law’s demands Himself through Christ, God neither lowers His standard nor abandons the sinner.

Part 3—Transformation: The Law Written in the Heart. A key Adventist emphasis is that salvation includes not only pardon but transformation. Through the new covenant promise (Jeremiah 31:33), God writes His Law in the heart. This is accomplished through the work of the holy spirit, making obedience internal and relational rather than external and burdensome.

This aligns with the 1888 message: right-doing (righteousness) comes through trust (faith) in God’s ability (grace) to set right (justify) a believer through a change of heart (new birth). Character development is therefore not legalistic striving but cooperation with divine grace. As believers abide in Christ, they increasingly reflect the principles of the Law—love, truth, and freedom—which are the very attributes of God’s character (Galatians 5:22–23).

The ultimate goal of salvation, in Adventist theology, is the restoration of the image of God in humanity. The Law functions as:

- A standard of what restored humanity looks like.
- A guide for daily living.
- A means through which love is expressed in action.

Part 4—The Cosmic Context: The Great Controversy. Adventists understand the plan of salvation within a broader cosmic narrative—the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. In this narrative, the Law becomes a central point of dispute:

- Satan claims God’s Law is restrictive, unjust, and unkeepable.
- God demonstrates, through the lives of redeemed humanity, that His Law is rooted in love, truth, and freedom—and that it can be kept through His grace.

This means that every transformed Christian life is more than a personal blessing—it is evidence in a universal dispute about the character of God. Your growth in holiness, your perseverance through trial, your love for enemies—all of these bear witness to the universe that God’s way is righteous and His Law is not bondage but life.

In this framework, atonement extends beyond the individual. It is cosmic in scope: the complete eradication of sin, the vindication of God’s government, and the restoration of the universe to harmony with its Creator. The article’s opening definition is realized at the end of history: a people “who live in harmony with God and reflect His character before the universe.”

Session 6 Synthesis. As you close this final session, invite participants to reflect on the full arc of the study:

- Atonement begins with a relational breach—sin separating humanity from God.
- God takes the initiative: covering, cleansing, reconciling through covenant faithfulness.
- Christ fulfills all the Old Testament typologies: the Passover Lamb, the High Priest, the Mercy Seat.
- His death is once-for-all; his heavenly ministry applies its benefits to every believer.
- Faith receives what grace provides, resulting in transformed lives.
- The Law, written on the heart, becomes the shape of love.
- And the end is not just personal salvation—it is the restoration of God’s image in humanity and the vindication of God’s government before the universe.

Discussion Questions — Session 6

1. In Adventist theology, the Law of God is “a revelation of God’s character,” not merely a legal code. How does this perspective change the way you approach obedience?
2. The article says Christ’s death demonstrates both the immutability of the Law AND the self-sacrificing love of God. How can one death accomplish both things simultaneously?
3. In the Great Controversy framework, transformed human lives serve as evidence in a cosmic dispute about the fairness of God’s government. How does this give new meaning to your personal spiritual journey?
4. Looking back across all six sessions: How has your understanding of atonement changed or deepened? What one insight will most shape how you live your faith?
5. The article ends with the idea that the ultimate goal of salvation is “the restoration of the image of God in humanity.” What does this look like practically in your community and daily life?

APPENDIX: Quick-Reference Glossary [\[e\]](#)

The following terms appear frequently throughout the study material. Use this glossary as a reference during group discussions.

Atonement: From “at-one-ment.” The covenantal, relational work by which God addresses sin in order to restore humanity to fellowship with Himself. Not synonymous with penal substitution.

Expiation: The removal, cancellation, or annulment of sin. Answers: “What is done with sin itself?” Emphasizes cleansing, healing, and restoration.

Propitiation: Appeasement of divine wrath through offering. Many scholars argue this concept is more pagan than biblical, and that Old Testament sacrifices were never intended to appease a wrathful deity.

Reconciliation (*katallagē*): Restoration of relationship; exchange of hostility for peace. The relational outcome that atonement produces.

Justification (*dikaïoumenoi*): Being “set right”—not merely declared righteous but made right in reality. A transformative process, not just a legal verdict.

Sola Fide: Latin for “faith alone.” The Protestant teaching that salvation is received through faith, not through merit or works; though genuine faith always produces good works.

Imputed Righteousness: Righteousness credited to a believer. In the 1888 Adventist understanding, credited to the obedient—those who genuinely manifest right-doing through Christ’s power.

Dual Atonement: The Adventist teaching that Christ’s atoning work unfolds in two phases: the completed sacrifice at the cross AND the ongoing high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Investigative Judgment: A pre-Advent review of believers’ lives conducted by Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, corresponding typologically to the Day of Atonement.

Kapar / Kippurim: Hebrew root meaning “to cover, wipe away, purge.” The foundation of Old Testament atonement language. From this come *kippēr* (to make atonement) and *kappōret* (mercy seat).

Hilastērion: Greek term used in Romans 3:25 for the “mercy seat” of the Ark of the Covenant. Often mistranslated as “propitiation.” Points to Christ as the locus of God’s mercy.

Great Controversy: The Adventist theological framework of a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan over the character of God and the fairness of His Law, with redeemed humanity as witnesses.

► Study Guide: Spirit as Essence

Sessions:	
SESSION 1	Introduction and Overview
<u>SESSION 2</u>	The Spirit's Absence in Key Passages
<u>SESSION 3</u>	Spirit, Soul and Personhood
<u>SESSION 4</u>	The Spirit's Name, Gender and Consciousness
<u>SESSION 5</u>	Derivative Attributes and John 4:24
<u>SESSION 6</u>	The Spirit as Paraclete and God's Power

SESSION 1: Introduction and Overview

Session Goals

- Understand the purpose and scope of this study
- Introduce the central thesis: the Holy Spirit is God's power and essence, not a third Person
- Explore what major Church sources (including Catholic scholarship) acknowledge about this topic
- Set up the exegetical framework for the sessions ahead

Background and Context. The doctrine of the Trinity—including the personhood of the Holy Spirit—was formally developed through a series of Church councils in the fourth century. The resulting creeds continue to define Christian orthodoxy today. However, this study invites participants to examine what Scripture itself actually teaches about the nature of the Holy Spirit, drawing on both biblical and historical sources. Importantly, the Catholic Church itself has acknowledged:

Catholic Scholarship Acknowledges:

"The Old Testament clearly does not envisage God's spirit as a person...God's spirit is simply God's power." —New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition, Vol. 13

"On the whole the New Testament, like the Old, speaks of the spirit as a divine energy or power." —A Catholic Dictionary, 9th Edition

The Central Argument. The position examined in this study is that the Holy Spirit is best understood as God's power—His divine energy or essence—rather than as a third, coequal, and distinct personal being alongside the Father and the Son.

Topics Covered in This Study

- The spirit is not mentioned in key theological passages
- The spirit is not the same as the soul
- The spirit is not a person in the same sense as the Father and Son
- The spirit does not have a personal name or gender
- The spirit does not possess independent consciousness
- The attributes of the spirit are derived from the Father and Son
- John 4:24 (“God is spirit”) is often misinterpreted
- The spirit functions as the Paraclete—the presence of Christ
- The spirit is God’s power
- Ellen G. White’s descriptions of the spirit

Key Definition**Spirit as Essence**

The Holy Spirit is understood in this study as the living essence or power of God—the divine life and energy that proceeds from the Father through the Son to believers. It is not a separate, self-conscious Person, but God’s own life at work in the world.

Scripture for Reflection

- *Acts 1:8*—“But you will receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you.”
- *John 4:24*—“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
- *2 Timothy 1:7*—“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

Discussion Questions — Session 1

1. What assumptions or prior beliefs do you bring into this study about the Holy Spirit? Are you open to examining them in light of Scripture?
2. How does it affect your thinking to know that the Catholic Church itself acknowledges the Spirit is not presented as a person in the Old Testament, or clearly as a person in most of the New Testament?
3. What do you think is the difference between the Holy Spirit being God’s power versus the Holy Spirit being a separate Person? Does this difference matter practically?
4. Why might the fourth-century Church councils have systematized the Spirit’s personhood in the way they did? What pressures or influences might have shaped that decision?

5. How would you personally describe the Holy Spirit to someone who had never heard of it before?

SESSION 2: The Spirit's Absence in Key Passages [\[d\]](#)

Topic: What the Texts Do Not Say

Session Goals

- Examine the significant passages in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is not mentioned
- Evaluate the theological arguments used to explain these omissions
- Distinguish between an argument from silence and an argument from absence
- Understand the principle of eisegesis vs. exegesis in biblical interpretation

The Pattern of Absence. If the Holy Spirit were a coequal third Person of the Godhead, we would expect to find the Spirit consistently mentioned alongside the Father and Son in key theological and devotional passages. But a careful survey of Scripture reveals a striking pattern of omission:

Key Passages Where the Spirit Is Absent

- **The Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13)**—Jesus' model prayer addresses only the Father.
- **Oneness of Father and Son (John 10:30)** — “I and the Father are one.” The Spirit is not included.
- **Eternal Life Defined (John 17:3)**—Eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son. The Spirit is not part of this definition.
- **The Heavenly Throne (Rev. 22:1, 3)**—The throne belongs to God and the Lamb, not to a triune Godhead.
- **Pauline Salutations**—Nearly all epistolary greetings mention only “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- **Doxologies (1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25)**—Praise and honor go to the Father and Son, without the Spirit.

Common Trinitarian Explanations. Supporters of the Spirit's personhood offer several explanations for these omissions:

- The Spirit's role was progressively revealed
- The focus of those passages was on the Father or the Son
- The Spirit's work is implicit, not always explicit
- The Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ, not Himself
- Early Christian writings maintain literary simplicity and continuity with Jewish prayer forms

Evaluating the Arguments. The study challenges each of these explanations with four key observations:

1. Pattern of Absence vs. Argument from Silence. A single omission might be an argument from silence. But when the Spirit is consistently absent across formal prayers, greetings, doxologies, and theological summaries, this constitutes a pattern of absence—a meaningful literary and theological signal that the Spirit was not understood as a coequal Person.

2. The Burden of Proof. If a text does not mention the Spirit, the burden lies with those who claim the Spirit is nevertheless implied. Inserting the Spirit into passages where it does not appear assumes a Trinitarian framework rather than deriving one from the text.

3. Eisegesis vs. Exegesis. Reading later Trinitarian theology back into earlier Scripture is eisegesis—reading meaning into the text. Sound biblical interpretation (exegesis) draws meaning out of the text based on what it actually says.

4. What the Absence Suggests. The consistent omission may indicate that early Christian communities understood God’s presence and agency through the Father working through the Son—not through a third distinct entity. The personhood of the Spirit was only systematized centuries later.

Scripture for Reflection

- *Matthew 6:9–13*—The Lord’s Prayer
- *John 17:3*—“This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
- *Revelation 22:1, 3*—The throne of God and of the Lamb

Discussion Questions — Session 2

1. Look up several Pauline greetings (e.g., Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, Galatians 1:3). What do you notice? Does the absence of the Spirit in these greetings change how you read them?
2. Do you find the “implicit presence” argument convincing? Why or why not?
3. What is the difference between reading the Bible to find what it says (exegesis) and reading it to confirm what we already believe (eisegesis)? Can you think of examples of both?
4. If you were explaining the Lord’s Prayer to someone new to Christianity, would the omission of the Spirit raise any questions for you? How would you handle it?
5. Does the pattern of absence in these passages challenge or confirm your prior understanding of the Trinity? Explain your reasoning.

SESSION 3: Spirit, Soul and Personhood [d]

Topic: What Is a Person? What is a Soul?

Session Goals

- Understand the biblical distinction between spirit and soul
- Examine the definition of “person” in both biblical and theological contexts
- Explore why the Holy Spirit, lacking a body, cannot be a “person” in the same sense as the Father and Son
- Review early Adventist views on God’s materiality

The Soul: What Does the Bible Say? Many Christians use the terms “spirit” and “soul” interchangeably, but Scripture maintains a clear distinction:

The Biblical Formula: Body + Spirit = Soul

When God formed Adam from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life, Adam became a living soul (nephesh). A soul is not something a person has—it is what a person is.

Genesis 2:7 | James 2:26 | Psalm 104:29 | Ecclesiastes 12:7

Implications for Personhood. Since a “soul” or person requires both a body and a spirit, we can ask: what makes the Father a Person, and what makes the Son a Person?

- The Son is clearly a Person—he became incarnate and took on a physical human body
- The Father is a Person because the Son is in the likeness (or image) of the Father. Early Adventists affirmed that God the Father was a Person having a heavenly, immortal body (not an earthly one)
- The Spirit has no body—therefore it is not a “person” in this biblical sense

Early Adventist View on God’s Materiality. James White (EGW’s husband) expressed what was the commonly held early Adventist view:

James White on God and Christ. *“What is God? He is material, organized intelligence, possessing both body and parts. Man is in his image.”*

Ellen G. White also wrote of seeing in vision that God the Father has a form—though she could not behold the full glory of it (*Early Writings*, p. 54).

God is a Person; the Spirit Is an Essence. Ellen G. White made an important distinction between God being a “person” and the Holy Spirit being an “essence”:

- “Every church member will be vigorous and fruitful in proportion as he honors the Father, who is not to be regarded as an essence but as a personal God.” (8LtMs, 1893)
- “The Holy Spirit is the living essence that cements, animates, and pervades the whole body of Christ’s followers.” (7LtMs, 1891)

EGW warns against the idea that God is an essence—while affirming that the Holy Spirit is an essence. This is a critical distinction that shapes the entire study.

Our Spirit Is Not a Separate Person. An important analogy: just as our own spirit (which can feel, pray, know, rejoice, and search) is not a separate person from us, so God’s Spirit is not a separate person from God. When your spirit prays, you are praying. God’s Spirit is God’s life—not a different entity.

Scripture for Reflection

- *Genesis 2:7*—The creation of man, a living being (“soul”)
- *James 2:26*—“The body without the spirit is dead”
- *John 5:26*—“As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself”
- *Isaiah 42:1*—God speaks of His own soul

Discussion Questions — Session 3

1. Before this study, did you think of the soul and spirit as the same thing? How does the biblical formula (body + spirit = soul) change your understanding?
2. If the Spirit has no body, and a “person” requires a body, what does that mean for how we relate to and think about the Holy Spirit?
3. Consider the analogy: your spirit is not a separate person from you. How does this help (or complicate) your understanding of God’s Spirit?
4. What are the implications of EGW’s warning that God should not be regarded as an essence—while she also says the Holy Spirit is an essence? How do you hold these two statements together?
5. Does it change how you pray or seek the Spirit knowing it may be God’s own life and power rather than a separate being? How might this reshape your devotional life?

SESSION 4: The Spirit's Name, Gender and Consciousness [\[d\]](#)

Topic: Does the Spirit Have Personal Characteristics?

Session Goals

- Examine whether the Spirit possesses a personal name, as the Father and Son do
- Investigate the gender of the word “spirit” in biblical languages
- Consider whether the Spirit has consciousness or independent self-awareness
- Review the Witch of Endor account as a case study on spirit consciousness

Does the Spirit Have a Name? Persons have names. God the Father is named Yehovah in the Old Testament. The Son is named Jesus in the New Testament. Both have secondary names and titles as well. The Spirit, however, has no personal name. It is described only as:

- “The Spirit” or “Holy Spirit”
- “The Spirit of God” / “The Spirit of Christ”
- Titles derived from the Father and Son (e.g., Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Holiness, Spirit of Wisdom)

This absence of a personal name is consistent with the Spirit being an essence or power rather than an independent personal being.

The Gender Question. What the biblical languages actually say.

- Hebrew (*ruach*): feminine gender
- Greek (*pneuma*): neuter gender (“it,” not “he” or “she”)

Most English translations: masculine (“he”)—a translator’s interpretive decision, not a grammatical requirement.

Capitalization. The capitalization of “Spirit” (versus “spirit”) is likewise a translator’s decision. The original biblical languages did not distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters in the same manner as English. Consequently, whenever “Spirit” appears capitalized in English translations, this reflects the translator’s theological interpretation rather than an explicit feature of the original text. **Throughout the remainder of this study, and generally throughout this book, “spirit” and “holy spirit” are rendered in lowercase.**

A Non-Familial Relationship. God is our Father. Christ is our Elder Brother (Romans 8:29). But the spirit holds no familial relationship with us—it is neither Father, Mother, nor Brother. Notably, when Jesus prayed for unity between the Father, Son, and believers (John 17:21–23), the spirit is never mentioned. Jesus said, “We will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:23)—referring to the Father and the Son, not a three-Person Godhead.

Does the spirit have consciousness? The biblical term for spirit (*ruach* / *pneuma*) commonly denotes the life-force or breath that animates a person. The spirit is not presented in Scripture as a self-conscious, independent, pre-existing entity.

Case Study: The Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28). This is the passage most often cited to support consciousness after death. However, several principles argue against this interpretation:

- God's law strictly forbids consulting the dead (Deut. 18:10–12)—God would not violate His own law.
- God had completely ceased speaking to Saul through legitimate channels (v. 6).
- Ecclesiastes 9:5 states “the dead know nothing”.
- The prophecy given required no supernatural foresight—Saul had already been told he would lose the kingdom.
- The passage is descriptive (narrative), not doctrinal (teaching about the afterlife).

Conclusion: The Witch of Endor account does not establish that spirits have consciousness after death. It is a narrative of judgment and disobedience, not a theological treatise on the nature of the spirit.

Scripture for Reflection

- *John 17:21–23*—Jesus' prayer for unity (the Spirit is not mentioned)
- *1 John 1:3*—“Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”
- *Ecclesiastes 9:5*—“The dead know nothing”
- *Psalms 146:4*—“In that very day his thoughts perish”

Discussion Questions — Session 4

1. Does it matter that the spirit has no personal name the way the Father and Son do? What significance do you attach to names in Scripture?
2. How does knowing that *pneuma* (spirit) is neuter in Greek affect your reading of passages that refer to the spirit as “He”? Should translations be more literal here?
3. Why do you think Jesus, in his prayer for unity in John 17, never includes the spirit as a personal party to that fellowship? How do Trinitarians typically explain this?
4. What do you think happened at the Witch of Endor? Does the story teach anything about life after death? Walk through the arguments for and against.
5. If the spirit has no independent consciousness, does that change how you pray or interact with the spirit? Does it feel like a loss, or does it open up a different way of relating to God?

SESSION 5: Derivative Attributes and John 4:24 [\[e\]](#)

Topic: What the spirit's attributes tell us

Session Goals

- Examine how all of the spirit's titles and attributes originate in the Father and Son
- Apply the same logic to the spirit of man as a comparison
- Carefully interpret John 4:24 ("God is spirit") in its proper context
- Understand the hermeneutical principle of not building doctrine on a single passage

The spirit's titles are derivative. Every title and attribute applied to the holy spirit can be traced back to the Father or the Son. Consider the following:

- "The spirit of God" (Matt. 3:16)—originates in the Father
- "The spirit of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:11)—originates in the Son
- "The spirit of truth" (John 14:17)—Christ is the truth (John 14:6)
- "The spirit of wisdom" (Eph. 1:17)—wisdom belongs to God
- "The spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29)—grace originates in God's character
- "Comforter" (John 14:26)—but God is called "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3–4)

The Spirit of Man: A Useful Comparison. If the spirit of God is a separate Person because of what the spirit does, then what about the spirit of man? The Bible says man's spirit can:

- Be troubled, revived, stirred up, wounded (Gen. 41:8; 45:27; Prov. 18:14)
- Pray, know things, bear witness, confess, travel (1 Cor. 2:11; 14:14; Rom. 8:16; Eccl. 12:7)
- Serve God, work, stand up, fail (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 2:2; Ps. 143:7)

None of these activities make the human spirit a separate person. When your spirit prays, you are praying. When God's spirit works, God is working. The parallel is exact.

John 4:24 — "God is spirit." *Context first:* This verse appears only once in all of Scripture. It comes from Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, where the topic is not the nature of God's composition, but the proper mode of worship. Jesus is correcting the idea that geography matters to true worship.

What the Greek actually says: The Greek phrase is *pneuma ho theos* ("spirit the God"). The word *pneuma* (spirit) here functions as a qualitative predicate—describing God's character, not His physical substance. Compare with:

- “God is light” (1 John 1:5)—not that God is made of photons
- “God is love” (1 John 4:8)—not that God is an emotion

A paraphrase of John 4:24 would then read:

John 4:24 (paraphrased): *“God is a spiritual (and truthful) being; therefore, those who worship him must worship him spiritually and truthfully.”*

The verse describes God’s spiritual nature and mode of engagement with worshippers—not His physical composition or the structure of the Godhead.

Hermeneutical principle. Sound doctrine is not built on a single verse—especially one that is rare, contextual, and potentially symbolic. It must be established through the consistent teaching of Scripture across multiple books and passages. Major doctrines (love, faith, repentance) appear frequently and clearly. A solitary verse should be interpreted in light of the whole.

Scripture for Reflection

- *John 4:24*—“God is spirit”
- *1 John 1:5*—“God is light”
- *1 John 4:8*—“God is love”
- *2 Corinthians 1:3–4*—God as “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”

Discussion Questions — Session 5

1. Looking at the list of the spirit’s derivative titles, does it change your view that all of them can be traced back to the Father or Son? What would you expect from a truly independent third Person?
2. Does the analogy of man’s spirit being non-personal help you understand God’s spirit better? Where does this analogy hold, and where might it break down?
3. Read John 4:24 in context (John 4:1–26). What is Jesus actually arguing in this passage? Does the context support or challenge the idea that Jesus is defining God’s essential composition?
4. How does the principle of not building doctrine on a single verse apply to other doctrines you hold? Can you think of cases where this principle was ignored with harmful results?
5. How do the parallel statements “God is light” and “God is love” help you interpret “God is spirit”? In what ways is God like light or love, and in what ways is He not literally those things?

SESSION 6: The Spirit as Paraclete and God's Power [d]

Topic: The spirit as Christ's presence and God's power

Session Goals

- Understand what Jesus meant when he promised “another Paraclete”
- See how the spirit is the spiritual manifestation of Christ's presence
- Identify the spirit as God's power—divine energy at work in believers
- Review Ellen G. White's descriptions of the spirit for further clarity

The Promise of the Paraclete. In his farewell address (John 14–17), Jesus told his disciples: “The Father will send you another Paraclete like me” (John 14:16, paraphrased). The Greek word for “another” (*allos*) means “another of the same kind.”

Jesus was the first Paraclete—present with his disciples in the flesh. The holy spirit would be the second Paraclete—the same quality of presence, but in spiritual form. As Jesus said:

- *John 14:18:* I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.
- *John 14:23:* If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

The disciples did not understand **that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual manifestation**—that he could be present with them through his spirit without being physically visible. Ellen G. White explains: “They did not understand the meaning of a spiritual manifestation.” (12LtMs, 1897)

The Spirit Is the Life of Christ. When we receive the spirit, what are we actually receiving? Scripture is clear:

- “This is the testimony: that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” (1 John 5:11)
- “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.” (John 5:26)
- The life that flows from the Father through the Son to us is the spirit of life—eternal life itself

Romans 8:2 calls this “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” To receive the spirit is to receive the life of Christ, which has its ultimate source in the Father.

The Lord is the spirit

2 Corinthians 3:17-18: Now **the Lord is the spirit**, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; this comes from **the Lord who is the spirit**.

The Spirit Is God's Power. The New Testament consistently describes the spirit as power—active, transforming divine energy:

- *Acts 1:8*: “You will receive power when the holy spirit has come upon you.”
- *Romans 15:19*: “By the power of the spirit of God”
- *Ephesians 3:16*: “Strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being”
- *2 Timothy 1:7*: “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

This is not human influence or institutional authority. It is divine life transforming the believer from within—creating holiness, overcoming sin, and reproducing the character of Christ.

EGW's descriptions of the spirit. Ellen G. White used a rich variety of language to describe the holy spirit—consistently identifying it with Christ's own presence, life, and power:

- “The indwelling of Christ” (DA 324.1)
- “The omnipresence of the spirit of Christ, called the Comforter” (14MR 179.2)
- “The life of Christ” (DA 805.3)
- “The personal presence of Christ” (RH, Nov. 29, 1892)
- “The presence and power of God” (ST, Nov. 23, 1891)
- “An influence emanating from God” (ST, Sept. 4, 1893)

EGW also affirmed that there is no power to save apart from Christ: “There is no power in you apart from Christ, but it is your privilege to have Christ abiding in your heart by faith.” (YI, June 29, 1893)

What Happens When We Are Joined to Christ

- We partake of the spirit of life (Romans 8:2)
- We have access to the Father through Christ (John 14:6)
- We receive power to overcome hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil (DA 671.2)
- We become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3–4)

Scripture for Reflection

- *John 14:18–23*—Jesus’ promise of the spirit and his coming
- *Romans 8:9–11*—The spirit of God, the spirit of Christ, the spirit of life
- *2 Corinthians 3:17–18*—“The Lord is the spirit”
- *Acts 1:8*—“You will receive power”

Discussion Questions — Session 6

1. What does it mean to you personally that Jesus promised to come back to his disciples through the spirit? How does the phrase “I am coming to you” (John 14:18) reshape your understanding of the spirit’s presence in your life?
2. EGW identifies the holy spirit as “the personal presence of Christ” and “the life of Christ.” How does this understanding change the way you might seek or pray for the spirit?
3. Romans 8:9–11 speaks of the spirit of God, the spirit of Christ, and the spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Does the text suggest these are three separate spirits, or one? What do you conclude from this?
4. If the power of the spirit is really the power of Christ working through the Father’s life, how should that affect the way a church community operates? What does it look like to depend on spirit-power rather than human influence?
5. After six sessions, how has your understanding of the holy spirit changed or deepened? What questions remain? What would you like to explore further?

► **Study Guide: Apostate Adventism**

Sessions:	
OVERVIEW	About this study guide, method and posture
<u>SESSION 1</u>	Introduction: The Journey and the Question
<u>SESSION 2</u>	The Heuristic Center and the Trinity
<u>SESSION 3</u>	Three Critical Pillars Rejected
<u>SESSION 4</u>	The Spirit of Prophecy and the Remnant
<u>SESSION 5</u>	Church Governance and Apostasy
<u>SESSION 6</u>	Matters of Conscience and Summary

OVERVIEW

About this study guide. This guide walks a Sabbath School class or small group through a single question, asked slowly and carefully over six sessions: Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church of today the same church, doctrinally, that emerged from the Millerite movement and organized in 1863—or has it, over the course of the twentieth century, departed from the “fundamental principles” that its founders and Ellen G. White regarded as pillars of the faith?

The source material traces the author’s twenty-year investigation into that question, beginning with a single classroom discussion about the nature of the Holy Spirit and expanding into a systematic comparison of Pioneer-era Adventism (roughly 1844–1915) with the doctrinal, missional, and organizational posture of the church after 1980. The guide does not ask participants to accept the author’s conclusions uncritically. It asks them to test every claim against Scripture, against the historical record, and against the writings of Ellen G. White — “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

A Note on Method and Posture. This is a demanding study. It examines matters on which sincere, Bible-believing Adventists disagree—the nature of the Godhead, the ministry of Ellen G. White, church governance, and questions of conscience. Group leaders are encouraged to create space for genuine disagreement, to keep every claim anchored to a citable source, and to return again and again to the Bible as the final court of appeal. The goal is not to settle every question in ninety minutes, but to equip participants to search the Scriptures for themselves — “whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

SESSION 1: Introduction: The Journey and the Question [\[e\]](#)

Objectives

- Introduce the topic of “Apostate Adventism” and why it matters.
- Understand the author’s 20-year personal journey of discovery.
- Establish the two foundational questions that drive the entire study.
- Set the tone for charitable, Bible-centered group discussion.

What Is an Apostate? This session opens with a definition: an apostate is someone who has renounced or abandoned previously held religious beliefs. “Apostate Adventism” describes a theological system that no longer aligns with the foundational principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as established during its first fifty years of existence.

Ellen G. White herself warned that those who tried to remove the “pillars of our faith” concerning the sanctuary, the personality of God, or the personality of Christ were working as “blind men,” setting the people of God adrift without an anchor (20LtMs, Ms 62, 1905).

The Author’s 20-Year Journey. The investigation began in 2003 during an Adult Sabbath School class, when the question of the Holy Spirit’s nature produced widely varying opinions. A fellow church member offered a startling piece of information: the Adventist Pioneers—the church’s founding fathers—did not believe in the Trinity, and specifically did not believe the Holy Spirit to be a divine person equal to the Father and the Son.

This led to three stages of investigation:

1. Verifying that the Adventist Pioneers were indeed antitrinitarian. (Confirmed as an accepted fact of Adventist history, acknowledged by Dr. Jerry Moon, Andrews University.)
2. A long study of the so-called “proof texts” for the Trinity doctrine. The conclusion: there are no biblical proof texts—a finding acknowledged by both Catholic and Adventist scholars.
3. A study of the history of the Trinity doctrine in Christianity, tracing how it developed over four centuries of debate and how it was adopted by the Adventist Church during the 20th century, culminating in 1980.

The Four Fundamental Implications. Discovering that the Adventist Church changed its position on the Trinity raises four profound implications:

- Either early Adventist interpretation of Scripture was deeply flawed, raising questions about other doctrines.
- If the Pioneer position was correct and non-trinitarian, Ellen G. White’s status as a true prophet must be questioned by those who hold the Trinity.

- If the Pioneer position was correct, then modern Adventism has apostatized from biblical truth.
- The Trinity doctrine has “tentacles” into the entire system of Adventist belief, from the Godhead to the plan of salvation, the sanctuary, and the judgment.

Key Historical Quotation

“As one line of reasoning goes, either the pioneers were wrong and the present church is right, or the pioneers were right and the present Seventh-day Adventist Church has apostatized from biblical truth.”
—Woodrow Whidden, Jerry Moon, John Reeve, *The Trinity* (2002), p. 190.

Also Notable

“Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination’s fundamental beliefs.” —George Knight, *Ministry Magazine*, October 1993.

The Alpha and the Omega. The author introduces Ellen White’s language of the “alpha” and “omega” of apostasy. She applied the term “alpha of deadly heresies” to a crisis within the early church involving Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s book *The Living Temple* (1903). She predicted an “omega” apostasy would follow—one that would involve giving up the doctrines standing as the pillars of the faith, establishing a new organization, and producing “books of a new order.” The author argues this omega has been fulfilled after 1980.

Closing Summary. Session 1 establishes that a significant doctrinal shift has taken place within the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the 20th century, particularly after 1980. The core question the study will examine is: Did the church advance in truth, or did it depart from it?

Discussion Questions — Session 1

1. Before this study, were you aware that the Adventist Pioneers were antitrinitarian? How does learning this affect your understanding of Adventist history?
2. The author presents a binary: either the Pioneers were wrong and the modern church is right, or vice versa. Is this truly an either/or situation? Why or why not?
3. Ellen White warned against “removing the pillars of our faith.” What do you believe constitutes a “pillar of faith,” and who has the authority to define that?
4. How should a group of believers respond when they discover their church has changed a foundational teaching? What does Scripture say about testing truth claims?

5. What personal assumptions or prior beliefs might make this study challenging for you? How can the group create space for honest exploration?

SESSION 2: The Heuristic Center and the Trinity [\[d\]](#)

Objectives

- Understand the Great Controversy Theme (GCT) as the central lens of Adventist theology.
- Examine how the GCT is inherently non-trinitarian in its storyline.
- Trace the history of the Trinity's adoption into Adventism.
- Evaluate the revisionist historical claims made by modern Adventist theologians.

The Great Controversy Theme (GCT). The Great Controversy Theme is the principle hermeneutic (interpretive framework) and worldview of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Adventists claim it was uniquely given to them through Ellen G. White, who received it in a famous two-hour vision in Lovett's Grove, Ohio, on March 14, 1858. It is the theological glue that binds all Adventists together and defines their understanding of the gospel, salvation, justification, sanctification, and eschatology.

The GCT Is Non-Trinitarian. The author's argument is that the GCT, from its very beginning, presents a non-trinitarian storyline. Its three primary characters are:

- God the Father
- His Son (Christ)
- Satan (Lucifer)

The Holy Spirit, as a divine person, is notably absent from the controversy and never takes part in the heavenly "war" that launched the conflict. Furthermore, the Son of God is presented as the literal begotten Son—subordinate in authority to the Father. Lucifer's jealousy was specifically of Christ's unique position as the only begotten, the only Being who could enter into divine council with the Father.

This stands in stark contrast to Trinitarian theology, where the three persons are co-equal and co-eternal. The GCT, as originally taught, undermines the very trinitarian framework that modern Adventism now officially affirms.

Transitioning to the Trinity: Key Historical Moments. The transition from anti-Trinitarianism to Trinitarianism did not happen overnight. Key milestones included:

- 1903–1907 Kellogg Crisis: The “alpha of apostasy.” Dr. Kellogg’s pantheistic views triggered a crisis that, ironically, began moving some leaders toward Trinitarian thinking.
- 1919 Bible Conference: Heated debate over the Deity of Christ marks an early inflection point.
- 1930: A. G. Daniells encourages Le Roy Froom to engineer the transition but advises waiting until the older pioneer generation “dropped out of action.”
- 1931 Yearbook: New “Fundamental Beliefs” statement introduced with Trinitarian language for the first time—without a worldwide church vote.
- 1946: Froom’s *Evangelism* compiled, selectively using EGW quotes to suggest Trinitarian support.
- 1980: Full transition complete. Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs adopted, incorporating the Trinity doctrine officially.
- 1985: New SDA Hymnal published, including Trinitarian hymns and removing certain earlier content.

Revisionist History. The author catalogs a series of false claims made by revisionist Adventist historians—particularly in a 1999 Adventist Review article by Dr. Jerry Moon. These include false claims that:

- The Pioneers were uneducated scholars who gave insufficient attention to the Trinity.
- The early church eventually accepted the Trinity (untrue—significant opposition existed well into the 1920s).
- Ellen White changed her theology via the *Desire of Ages* (examined in detail in Session 4).
- There are abundant biblical proof texts for the Trinity (the BRI itself admits there are none).

Books of a New Order

Le Roy Froom describes the 1931–1941 period as a new epoch. He oversaw revision of “standard works” to eliminate statements that “taught, and thus perpetuated, erroneous views on the Godhead” (*Movement of Destiny*, p. 422). EGW’s writings were also manipulated through selective quoting and ellipses to make her appear Trinitarian.

Closing Summary. The Great Controversy Theme—the very heart of Adventist theology—is inherently non-trinitarian. The adoption of the Trinity doctrine required a carefully orchestrated, decades-long revision of church publications, hymns, and historical narratives. The author argues this constitutes the fulfillment of EGW’s predicted “omega apostasy.”

Discussion Questions — Session 2

1. The Great Controversy Theme places the Holy Spirit entirely outside the central narrative. Does this match your understanding of the Holy Spirit's role? What does Scripture say about the spirit's involvement in cosmic events?
2. Le Roy Froom was advised to wait until the older generation “dropped out of action” before introducing change. What does this strategy suggest about the legitimacy of the transition to Trinitarianism?
3. The BRI (Biblical Research Institute) itself admits there are no specific scriptural texts that formally state the doctrine of the Trinity. How should that admission shape how Adventists discuss this doctrine?
4. What is the difference between a church developing its understanding of Scripture and a church departing from Scripture? How do we distinguish between the two?
5. How should we evaluate claims about church history when there are competing narratives from within the same denomination?

SESSION 3: Three Critical Pillars Rejected [\[e\]](#)

Objectives

- Examine the three critical pillars of early Adventism: the **sanctuary**, the **personality of God**, and the **personality of Christ**.
- Compare Pioneer and modern Adventist views on the nature of Christ.
- Understand the debate between dual and single atonement theology.
- Evaluate the claim that the Father killed Jesus on the cross.

The Nature of Christ—Begotten or Unbegotten? Pioneer Adventists, along with Ellen G. White, believed the Son of God was literally begotten of God—born of the Father in the eternal past, before the Incarnation. They took biblical language literally: when the Bible says “God gave His Son” or “God sent His Son,” it means He had a Son to give and a Son to send.

Modern Adventist theologians hold the opposite view: the term “Son” is metaphorical. Jesus only began his “Sonship” at the Incarnation; before that, he was the eternal, co-equal God. According to BRI scholars, “the Sonship of Jesus is not ontological, but functional.”

EGW stated clearly that Christ was “the Son of the infinite God” even before the Incarnation, and that Satan was “well acquainted with the position of honor Christ had held in Heaven as the Son of God.” These two positions are, as the author notes, irreconcilable: someone is wrong.

The Fatherhood of God. If the Son is not a literal son, then logically the Father is not a literal father—both are metaphorical roles in a divine play. The author argues this is what modern Adventist theology implies, even if not stated outright. By contrast, the Apostle John identifies denying the Father and the Son as the mark of the antichrist (1 John 2:22). Ellen White held a robust view of a real, personal Fatherhood of God.

Christ's Human Nature. Pioneer Adventists believed Christ took on post-Adamic (fallen) human nature—the same nature weakened by sin that we possess. This made him our perfect example, able to overcome where we struggle, proving that a human being in fallen flesh can, through God's power, live a sinless life.

Modern Adventists believe Christ took on pre-Adamic (unfallen) human nature—the nature of Adam before the fall. This changeover occurred gradually between 1940 and 1955, when words like “sinful” and “fallen” with reference to Christ's human nature were eliminated from denominationally published materials.

The theological consequence: if Christ did not take our fallen nature, he cannot serve as our example in the same way the Pioneers taught.

The Second Death. Pioneer Adventists did not believe Christ died the “second death” (eternal death/separation from God). Modern Adventists do: “The death that Christ tasted for everyone was the second death” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 1988, p. 114). This has direct implications for how the atonement is understood.

Single vs. Dual Atonement. This is one of the most consequential theological changes in Adventist history.

- **Single Atonement:** Christ's death on the cross is the complete and finished atonement. Nothing more is needed. Salvation is fully accomplished at Calvary. This is the current SDA position, aligning them with mainstream evangelical theology.
- **Dual Atonement:** Christ's death fulfilled the daily sanctuary service typology. The annual Day of Atonement typology remains unfulfilled—pointing to Christ's ongoing high priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary since 1844. The atonement is completed when Christ finishes his heavenly ministry before the Second Coming.

The shift from dual to single atonement, formalized in *Questions on Doctrine* (1957), fundamentally altered Adventist eschatology, including the significance of 1844 and the Investigative Judgment.

Did the Father Kill Jesus? A December 2023 Adventist Review article stated plainly: “The Father killed Jesus so that He wouldn't have to kill us.” The author argues this view—called penal substitution—is neither supported by Scripture nor taught by EGW. Scripture consistently teaches that sin produces its own death (Romans 6:23; James 1:15) and that it is Satan who holds the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). EGW herself wrote:

Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer.

—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.2

God gave life through His Son; it was mankind, moved by Satan, who killed Jesus—this is the plain teaching of Acts 2:23 and the consistent testimony of Ellen White’s writings.

Closing Summary. Key doctrinal teachings of early Adventism—a begotten Son, his fallen human nature, and the dual atonement—have each been systematically replaced with views more compatible with evangelical Protestantism and Catholic theology. The author contends this represents a fundamental departure from the faith of the Pioneers.

Discussion Questions — Session 3

1. What is at stake theologically if Christ was not literally the begotten Son of God before the Incarnation? Does it change how you relate to him as Savior and Lord?
2. The author says if Christ took on pre-Adamic (unfallen) nature, he cannot serve as our example in overcoming sin. Do you agree? What is the practical difference for daily Christian living?
3. The shift from dual to single atonement moved the SDA Church into alignment with mainstream evangelical theology. Is alignment with other Christians necessarily a sign of spiritual progress, or could it be a warning sign?
4. Scripture says “the wages of sin is death” and that Satan “holds the power of death.” In light of these texts, how do you understand what happened at the cross?
5. Which of these three pillars do you find most significant, and why? Has this session changed how you think about any of them?

SESSION 4: The Spirit of Prophecy and the Remnant [\[e\]](#)

Objectives

- Understand Ellen G. White's role and her own description of her commission.
- Evaluate the SDA Church's claim to be the Remnant Church of Revelation.
- Examine revisionist claims that EGW changed her theology in *Desire of Ages*.
- Consider the true meaning of the "testimony of Jesus" and the "spirit of prophecy."

Who Was Ellen G. White? Ellen G. White (1827–1915) was a founder and recognized prophetic voice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her biographer and grandson, Arthur L. White, credits her with receiving over 2,000 visions and dreams. Her writings total close to 100,000 pages. While not considered equal to Scripture, her writings carry significant authority in Adventism.

Interestingly, EGW never claimed the title "prophetess" out of personal modesty. She described herself as "a messenger, entrusted by the Lord with messages for His people." More strikingly, she said her commission "embraces the work of a prophet, but it does not end there. It embraces much more" (Letter 244, 1906). This is a significant claim that many modern Adventists underestimate or ignore.

The Test of Fellowship. For nearly the first 90 years of the SDA Church (1863–1951), belief in EGW's prophetic ministry was not a formal test of fellowship. It became one in the 1951 Church Manual and has been carried forward to the present day as Fundamental Belief #18. The author finds an irony here: the pioneers' actual belief in EGW as prophet was arguably stronger without a creedal declaration than today's formal requirement produces.

The SDA Claim to Be the Remnant Church. The SDA Church bases its claim to be the Remnant Church of Revelation on two identifying marks from Revelation 12:17:

1. Keeping the commandments of God (including the Sabbath commandment).
2. Having the testimony of Jesus Christ, interpreted as possessing the spirit of prophecy (satisfied by EGW's ministry).

The author challenges both aspects of this claim.

- *On the first commandment:* The first commandment declares "You shall have no other gods before me"—me being Yehovah, a singularity. The Trinitarian teaching of three co-equal divine persons is, the author argues, a violation of the first commandment.

Therefore, modern Adventists cannot simultaneously hold the Trinity and claim to keep the first commandment.

- *On the spirit of prophecy*: The author argues that the ultimate fulfillment of the “spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10; Joel 2:28–32) is not one prophet among the church, but all of God’s people prophesying—sons and daughters, old and young. EGW herself wrote of “the remnant of the church” (not “the remnant church”) as those who would go through to the end—a distinction with significant implications.

Did EGW Change Her Theology? The Desire of Ages Question.

Modern Trinitarian Adventists claim that the 1898 publication of *The Desire of Ages* represented a “paradigm shift” in EGW’s theology toward Trinitarianism. The two most-quoted statements are DA 530.3 and DA 671.2.

The author examines DA 530.3 in detail: “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived.” Trinitarians use this to argue Christ is self-existent God. But the author demonstrates that in context, EGW is speaking of the life Christ possesses to bestow eternal life—which he received from the Father and passes to believers. As EGW writes elsewhere, “Christ was invested with the right to give immortality” (1SM 302.2)—a right given to him, not intrinsic. *The Desire of Ages*, read in its entirety, is replete with non-trinitarian statements, including: “All things Christ received from God, but He took to give” (DA 21.2).

Revisionist claims that EGW “never expressed anti-trinitarian views” have been challenged even by prominent non-SDA scholar Dr. Walter Martin, who acknowledged she made many clearly non-trinitarian statements.

EGW on the Remnant

“I saw that God has honest children among the nominal Adventists and the fallen churches, and before the plagues shall be poured out, ministers and people will be called out from these churches and will gladly receive the truth.” —*Early Writings*, p. 261.1

Closing Summary. The Spirit of Prophecy has been misused in modern Adventism: EGW’s writings are selectively quoted and her theology distorted to support a Trinitarian framework she did not hold. The SDA Church’s claim to be the Remnant Church is challenged on two fronts: the Trinity violates the first commandment, and the ultimate fulfillment of the spirit of prophecy has not yet appeared in their midst.

Discussion Questions — Session 4

1. Ellen White said her commission “embraces the work of a prophet, but does not end there.” What do you think she meant? How does that change how Adventists should treat her writings?

2. The author argues that worshipping three co-equal divine persons violates the first commandment. How do you evaluate this argument from Scripture?
3. What does it mean for a church body to be “the Remnant”? Can an institution claim this title, or is it inherently a small-group or individual designation?
4. Joel 2:28–32 describes all of God’s people prophesying, not just one prophet. How does this vision compare with how the SDA Church presents the gift of prophecy?
5. The statement in *Early Writings* (p. 261) says God has honest children in “the fallen churches” who will be called out. What implications does this have for how we relate to members of other denominations?

SESSION 5: Church Governance and Apostasy [\[e\]](#)

Objectives

- Examine the top-down governance structure of the modern SDA Church.
- Survey the decades-long ecumenical engagement of the SDA Church.
- Evaluate the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* against both the original Fundamental Principles and Scripture.
- Understand the significance of the papacy’s omission from modern SDA beliefs.

A Governance Structure Like Rome. A 1986 federal court ruling noted that the Adventist Church is “next to the Roman Catholic Church, the most centralized of all the major Christian denominations” in the United States. The SDA President of the Canadian Union himself noted that the church’s organizational model is “modified from the orders of Roman Catholicism.”

Key characteristics of this governance include:

- Tithes flow upward to regional and General Conference headquarters—not retained at the local church level. This gives the hierarchy leverage over the whole structure.
- Pastors are appointed and paid by the Conference, making them employees of the institutional church rather than servants of the local congregation.
- The General Conference holds legal title to local church properties and institutions.
- Delegates to constituency meetings above the local conference level are appointed rather than elected, ensuring the majority hold church-paid positions and have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

The practical result, the author argues, is spiritual stasis: clergy dare not challenge church doctrine for fear of losing their employment, and laity are discouraged from independent Bible study when a Creed tells them what to believe.

Adventist Trademarks and Lawsuits. Since 1981, the names “Seventh-day Adventist” and “Adventist” have been registered trademarks of the General Conference. The church has pursued litigation against other Adventist groups. A notable recent case: a 2022 lawsuit against the International Association of Free Seventh-day Adventists (organized 1916) sought \$350 million in damages. The case was settled in 2023 with FreeSDA retaining the right to its name, but only after \$500,000 in legal costs to the smaller organization.

Ecumenism: A Documented Timeline. Despite official statements resisting “full ecumenical integration,” the SDA Church has engaged in decades of dialogue, agreements, and partnership with Catholic, evangelical, and other religious bodies. Key moments from the documented timeline include:

- 1955–57: Dialogue with evangelicals Martin and Barnhouse. *Questions on Doctrine* published (1957), adopting positions that aligned with evangelical Christology.
- 1973: An SDA/WCC joint book stated the two bodies are “in agreement on the fundamental articles of the Christian faith” including “unqualified acceptance of the doctrines of the Trinity and the Two Natures.”
- 1980: New 27 Fundamental Beliefs adopted—WCC-compatible. The second and third angels’ messages notably absent.
- 1984: 1,339 Hungarian Adventists disfellowshipped for protesting the church’s ecumenical involvement.
- 1995: New Trinitarian SDA logo replaces the three-angels logo.
- 2024: A GC director declared Adventists who espouse anti-ecumenical messages to be “promoters of violence and terrorists.”

The guide presents this record as evidence that, whatever the church’s official statements on ecumenism, its institutional practice over several decades has moved steadily toward closer alignment with other Christian communions, including the Roman Catholic Church.

The 28 Fundamental Beliefs vs. the Original Principles. The author identifies several key areas where the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* contradict or depart from the original Fundamental Principles held for the first fifty years of the church’s existence:

- Belief #2 (The Trinity): Expressly rejected by the original SDA Church.
- Belief #4 (The Son): “God the eternal Son” is a self-contradiction and not a biblical or Pioneer term.

- Belief #5 (The Holy Spirit): “God the eternal Spirit” was never used by the original church; the Spirit was understood as an essence, not a third divine person.
- Belief #13 (The Remnant): The SDA Church is not the Remnant as defined by Revelation, for reasons discussed in Session 4.
- Belief #14 (Unity): “This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God” is an unbiblical statement absent from the original faith.
- Belief #18 (Gift of Prophecy): EGW’s ministry was not originally a test of faith.

A Telling Omission: The Papacy. The 1889 *Fundamental Principles* explicitly identified “the man of sin”—the papacy—as having thought to “change times and laws” (Daniel 7:25). This identification is entirely absent from the modern *28 Fundamental Beliefs*. The author sees this as both a symptom and a consequence of the SDA Church’s ecumenical alignment with Rome.

Closing Summary. The modern SDA Church’s governance, ecumenical posture, and creedal statements represent a significant departure from its founding principles. The *28 Fundamental Beliefs*, while presented as a summary of Scripture, effectively function as an unchallengeable creed—one that departs at several key points from the very *Fundamental Principles* on which the church was originally built.

Discussion Questions — Session 5

1. The Adventist Church has been legally compared to the Catholic Church in its centralization of power. What are the spiritual risks of a highly hierarchical church structure? What does the New Testament model of church leadership look like?
2. The original *Fundamental Principles* explicitly named the papacy as the “man of sin.” Its removal from the modern *28 Beliefs* coincides with decades of ecumenical dialogue with Rome. Is this a coincidence? What does Revelation say about Babylon and her daughters?
3. The author argues that the *28 Fundamental Beliefs* function as an unchallengeable creed. What is the difference between a helpful summary of doctrine and a binding creed that supplants Scripture?
4. Adventists historically proclaimed the second angel’s message: “Babylon is fallen.” How can a church deliver that message while simultaneously seeking ecumenical unity with Babylon’s institutions?
5. Ellen White said the Lord has “plainly pointed out the work that Seventh-day Adventists are to do”—proclaiming the three angels’ messages. In your view, is the current SDA Church fulfilling that mission? What evidence would you point to?

SESSION 6: Matters of Conscience and Summary [\[e\]](#)

Objectives

- Examine the SDA Church's shifting position on abortion and vaccination mandates.
- Understand Conrad Vine's argument that the General Conference's UN affiliation redefined liberty of conscience.
- Review the summary comparison between Pioneer and modern Adventism.
- Consider what a faithful response to these findings looks like for individual believers.

Legislating Morality: A Framework. The author distinguishes between two categories of morality in the Ten Commandments:

- Commandments 1–4 govern our relationship to God—a religious matter, not for government to enforce.
- Commandments 5–10 govern our relationship to fellow human beings—a civil matter that governments have always enforced.

Adventist Pioneers had no hesitation advocating for government enforcement of moral laws relating to human life—they were strongly anti-slavery and anti-abortion. The question is whether the modern SDA Church maintains that moral clarity.

Abortion: From Clear Condemnation to Silence. The SDA Pioneers were unanimously and vocally opposed to abortion, publishing anti-abortion material in official church publications and supporting anti-abortion legislation. Representative voices include:

- J. N. Andrews (1869): Called abortion “one of the most shocking... sins of this generation” and “the murder of unborn infants.”
- J. H. Waggoner (1886): “It is just as truly murder to take life in the one condition as in the other.”
- Uriah Smith (1867): “In the sight of God it is willful murder.”
- Dr. J. H. Kellogg (1893): Called for abortion to be “made infamous and criminal” and a cause for church disfellowship.

Today's SDA Church position leaves the decision to “the conscience of the individuals involved and their families.” The author notes that some Adventist voices even argue that a woman's right to choose abortion is a protected religious liberty that governments should not interfere with—a position the Pioneers would have found incomprehensible.

COVID Vaccination Mandates: The Other Extreme. In October 2021, the General Conference declared that “claims of religious liberty are not used appropriately in objecting to government mandates” regarding COVID-19 vaccines. This placed the institutional church on the side of compulsory vaccination—precisely the opposite of religious liberty advocacy. The author argues this was both ethically flawed and medically ill-

advised, as subsequent evidence raised significant safety concerns about the mRNA vaccines.

The author sees a deep inconsistency: the church invokes religious liberty to protect abortion (a matter of taking life) but denies it for vaccination (a matter of medical choice involving one's own body).

Liberty of Conscience and the GC—Conrad Vine's Argument. In a June 2026 sermon titled “Entropy,” Dr. Conrad Vine argues that the General Conference undermined Adventism's historic doctrine of liberty of conscience through two linked institutional decisions taken decades apart. In 1985, the GC secured consultative NGO status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), a status that required agreeing to support the UN's spirit, goals, and objectives. Over the following years, the GC twice issued statements formally affirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—in 1998 and 1999. Vine points out that while the UDHR's Article 18 guarantees freedom of religion, Article 29 subordinates that freedom to “the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.” By endorsing the UDHR, he argues, the GC quietly redefined liberty of conscience from an inherent, God-given right into a conditional one—something an institution grants and can therefore also revoke, a shift he likens to Esau selling his birthright.

Vine treats this doctrinal groundwork as the setup for a later, concrete action: the GC's October 2021 COVID-19 “reaffirmation statement,” which held that claims of religious liberty were not appropriately used to object to government or employer vaccine mandates. He reads this as the first real-world application of the conditional logic established in 1985–1999. When Vine publicly challenged the statement, the GC's Office of General Counsel defended ADCOM's authority to issue it under Section 4.1 of its governing rules. Vine responds with four rebuttals—among them that the GC has no jurisdiction over the employment relationship between secular employers and church members—and cites a retired Navy flight surgeon's report that the Pentagon relied on the GC statement to deny Adventist service members' religious exemption requests in October 2021, offering it as evidence of concrete, real-world harm.

Vine frames the underlying issue theologically, applying Ellen White's warning in *The Great Controversy* about religious leaders who “exalt human authority to rule the conscience” to present-day General Conference and conference leadership. Because the GC's defense of ADCOM's authority was never withdrawn after the 2021 controversy, Vine argues the same justification now stands as a durable precedent available for future use—in future public health mandates, in employer or government reliance on GC statements, and potentially in other contested civil-liberty matters such as conscription or licensing requirements. His central concern is less about vaccines specifically than about who gets to decide when a conscience claim is valid: the individual believer, or an institutional body applying a welfare standard borrowed from secular human-rights law. In Vine's reading, this precedent does more than settle a past

dispute—it establishes the very mechanism by which the church could one day compel conformity to a Sunday law, fulfilling the end-time apostasy Adventist eschatology has long anticipated.

The Summary Comparison. The author provides a comprehensive side-by-side comparison of Pioneer Adventism and modern “Apostate Adventism” across ten dimensions:

Topic	Adventist Pioneers (pre-1915)	Apostate Adventism (post-1980)
Creed	Bible alone	<i>28 Fundamental Beliefs</i>
God’s nature	Father and Son—personal beings; Spirit is an essence, not a person	Trinity—three co-equal beings
Christ’s nature	Literal begotten Son of God	Unbegotten God; “Son” is metaphorical
Christ’s human nature	Post-Adamic (fallen)—our Example	Pre-Adamic (unfallen)—not our Example
Christ’s death	Father did not kill Jesus; Satan did	Father killed Jesus (penal substitution)
Atonement	Dual atonement; relational	Single atonement; legal transaction
EGW writings	True prophet; pillars of faith unchanged	Pseudo-authoritative; paradigm shift claimed
Three angels’ messages	Central mission, clearly understood	Mission lost through ecumenism
Governance	Bottom-up; members owned the church	Top-down; corporate entity owns church
Abortion	Adamantly anti-abortion	No policy; left to individual conscience

Where Does This Leave Us? The author draws a sobering parallel with the Jewish nation at the time of Christ: they had name and lineage—claiming to be the sons of Abraham—while rejecting the Messiah. The label does not determine authenticity; faithfulness to truth does. The author concludes with three summary charges against the modern SDA Church:

1. **Adopted false theology:** The nature of God, Christ, and the Atonement have been changed in ways the Pioneers would not recognize.
2. **Adopted a false mission:** The three angels’ messages can no

longer be correctly proclaimed because the church has drunk the wine of Babylon.

3. **Adopted a false organization:** The corporate, hierarchical structure patterns itself after Rome, not the Early Church.

A Closing Reflection. Ellen White wrote:

“The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written.” —*Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 204.

From the evidence given in the article, the author argues this vision has been fulfilled.

Closing Summary. This final session has brought the study full circle: from a question asked in a Sabbath School class in 2003, through twenty years of investigation, to a systematic case that the modern Seventh-day Adventist Church has departed from its founding theological, missional, and organizational principles. The question each participant must now take home is not merely academic—it is personal and spiritual: What is my relationship to truth, and what does faithfulness require of me?

Discussion Questions — Session 6

1. The Adventist Pioneers unanimously condemned abortion as murder. Modern Adventism has no official policy. What accounts for this dramatic shift, and what does it say about the church’s moral authority?
2. The SDA Church denied religious liberty exemptions for COVID vaccines while simultaneously arguing that abortion is a matter of religious liberty. How do you evaluate this inconsistency?
3. After six sessions, which theological change discussed in this study concerns you most? Which concerns you least? Why?
4. The author’s conclusion is that the SDA Church has adopted false theology, a false mission, and a false organization. Do you agree, disagree, or find yourself somewhere in between? What evidence matters most to you?
5. EGW wrote that honest souls in “the fallen churches” will be called out before the end. What does that vision mean for how we live as believers today—regardless of our denominational affiliation? What is the faithful response to what we have studied?

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” —Isaiah 8:20

