

**The Basic Doctrines  
of the Christian Faith:  
A Primer**

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this booklet is to introduce the Christian, especially the new Christian, to the basic doctrines of Christianity, that is, the doctrines that make Christianity, Christianity. The Christian faith certainly includes many other doctrines (such as baptism), but these are the doctrines that are essential to the faith. We will not cover any of the doctrines as thoroughly as they can be; there are plenty of excellent books that already do that. We will simply explain what the doctrine is, present the Scriptures that support the doctrine, and answer some common objections raised against it. Take your time reading through this, look up the Scriptures, and if you have any questions, ask reputable people of God for the answers.

We Christians do not accept a doctrine of the faith as true unless it can be supported by the Bible, so the first doctrine we will discuss is what we believe about the Bible.

## **The Bible**

We believe the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

First, we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

“Is given by inspiration of God” is one Greek word, *theopneustos*, which literally means “God-breathed.” It is true that men wrote the books of the Bible, but God inspired them, that is, he made sure they wrote what he wanted written.

We believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, that is, we believe that every word of the Bible is inspired. If only part of the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then how are we to know which part is true and which is not? The Bible does not contain the Word of God. It *is* the Word of God.

Second, we believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. That is, we believe that the Bible contains no errors and that it is telling us the truth.

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”  
(John 17:17).

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the  
soul;

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise  
the simple;

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the  
heart;

The commandment of the Lord is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous  
altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,

Yea, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Moreover by them Your servant is warned,

And in keeping them there is great reward (Ps. 19:7-11)

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

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

The entirety of Your word is truth,  
And every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever (Ps. 119:160).

Because the Bible is inspired and inerrant, it is also “profitable for doctrine.” The Bible is the standard by which we judge doctrines of the faith. If the Bible does not support a doctrine, we consider that doctrine to be false.

### *Some objections*

Some nonbelievers object to this belief about the Bible. They say, “You are merely arguing in a circle. You are using the Bible to prove the Bible.”

That would be true if the Bible were only one book written by one human author. The Bible is a collection of books written by 40 different human authors at different times and places. The Scriptures we read above are simply the testimony of these authors concerning the other books of the Bible. When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy, the only Bible he had was the Old Testament. So 2 Tim. 3:16 is Paul’s testimony that the Old Testament was

inspired. And Peter gives testimony that Paul's writings are Scriptural (2 Pet. 3:15-16). These men were simply confirming what God himself had already said about the Scriptures.

Since God inspired the writing of the Bible, he is the ultimate author of it. We know that the Bible is true because we know the author!

God knows everything (Heb. 4:13); therefore, he knows what is true and what is not. God does not lie (Titus 1:2); therefore, if he says something is true, we can trust that it is true. We trust that the Bible is telling us the truth because we trust that God is telling us the truth.

A second objection is, "You cannot view the Bible as authoritative because men chose which books should be in the Bible."

From the outside, it certainly looks like men chose which books to put into the Bible. The New Testament did not achieve its final form until the fourth century. Several Church leaders offered different lists of which books were considered inspired. Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, was the first to list the 27 books we now have in the New Testament. He wrote that list in 367 AD.

However, these men were not deciding which books should be in the New Testament. *God* decided which books were inspired and which were not. The Church leaders were merely recognizing and confirming which books were inspired and therefore should be included in the New Testament.

So, how do we know which books should be in the Bible? We know because God said so. Men down through the ages have merely confirmed what God has already said.

A third objection is, “The Bible as we now have it is not what was originally written.” This objection can take two forms. One is that changes were accidentally made to the Bible so that we can no longer trust that we have what the authors originally wrote. The other form is that changes were made *deliberately* by the religious leaders to foist their beliefs upon their unsuspecting followers.

The original books of the New Testament were written on papyrus or parchment. Tertullian, who wrote in 200 AD, said that the original books could still be seen in the Churches in his day.

However, these books eventually decayed, so copies had to be made by hand. When those copies decayed, they were copied by hand. Over the years, scribes made copies of copies of copies of copies. Some of those copies have survived, but the original books have not. Of course, in the process of making these copies, mistakes were made, which is why some people say that we cannot trust that what we have is what the authors originally wrote.

Every ancient book has undergone this process of being copied by hand, including Homer’s *Iliad* and Caesar’s *Gallic Wars*. In each case, scholars wish to know what the author had originally written. To find out, they use a process called textual criticism.

Textual critics look for two important factors when studying the hand-written copies of any book. The first is age. The older a copy is, the closer it was to the original, and therefore less likely to have mistakes. The second factor is the number of copies. If we have eight copies and four of them say one thing and four say another, it is difficult to know which ones are correct. But if we have 5000 copies and 100 say one thing and the other 4900 say another thing, we

have a better idea of which ones are correct. Look at these famous ancient works and notice how few copies we have:

<b>Author</b>	Aristotle ( <i>Poetics</i> )
<b>Time of Writing</b>	343 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	1100 AD
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	1400
<b># of Copies</b>	5

<b>Author</b>	Plato ( <i>Tetralogies</i> )
<b>Time of Writing</b>	427-347 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	900 AD
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	1250
<b># of Copies</b>	7

<b>Author</b>	Herodotus ( <i>History</i> )
<b>Time of Writing</b>	480-425 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	900 AD
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	1350
<b># of Copies</b>	8

<b>Author</b>	Thucydides
<b>Time of Writing</b>	460-400 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	900 AD
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	1300
<b># of Copies</b>	8

<b>Author</b>	Caesar ( <i>Gallic Wars</i> )
<b>Time of Writing</b>	100-44 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	900 AD
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	950
<b># of Copies</b>	10

<b>Author</b>	Homer ( <i>Iliad</i> )
<b>Time of Writing</b>	800 BC
<b>Oldest Copy</b>	400 BC
<b>Gap (Years)</b>	400
<b># of Copies</b>	643

Compare those numbers with those of the New Testament. The last book of the New Testament was written around 80-90 AD. The oldest copy of the almost complete New Testament was written around 325-350 AD, a gap of only 270 years. The oldest copy of a portion of the New Testament contains John 18:31-33 and 37, and it was written around 130 AD, only 50 years later. We currently have over 5000 copies of the New Testament or portions of it in the Greek and almost 20,000 more copies in other languages.

The small gap between the original writings and the oldest copies as well as the sheer number of copies makes the New Testament the easiest text to reconstruct and assures us that the copies which we read in our homes are in fact reliable copies of the original text. Some textual critics have even said that the New Testament copies are more reliable than any ten ancient literary works combined.

The story with the Old Testament is different. We do not have a large number of copies and the copies we do have are relatively young. The oldest complete Hebrew manuscript we have was written around 1000 AD, more than 1400 years after Malachi was written. However, we know that the Jews were very meticulous when making copies of the text, and burned the ones that contained mistakes, which is why we have so few copies. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were written around 300 BC to 100

AD, only confirmed that the copy which we have is very reliable, for the Scrolls agree quite well with it.

We must understand that the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible only applies to the original writings and not to the copies. The copies do contain mistakes, but not as many as some would claim.

What we call mistakes, scholars call variants. The vast majority of these variants are trivial, such as the difference in the spelling of a word. If 20,000 copies have one spelling and 4,000 have another spelling, scholars count that as 4,000 variants. The verses in the New Testament that have variants are only 12.5% of all of the verses. Some variants do change the meaning of the text. Those verses come to only 1.66% of the entire New Testament. In other words, the copies have preserved 98.33% of the original writings. Compare that to Homer's *Iliad*, which is only 95% preserved. And none of those verses affect the doctrines historically taught by the Christian Church.

The objection that the early Church leaders changed the Bible to make it say what they wanted it to say is absurd. The leaders would have had to gather the thousands of copies that were scattered all over the Roman Empire, destroy them, and then issue new copies, all without the rest of the Church being in the least bit suspicious. Impossible.

The objection that the Bible contains so many mistakes that it is not what the authors originally wrote is also absurd. God has seen to it that the copies have remarkably preserved 98.33% of the original writings and the differences are trivial.

So why did God not preserve 100% of the original? Probably because of our propensity for idolatry. As it is, some people have a relationship with their Bible but not with the author of the Bible. We

must remember that the purpose of the Bible is to help us develop a close relationship with God, not replace him.

## **God the Father**

The Bible has much to say about God the Father, and we could not possibly cover it all in this booklet. Besides, we are studying the basic doctrines about Christianity, the doctrines that make Christianity, Christianity. So what does a person need to believe about God in order to be a Christian?

There is one verse in the Bible that tells us what we must believe about God in order to be a Christian: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). The Bible says that those who do not believe these things are fools (Ps. 14:1-3).

First of all, Heb. 11:6 says that we must believe that He *is*, that is, that He exists.

Atheists argue that philosophy (logic) and science always lead us to the truth. They also argue that God’s existence cannot be proven philosophically (logically) or scientifically. That is why they do not believe that he exists.

However, if philosophy always leads us to the truth, why are there so many philosophies? There is Platonism, Aristotelianism, hedonism, stoicism, utilitarianism, existentialism, nihilism, and many, many others, none of which completely agrees with any of the others.

Science is limited to dealing only with that part of the physical realm that is observable. By “observable,” scientists mean “measureable.” How do you measure a spiritual being who is bigger than the universe?

Besides, science changes its mind every 50 years.

Not once do the writers of the Bible attempt a philosophical or scientific proof of God’s existence. They do not try to prove his existence any more than they try to prove the existence of Abraham or Moses or Paul.

Instead, the Bible says that God’s existence has already been revealed to men. God reveals his existence in two ways. The first is in Rom. 1:18-20:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

God uses nature to show that he exists.

The phrase “things that are made” in v. 20 is only one word in the Greek. That word is *poiema*, which originally meant “anything made by hand,” but by New Testament times came to mean “a work of art.” We get our word *poem* from this Greek word. So God’s existence and his character are revealed by nature, which is his poem.

This Greek word is used in only one other place in the entire New Testament: “For we are His

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). Here the Greek word is translated as “workmanship.”

According to this verse, we are God’s poem. Our job is the same as nature’s: God wants to use us to show the world, by how we live, who he really is and that he exists. In short, God’s existence is revealed to others by the testimony of nature and by our testimony.

Second of all, Heb. 11:6 tells us that we must believe that *He* is, that is, that *this* God exists.

Atheism was not a problem when Hebrews was written. Almost everybody believed in some sort of god. The writer of Hebrews is saying that it is not enough to believe in *a* god; we must believe in *this* God, the God who was proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

Jesus came to show us who God really is: “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world” (John 17:6). He came to manifest God’s name, that is, to show us God’s character. The best summary of God’s character is found in Exod. 33:18-19 and 34:6-7. Moses asked to see God’s glory and God said he would show Moses his goodness. In other words, God’s glory is his goodness. Some people in the world believe that God exists, but that he is a mean or vengeful or judgmental God. We must show the world that God is good.

Third of all, Heb. 11:6 says that we must believe that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. This also implies that he is a rewarder (or, rather, punisher) of those who do not seek him. It is not enough to simply believe in God’s existence. He

wants us to enter into a relationship with him. He wants us to search for him and find him.

He constantly urged Israel to seek him: Is. 55:6-7, Jer. 29:13, Amos 5:4.

If we diligently seek him, he will reward us. What is his reward? First it is Himself. Second it is life, for he is life (Deut. 30:19-20).

So why is it necessary to believe in God and have a relationship with him? Because that is the only way to obtain eternal life: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

There is one more thing that we must believe about God in order to be Christians: we must believe that *this* God exists because he is in fact the *only* God who exists.

The Scriptures tell us over and over again that the Christian God is the only God and that all of the other so-called gods do not exist.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deut. 6:4; quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29).

“that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Kings 8:60).

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him;

and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5).

In Isaiah's time, Israel was heavily involved in idolatry, so God used Isaiah to emphasize the truth that the God of Israel is the only true God.

Is. 43:10-12

Is. 44:6

Is. 44:8

Is. 44:24

Is. 45:5-6

Is. 45:14

Is. 45:18

Is. 45:21-22

Is. 46:9

Since the other so-called gods do not really exist (or are demons), they cannot save us. We must believe in the Christian God because he is the only one who can save us (Is. 45:22) and the only one who can give us eternal life (John 17:3).

## **God the Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is probably the most misunderstood person of the Trinity. What must we believe about the Holy Spirit according to the Scriptures?

First, we must believe that the Holy Spirit is a person. Some people think of the Holy Spirit as a thing. They say that, just as we have a spirit, so, too, God has a Spirit. Others, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, say that the Holy Spirit is merely a force, the power of God.

But the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is a person. The best evidence is that Christ refers to the Holy Spirit using the pronouns "He" and "Him," not "it" (John 14-16).

Jesus also referred to the Holy Spirit as "another Helper" (John 14:16-17). Greek has two words that can be translated as "another." The first, *eteros*, means "another of a similar or different kind": "You sampled that apple. Now try another kind of fruit, this time an orange."

The second, *allos*, means "another of the same kind": "You sampled that apple. Now try another apple." Both words are used in Gal. 1:6-7: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different (*eteros*) gospel, which is not another (*allos*); but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."

Jesus used the latter word. The Holy Spirit is the same kind of Helper that Jesus is. He is and does what Jesus is and does.

The Scriptures also tell us that the Holy Spirit has the attributes of a person and does what only a person can do. He:

has a will (1 Cor. 12:11, Heb. 2:4)  
makes decisions (Acts 15:28)  
helps (John 14:16)  
dwells (John 14:17)

teaches (John 14:26; Luke 12:12; 1 Cor.  
2:13)  
testifies (John 15:26)  
is a witness (Acts 5:32)  
convicts (John 16:8)  
guides (John 16:13)  
speaks (John 16:13; Acts 28:25; Heb.  
3:7)  
inspired the prophets (2 Pet. 1:21)  
forbids (Acts 16:6)  
prays for us (Rom. 8:26)  
can be grieved (Is. 63:10; Eph. 4:30)

Second, we must believe that the Holy Spirit is God. Peter said that lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God (Acts 5:3-4). And Paul says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17).

The Holy Spirit also has the attributes of God. He is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7), omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10-11), and eternal (Heb. 9:14).

## **God the Son**

Jesus Christ is, of course, the central figure of Christianity. He is why Christianity is called *Christianity*. The Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus was more than a man: he was and is also God in the flesh. The Scriptures also tell us why it is necessary to believe that he is both God and man:

And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name (that is, who he really is) of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment (1 John 3:23).

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12).

“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).

If we do not believe in Jesus, the REAL Jesus, the one who is both God and man, we will die in our sins.

Before we can begin to understand how Jesus could be both man and God, we need to understand the difference between nature and person.

*Nature* means kind or sort. For example, God created all of the animals, each “according to its kind” (Gen. 1:25). Specifically, nature means “the particular combination of qualities belonging to a person, animal, thing, or class by birth, origin, or constitution; native or inherent character.” For example, human nature is the set of characteristics that are common to humans. Human nature is what makes us human. Horse nature is what makes horses, horses. Dog nature is what makes dogs, dogs. The divine nature is what makes God, God.

*Person* refers to the individual who is distinct from everyone else. All of us have the human nature in common, but each of us is a distinctive person.

Jesus is *one person*, that is, he is an individual distinct from everyone else, including the Father and the Holy Spirit, and he has *two natures*, one human and one divine. All of the heresies fail to understand this in one way or another: they either deny that Christ was one person or they deny that he had two natures, one human and one divine.

I will show you what the major heresies taught (because some of them are still around) so you can understand where they went wrong. We will also see what the Scriptures say so we can see what is the correct way of understanding who Jesus is.

*Dynamic Monarchianism*, also known as *Adoptionism*, says that Jesus, who was a mere man, was adopted as the Son of God at his baptism or at his resurrection. They see Jesus as one person with only one nature, the human nature.

John 1:1,14 says that Jesus has always been God and so was never adopted.

*Ebionites* say that Jesus was a mere man and that Christ descended on him at baptism. Another version says that Christ descended on him after the temptation. They see Jesus as *two* persons in one body. Jesus is a man who has the human nature and Christ is the Son of God who has the divine nature.

Luke 2:11 says that Jesus was declared to be the Christ at his birth.

*Modalistic Monarchianism (Sabellianism)* says that Jesus is merely one mode in which God may appear. The Father and the Holy Spirit are the other modes. In other words, God is only one person who sometimes appears as the Father, sometimes as the Son and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. They see Jesus as one person with only one nature, the divine nature.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus speaks of the Father and the Holy Spirit as persons distinct from him and from each other. In other words, he speaks of them as three distinct persons.

*Gnosticism* says that Christ is a being who is almost like God. Christ did not actually take on a body of flesh and blood but only *appeared* to have taken on a human body. They see Christ as one person with only one nature, a semi-divine nature. Christian Science is a form of Gnosticism.

1 John 4:2-3 condemns Gnosticism.

*Arianism* says that Christ is the first created being and is like God. He has a *similar* substance (nature) as the Father, but not the *same* substance (nature) as the Father. He did take on flesh and become a man. They see Jesus as one person with two natures, but not with the divine nature. This is the position taken by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

John 1:3 says that the Word, Jesus, created *all* things, so Jesus is not a created being.

Of these heresies, Arianism proved to be the most influential. Many believers and Church leaders in the late third century and early fourth century became followers of this heresy and it almost split the Church. Constantine called for a council of bishops to convene in the city of Niceae in 325 AD to decide if Arianism was in fact a heresy. This council produced the first version of the Nicene Creed, which affirmed that Christ was both man and God and had the *same* substance (nature) as the Father. The Arian heresy, however, persisted, forcing the Council of Constantinople to issue a revision of the Nicene Creed in 381 AD. This is the final version of the Nicene Creed. The word "catholic" here means "universal"; it does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

This creed is the only one accepted by all of the Christian denominations.

After the Council of Constantinople affirmed that Jesus is in fact both God and man, the problem became, "How can Jesus be both at the same time? How do the two natures interact with each other?"

To most people, the divine nature and the human nature cannot be reconciled because in many ways

they are opposite of each other. According to the Scriptures themselves:

<b>God</b>	<b>Jesus</b>
Does not sleep – Ps. 121:3-4	Slept – Matt. 8:24
Is invisible – 1 Tim. 1:17	Was seen – 1 John 1:1-3
Is immortal – 1 Tim. 1:17	Died – John 19:33
Is infinite – Jer. 23:24, Ps 139	Is finite

How, then, do we reconcile these two natures?

Apollinaris was the bishop of Laodicea in Syria. He died in 390 AD. He said that Jesus was a man except that he did not have a human soul or spirit. God the Son was his spirit. So Jesus was fully God but not fully human. He believed that Jesus had 1 body and was 1 person who had 2 natures, but one of those natures was not complete. This teaching was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD.

Nestorius was the archbishop of Constantinople from 428 AD to 431 AD, when he was exiled for his teaching. He acknowledged the complete manhood of Jesus but said that his human nature was separate from his divine nature so that Jesus had 1 body but was 2 persons, one that was human and one that was divine. This teaching was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD.

In reaction to Nestorius, Eutyches, who was an elder in Constantinople, went to the other extreme. He taught that the human nature of Jesus was so united to the divine nature that it was absorbed by the divine

nature, so that even though Jesus had the same substance as the Father, he did not have the same substance as the rest of humanity. He believed that Jesus had 1 body and was 1 person who had only 1 nature. This teaching was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD.

The Council of Chalcedon issued this Creed:

Following the holy Fathers we teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same [Person], that he is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial with the Father as touching his Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching his manhood; made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of his Father before the worlds according to his Godhead; but in these last days for us men and for our salvation born [into the world] of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to his manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophets of old time have spoken concerning him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers hath delivered to us.

The Creed affirms that Jesus has 1 body and is 1 person who has 2 natures. It does not explain how the two natures work together because in actuality we do not know how they work. That is one of the mysteries of God that we do not understand, so the Church leaders who wrote this Creed were wise to not even attempt to explain how they work together. They simply did what the Scriptures do: they affirm that Jesus is both God and man but never try to explain how he could be both at the same time.

Even though not all Christian denominations acknowledge this Creed, they do teach that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully man and acknowledge that any teaching to the contrary is heretical.

Other Scriptures that show the Deity of Jesus Christ:

Matt. 1:23

Matt. 28:17

John 5:17-18

John 10:30-33

John 20:28

Acts 20:28

Phil. 2:6

1 Tim. 3:16

Tit. 2:13

Heb. 1:1-3

Heb. 1:8

1 John 5:20

Is. 44:6 with Rev. 22:13

Is. 45:22-23 with Phil. 2:10

## *Some objections to the Deity of Christ*

*John 10:30-39 – Jesus referred to other people as “gods” (v. 34). So Jesus is also a “god” in the same sense.*

Jesus is quoting Ps. 82:6. The Hebrew word for “gods” is *elohim*, which is most often translated as God or gods, but it literally means “mighty ones.” One can be mighty because he is a “god,” or because he is physically strong, or because he holds a position of authority. Therefore, what this word means depends on context. In Ps. 82, the “gods” are in fact the judges of Israel, who are expected to judge righteously, like God does. *Elohim* is also translated as judges in Exod. 21:5-6 and 22:7-9.

So Jesus is saying that if the judges, who are mere men, can be called “gods” because they hold positions of authority, why do you object when I, who has been set apart and sent here by the Father himself and is therefore of greater authority than the judges, say that I am the Son of God? Jesus is not saying that he is a “god,” but is above these so-called “gods” because he is the Son of God and therefore has the same divine nature as God the Father. The Jews understood this immediately, for they tried to stone him for blasphemy.

*John 1:1 – In the Greek, the definite article (“the”) appears before the first use of “God” but not before the second use. This implies that there is a distinction between the first God (“the God,” meaning the Father) and the second god (“a god,” meaning the Son).*

Actually, Greek is very careless with the definite article. Sometimes it uses it, sometimes it does not. For example, Greek often uses the definite article before proper names, but not always. In John 1:47, the article appears before the name Jesus but in John 1:50, it does not. Does this imply that there are two Jesuses? Of course not.

The definite article does not always appear before God even though the Father is clearly meant. For example, in John 1:18, “God” clearly refers to the Father, but the definite article is not used. The objection, therefore, is definitely pointless.

*John 1:18 – Jesus is called “the only begotten,” meaning that he had a beginning. Therefore, he can be a “god,” but not God.*

The Nicene Creed affirms that Jesus was “begotten, not made,” and the Creed of Chalcedon explicitly says that Jesus was “begotten of his Father before the worlds according to his Godhead.” What these Creeds are trying to say is that the word “begotten” actually confirms the divine nature of Jesus Christ. Just as humans beget humans, so, too, God begets God. This is not to imply that Jesus had a beginning. It means that his Sonship differs from everyone else. Believers are the sons of God (John 1:12) by *adoption* but Jesus is the only Son of God by *nature*.

The early Church leaders also spoke of Jesus as the “eternally begotten” Son, that is, as the Son who was begotten outside of time. Men do not become fathers until that certain point in time when they first beget a child. But the Father and the Son are both eternal and have always had their relationship. In

other words, the Father has always been the Father and the Son has always been the Son. So, the words “only begotten” actually mean that Jesus is the only Son who has the divine nature and has existed eternally. Therefore, Jesus did not have a beginning.

*John 14:28 – Jesus said that his Father is greater than he is, so Jesus cannot be equal in nature to God.*

This objection does not take into account the difference between nature and authority. If my son and I were working at the same corporation and he were the janitor and I were the CEO, I would have more *authority* than he would (thus, I would be greater than him), but we would still have the same *nature*. The Father has more authority than the Son, which makes him greater than Jesus, but they still have the same divine nature.

*1 Cor. 8:5-6 – Paul says that there is only one God and that God is the Father. Therefore, Jesus cannot be God.*

Paul also says that there is only one Lord and that Lord is Jesus Christ. So, if the objection were legitimate, that would mean that the Father and the Holy Spirit cannot also be Lord. Yet, Paul calls the Father Lord in 2 Cor. 6:17-18 and he calls the Holy Spirit Lord in 2 Cor. 3:17.

Paul is drawing a contrast between the world and us. In the world, there are many so-called gods and lords, but for us there is only one God and one Lord.

## The Trinity

We have seen that the Scriptures teach that the Father is God, the Holy Spirit is God, and the Son is God. But we have also seen that the Scriptures teach that there is only one God. How do we reconcile these Scriptures?

The Church has consistently taught that these Scriptures are reconciled by the doctrine of the Trinity. The word “trinity” is a combination of the words “tri” and “unity.” Hence it means three in one. It is true that the word “trinity” does not appear anywhere in the Scriptures. The word is simply our name for the doctrine which is clearly taught by the Scriptures.

The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is only one God in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are equal in nature, power, and eternity. Each person is fully God, yet they are united in such a way that there is only one God.

The doctrine is not explicitly stated in the Old Testament, though there are hints of it. Gen. 1:26-27, Gen. 11:5-9, and Is. 6:8 all have something in common: the Lord refers to “us” when he is clearly referring to himself.

Some verses mention all three persons:

Is. 48:16 (The Lord God [the Father] and His Spirit have sent Me [the Son])

Ps. 33:6 (The Word is the Son, the Hebrew word for “breath” is also the Hebrew word for the Spirit)

In Exod. 33:18-20, God tells Moses that no man can see God and live. John 1:18 tells us that no man has seen God, meaning the Father, at any time. Yet God appeared to several people in the Old Testament (for example, Gen. 17:1, Gen. 32:24-30, and Exod. 24:9-11). These people saw God, but did not die. The best explanation is that they did not see the Father but did see the Son.

The doctrine is explicit in the New Testament. The New Testament also affirms that there is only one God, but it also talks about the three persons and often mentions all three in the same passage:

Matt. 3:16-17

Matt. 28:19

John 14:16-17

Rom. 8:11

1 Cor. 6:1

1 Cor. 12:4-6

Gal. 3:11-14

Heb. 10:29

1 Pet. 1:1-2

1 John 5:7 states the doctrine in no uncertain terms. However, you should be aware that it appears in only a few manuscripts and those are quite young.

The doctrine of the Trinity is admittedly difficult to understand. Nowadays, most people in our culture do not believe in polytheism so they are not likely to split the persons into three gods. However, many people emphasize their unity so much that they often blur the persons. The Scriptures clearly teach that each person is distinct from the other. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

Each person also has a distinct role:

- God the Father's role is to generate things. Things originate with him and flow from him. God the Father is equal with the Son and the Holy Spirit, but things start with him. The Father sent both the Son ([John 3:16-17](#)) and Holy Spirit ([John 14:26](#)) into the world.
- God the Son's role is to pay for our sins with his blood, which he did on the cross ([Romans 5:9](#)). The Son also acts as a lawyer for us before God, acting as a "mediator" between us and God ([1 Timothy 2:5](#)), and speaking "to the Father in our defense" ([1 John 2:1](#)).
- God the Holy Spirit has many roles. The Spirit helps us pray ([Romans 8:26-27](#)). He gives us new life ([John 3:3-6](#)). He is our Comforter, and he helps us understand God's word ([John 14:26](#)). He lifts up Christ ([John 15:26](#)). He convicts us of sin ([John 16:7-11](#)). He helps us to live holy lives ([Romans 15:16](#)). He gives us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)). He helps us share our faith ([Acts 1:8](#)). And he lives inside us ([Romans 8:11](#)). (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/iyf/advise/faithdoubt/what-is-trinity.html>)

There is also a chain of command within the Godhead. Paul tells us that "the head of Christ is God," that is, the Father (1 Cor. 11:3). When all things are finally made subject to the Son, the Son will then make all things, including himself, subject to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

The Holy Spirit does not speak on his own authority (John 16:13) and is sent by both the Father and the Son (John 15:26), which suggests that he is on the bottom of the chain of command.

It is also possible to blaspheme the Father and the Son and be forgiven, but it is not possible to blaspheme the Holy Spirit and be forgiven (Matt. 12:31-32). This would not make sense if the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all the same person.

Each person in the Godhead is distinct from each other and yet they are one. In John 17, Jesus prayed that we would be one with each other and him just as he is one with the Father. Perhaps we do not understand how three persons can still be one God because we still do not understand how to be one with each other.

The Athanasian Creed is named after Athanasius, who defended the doctrine of the Trinity against the Arians. He did not write the creed, nor was it written by a Church Council. In fact, we do not know who wrote it. It first appeared in the sixth century and was soon adopted as a statement of faith by the Roman Catholic Church and later by some Protestant churches because it is a simple yet eloquent exposition on the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ. Again, the word “catholic” means “universal” and does not refer to the Roman Catholic Church.

### *The Athanasian Creed*

*Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith.*

*Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally.*

*And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.*

*For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another.*

*But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.*

*Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit: the Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, the Holy Spirit uncreated; the Father infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite; the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.*

*And yet there are not three Eternals, but one Eternal, just as there are not three Uncreated or three Infinites, but one Uncreated and one Infinite.*

*In the same way, the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet there are not three Almightyes, but one Almighty.*

*So the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;*

*And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.*

*So the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord;*

*And yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord.*

*Just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each distinct person as God and Lord, so also are we prohibited by the catholic religion to say that there are three Gods or Lords.*

*The Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone.*

*The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone.*

*The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.*

*Thus, there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.*

*And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another;*

*But the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things, as has been stated above, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped.*

*Therefore, whoever desires to be saved must think thus about the Trinity.*

*But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man.*

*He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity.*

*Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.*

*For as the rational soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ,*

*Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds.*

*And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire.*

*This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.*

## **The Virgin Birth**

Those who deny the virgin birth are actually attacking the Deity of Christ. They are trying to say that he was an ordinary man, born like any other man.

Isaiah the prophet tied the virgin birth of Jesus to his deity when he said, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). Immanuel, as Matthew tells us (Matt. 1:23), means “God with us.”

Some people would argue that the Hebrew word for “virgin” really means “young woman.” However, a young woman giving birth to a son is an everyday occurrence. How could an everyday occurrence be a “sign” from the Lord? The sign had to be something highly unusual. When Matthew quotes this verse (Matt. 1:23), he uses the Greek word for “virgin.”

The two birth narratives in the Gospels (Matt. 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-35, 2:1-7) clearly state that Mary was a virgin at the time Jesus was conceived and born.

## **The Atonement of Christ**

The word “atonement” is used in the King James Version of the New Testament in Rom. 5:11 –

And not only *so*, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

The NKJV uses the word “reconciliation” instead of “atonement.” Reconciliation is the final result of the atonement. The English word “atonement” actually comes from the phrase “at one.” It signifies that the purpose of Christ’s death was to help us become “at one” with God once again.

To fully understand what the atoning work of Christ accomplished, we must first understand what sin did to us and to our relationship with God the Father.

Is. 59:2 says that our sins separated us from God the Father. Sin also made us enemies of God (Rom. 5:6-11). As such we deserved God’s wrath. Our punishment should have been death (Rom. 6:23), that is, we should have been eternally separated from God and suffering in the lake of fire forever.

But because God loved us, he had a different plan for us (Eph. 2:4-7). His love for us made him want to live with us forever, but his justice could not simply ignore our sins. His justice demanded that someone pay the penalty for our sins. Someone had to shed blood because of our sins, for “without shedding of blood, there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

He chose to send his only begotten Son to pay our penalty for us.

God foretold the sacrifice of his Son by having the Israelites celebrate the Day of Atonement every year. On that day, a perfect animal was sacrificed to make atonement for the nation of Israel and to cleanse them from their sins (Lev. 16:30).

So, too, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. He was the only man who had no sin. And his sacrifice made atonement for us and cleansed us from our sins (Rev. 1:5).

By dying on the cross, he took our punishment for us and appeased God's wrath:

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

“Propitiation” means “that which propitiates.” Propitiate means “to make favorably inclined, to appease.”

His death overcame our separation from God the Father and reconciled us to him (Rom. 5:6-11). We can now live forever with God the Father, not because of what we have done, but because of the atoning work of Christ. That is what we mean when we speak of the atonement.

The message of the atonement is the message we must carry to the lost (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

## **The Resurrection of Christ**

The doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is absolutely paramount to the Christian faith. In fact, Paul says that if the resurrection did not happen, then our faith is futile (1 Cor. 15:17). In other words, if there is no resurrection, there is no Christianity.

We know that the resurrection happened because Jesus' disciples testified to seeing him after his crucifixion. All four Gospels record the resurrection. Luke gives the most details (Luke 24:1-12, 36-48).

Christ did not rise from the dead as just a spirit (like the Jehovah's Witnesses contend) but as a full person: spirit, soul, and body.

In fact, Jesus said that he would raise his own body (John 2:18-21). Christ's resurrection was a physical resurrection.

In 1 Cor. 15:1-8, Paul says that the Gospel consists of three events. First, Christ died. John's account of Jesus' death includes the detail that blood and water came out of Jesus' body after a soldier pierced his side with a spear (John 19:34). This proves that Jesus died when his heart ruptured. This also proves that Jesus really died (not just passed out), for no one survives a ruptured heart.

Second, Christ was buried. Following the customs of the time, he was placed in a cave, the opening of which was then covered by a large stone. Given the necessary size of the opening and the kind of material in that area, the stone probably weighed 1.5 to 2 tons. This means that if Jesus had been buried alive (and if he were a mere man), he would not have been able to move the stone by himself.

Third, Christ rose again on the third day.

Paul then cites the testimony of witnesses to prove that the resurrection did occur. How reliable were these witnesses?

First, in their written testimony, they pointed out their failures, including their unbelief. If they had made up the story of the resurrection, they would have made themselves look good.

Second, most of them died for their testimony. They were told they could live if they simply stopped proclaiming the resurrection of Christ. But they chose to die anyway because they knew they were telling the

truth. People do not willingly die for a story which they made up.

Third, their testimony was confirmed by other witnesses, both friendly and hostile. Paul says that 500 people saw the risen Christ at the same time. This proves that the disciples were not hallucinating, for no two people have the same hallucination, let alone 500. The hostile witnesses include the priests, who bribed the guards into saying that the disciples had stolen the body. In other words, even the hostile witnesses admitted that the grave was now empty!

Fourth, and perhaps the best reason for believing the reliability of the disciples' testimony, is that they first preached the resurrection in Jerusalem. They made their first public announcement of the resurrection within walking distance of the tomb itself. Anybody in the audience could have gone to the tomb to check it out for themselves. If the disciples had started preaching in Athens or Rome, no one could have verified it. But they began in Jerusalem because they knew that no one could prove them wrong.

All the enemies of Christianity had to do to stop it in its tracks when the disciples began to preach the resurrection was to produce the body. The fact that they never did is proof that the body was no longer in the grave.

The resurrection of Christ is the central belief of Christianity. We know that Christianity is correct because we know that Christ rose from the grave.

## Salvation by Grace through Faith

This doctrine is unique to Christianity. All other religions teach that you get to heaven (if there is a heaven) and have a relationship with God (if there is a relationship) by doing enough good works. Christianity alone teaches that you can never be good enough to get into heaven or have a relationship with God, that the only way to get into heaven and have a relationship with God is by putting your faith in Jesus Christ, the only person who has lived a life that is good enough.

The Scripture that teaches this most clearly is Eph. 2:8-10. It says that we are saved by grace through faith. It also says that we are not saved by works.

Why are we not saved by works? Verse 9 tells us why: if we were saved by works, we would boast about our accomplishment. Rom. 4:1-4 says that if Abraham had been justified by works, he would have something to boast about. It also says that if salvation came by works, then God would be in debt to us instead of us in debt to God.

In other words, salvation by works would put us above God and all other men. It would make us proud. And is that not why we sin in the first place?

Rom. 3:20-28 says that salvation must come by grace through faith because we cannot do enough good works in the first place and it excludes boasting.

Does this mean that we are no longer required to do the good works? Of course not (Eph. 2:10). In all other religions, works are the *cause* of salvation; in Christianity, works are the *result* of salvation.

James 2:14-26 says that we show our faith by our works. Just as a lamp produces both heat (which you

cannot see) and light (which you can see), true faith produces both salvation (which you cannot see) and good works (which you can see).

## **The Second Coming of Christ**

At his first coming, Christ died for our sins and then rose from the dead. At his second coming, he will establish his kingdom here on earth (Rev. 19).

Christians have different views on how and when this will happen. Will he come back for the church before or after the Great Tribulation? Will there even be a Great Tribulation? Will his millennial kingdom be literal or figurative?

The important point is to believe *that* he will return. Paul refers to Christ's return as "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

When Christ ascended, two angels assured the disciples that "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11). So his return will be a *physical* return, not just a spiritual return.

*When* he will return, however, no one knows. Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). So even Jesus does not know when he will come back.

Some people will claim that they know the date when Jesus will return and they will claim they figured it out based on clues they had gathered from the Scriptures. Who knows the Scriptures better than Jesus? And if Jesus does not know when he will return, what makes us think that *we* can figure it out?

Therefore, those who claim to know when Jesus is coming back are, at best, sorely mistaken and, at worst, false prophets and false teachers.

Because we do not know when Jesus will return, he warned us in several parables (Matt. 24:42-25:30) to not grow slack in doing what God has commanded us to do. We want to be found being faithful and diligent servants when Jesus does return.

## **The Resurrection of the Dead**

We have seen that the central doctrine of Christianity is the resurrection of Christ.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians, “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor. 15:17). If Christ did not in fact rise from the dead, there is no Christianity. But Paul also says, “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen” (1 Cor. 15:16). So, to believe in the resurrection of Christ, one must also believe in the resurrection of the dead.

The resurrection of the dead includes both the believers and the unbelievers (John 5:24-29).

We are not resurrected as spirit only, but as spirit, soul, and body. However, the body that we will receive at our resurrection is different from the one we have now (1 Cor. 15:35-58).

All of the examples Paul cites have a physical body. So, too, our resurrected bodies will be physical. However, they are called spiritual bodies because they will be free from sin. Our spirits will finally control our bodies instead of the other way around.

In short, our resurrected bodies will be just like the resurrected body of Christ (Phil. 3:17-21).

Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). Jesus said that his resurrected body consisted of flesh and bones (Luke 24:36-39). His resurrected body did not have blood because he had shed it for us. So, too, our resurrected bodies will not have blood. In this sinful body, the life resides in the blood (Lev. 17:11). But now Christ is our life (Col. 3:1-4), so we will no longer need blood to sustain us. That is how we can be resurrected with physical bodies and still inherit the kingdom of God.

The unbeliever, however, will not be resurrected with an incorruptible, spiritual body. He or she will be given back his or her sinful, natural body, which is why he or she cannot inherit the kingdom of God and why he or she will suffer forever in the lake of fire.

## **Eternal Judgment**

In Matt. 25:31-46, Jesus makes two things perfectly clear:

1. Only two fates await everybody.
2. Jesus will decide what everyone's fate will be.

Jesus makes the same two points in John 5:21-30, but adds one more point: those who believe are not under judgment.

Only the unbelievers will actually stand before God and Jesus on Judgment Day. This Day is depicted in Rev. 20:1-15. It is known as the Great White Throne Judgment because God sits on a great white throne when he judges the people. Eternity for

unbelievers *is* determined by their works, and all of their works are found wanting. So all of them are cast into the lake of fire, where they will be punished for eternity.

Eternity for believers, however, is not determined by their works. Believers are saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). But the works of the believers do determine their *rewards*.

Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 3:6-17 that our works will be subjected to fire. He pictures our works as components to a building. What is that building? When Paul says, “Do you not know that you are the temple of God?” (v. 16), “you” in the Greek is plural. So the building is the Church. What will be tested, therefore, is how well we contributed to building up the Church. If we did well, we will receive a reward. If not, we will suffer loss.

That is why Paul says that each of us must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, “that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:9-10). In the Greek, this judgment seat is called the *bema*, which is why this judgment is called the *bema* seat judgment. The Roman proconsuls would sit on the *bema* when they acted as judges. Jesus will sit on the *bema* in heaven when he judges our works. It is a judgment only for Christians and it does not determine our eternity, only our rewards.

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## Notes

## Notes

