



## World Religions

Element Christian Church holds the issue of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the highest regard; as a matter of fact the gospel is **THE** issue that essentially defines a cult verses the orthodox Christian faith. Chapter One will start where this discussion can only start: **The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the truth as revealed in scripture.**

**This Class is not designed to give you ammunition to go after your ‘nut job’ neighbors on a ‘seek and destroy mission’. Elements leadership cannot point to one person that we have come across who has become a believer because they were beat over the head with truth.**

**Arguments do not win people, Jesus wins people, so we will lift Him up in all we do.**

- “Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve for one another with whatever gift each of you have received.” 1 Peter 4: 8-10

## **What is a cult and WHY do we consider many groups ‘cults:’**

From a practical perspective, the word cult has deep seated connotations. Many religious organizations can fall into the realm of a cult if their focus and aim is not Jesus. The word “Cult” and “Occult” are different and are yet confused by many people.

- Cult: a religion or sect considered to be false, unorthodox, or extremist, with members often living outside of conventional society under the direction of a charismatic leader.
- Occult: of or pertaining to magic, astrology, or any system claiming use or knowledge of secret or supernatural powers or agencies.

Where the word “occult” comes from a Latin word meaning ‘hidden, concealed, or secret,’ today it is mainly associated with demonic worship. By discussing certain groups and calling them ‘cults’ we want you to be aware that these groups do not worship Satan. Cult have very distinctive markers in how they relate to the world around them.

## **What makes a Cult?**

Not every cult manifests all of these traits, it is difficult to make one box that includes every aspect of every cult, the following are simply the most common.

### Doctrinal Characteristics of a cult

#### **1) New Revelation**

Cults believe they have the sole pipeline to God and distribute literature that you must read, process, and internalize on a consistent bases to be able to live in their truth. The information they distribute is opposed to the truth as revealed in scripture.

#### **2) Denial of the sole authority of Scripture**

False Religions always seek to usurp the Bibles authority in our lives and then place themselves above it. Seen in such groups as Mormons, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses), Jim Jones, Mary Baker Eddy (science and health, Christian Science), Reverend Sun Myung Moon (the Divine Principle, the Moonie), New age Philosophies (the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ).

### 3) **Distorted View of God and Jesus: *Denial of the Trinity***

- Oneness Pentecostals (believe in Modalism – where God acts in different ‘modes’, sometimes he is the Father, the Son, or The Spirit)
- Jehovah Witnesses teach that Jesus is the first created being of God, Not God.
- Mormons believe that God was once a man that lived on another planet.
- Baha'is and Spiritists call Jesus an advanced medium
- Theosophists teach that Jesus is simply a reincarnation of the 'world teacher' who manifests every once in a while (*psychic Edgar Rice says 1<sup>st</sup> incarnation was Adam and 13<sup>th</sup> was Jesus*).

### 4) **Denial of Salvation by grace**

Almost every cult teaches that salvation is based upon the works you do to please God. *As an example, Herbert Armstrong (Worldwide Church of God) says that the belief that salvation is by grace and no works of our own is rooted in Satan.*

## **Sociological Characteristics of a cult**

### 1) **Authoritarianism**

A cult typically has an authority figure that uses different techniques to control its members. *Seen in people such as David Koresh, Joseph Smith (Mormons), David Brandt Berg and the Children of God (the family), Sun Myung Moon (Unification Church—Rev Moon in 1990 declared himself to be the Messiah), Jonestown (Jim Jones).*

### 2) **Exclusivism**

*"We alone have the truth"* Mormons and JW's both believe they are the exclusive community of the saved, you have to be a member of their church.

Other exclusive traits sometimes include forced communal living (easier to maintain control)--Branch Davidians, Children of God.

### 3) **Dogmatism**

Truth is in their suitcase. *"We alone can interpret the truth"* David Koresh said only he could interpret the Bible, the same for Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and many others.

### 4) **Close-mindedness**

Unwillingness to read or consider other points of view. Consider other peoples literature 'apostate.' *Mormons have stated that even if Joseph Smith was a false prophet they would not stop being a Mormon. JW's will not return to houses where they are hard pressed about their faith.*

### 5) **Susceptibility**

A lot of people in cults are either highly prideful or highly gullible. Most have the ability to 'compartmentalize' conflicting facts.

### 6) **Isolationism**

Some cults create boundaries about who members can hang out with. Deserters are considered traitors and most are told they will be attacked and destroyed by Satan. These Barriers are Psychological as well as physical and tends to make them isolated which usually leads to antagonism.

### 7) **Antagonism**

Many people in cults live in either fear or anger towards the 'outside world.' Other groups are considered 'apostate' or 'tools of Satan.' *These beliefs sometimes result in armed conflicts (Jonestown and Waco).*

## **Moral Characteristics of a cult**

### **1) Legalism**

Ridged sets of rules members must follow (from temple ceremonies to door to door evangelism). *Mormons forbid coffee, tea, or caffeine.* Adherence to the rules means gaining greater favor with God-, again this is a rejection of grace.

### **2) Sexual traits**

Many cults hold different views on sexuality. *Joseph Smith said polygamy was ok for Mormon males. David Koresh said he owned all the women in his group (even girls as young as 10 according to his 1989 'revelation'.)* Children of God use sexual flirting to bring in members. The opposite extreme can also be true as well, where sex is viewed only for procreation only or seen as wrong all together. *As evidenced in many 'Christian' sects throughout the ages.*

### **3) Physical abuse**

Ex-cult members have claimed they were beaten, sleep deprived, starved, and have seen children beaten until bloody.

### **4) Psychological abuse**

Many cults will use tactics such as fear, intimidation, and isolation (typically called shunning) to bring their followers back in line. The ultimate form of abuse is death as evidenced by various cults throughout the ages: *Jim Jones, Heaven's gate, David Koresh.*

### **5) Intolerance towards others**

Antagonism or even killing of others (*Branch Dividians, Early Mormons, and radical Muslims*) has been used throughout the ages to silence the opposition. Christians can exhibit this behavior if not careful (*Spanish Inquisition*).

## **Cultic Methodology**

### **1) Moral Deception**

Cults will typically view the truth as very fluid and can change their mind and terminology very quickly. *Moonies use lies to win converts, Mormon founder Joseph Smith used 'fraudulent tactics' and was even called into court and fined a few times.* Cults have a tendency to not share bits and pieces of what they believe until you get deeper into the web of their cult. *Cults also use word twisting -- saying one thing and meaning another (i.e.: Grace, resurrection, ascension, Christ.)*

### **2) Aggressive Proselytizing**

Sharing faith is good but when it becomes a means to make God like you or having to have a certain number of converts to remain in good standing it becomes bad.

## **Why are cults growing?**

### **1) Doctrinal Failure**

Most Christians, when confronted by many cultists cannot answer because they do not understand or know what they themselves believe. Most Christians do not spend enough time getting to know their savior and so are hard pressed for answers by a trained cultist. We must first know and understand the truth before we can recognize the error.

*The rise of cults are "directly proportional to the fluctuating emphasis which the Christian church has placed on the teaching of Biblical Doctrine to Christian laymen."*

**2) Increase in relativism**

Our culture is becoming more and more relativistic. That simply means that more people make statement like, "What may be true for you is not true for me." It is the "have your own religion syndrome."

**3) Mystical turn east**

When our society rejected that God created all and also rejected Atheism they began to embrace the bizarre theology of Star Wars, "God is all and all are God." This focuses ourselves inward (pride, the original sin) and places ourselves at the center.

**4) Emphasis on self**

New religions cater to felt needs rather than real needs

**5) Stress on Feeling**

Popular daytime shows tell America to, "Find something that feels good to you." This can also be seen in those seeking drugs as a short cut to Nirvana (Rastafarianism-Bob Marley).

**6) Moral Rebellion**

Scripture states that we are in rebellion against God. Only one dimension is moral...you will find the religion that suits your chosen lifestyle. (Hindu guru Rajneesh, Children of God). It becomes antiestablishment, antigovernment, and antifamily.

**7) Social breakdown of families**

Generation without a past, cut off from families. Cults pray on lost families. Many cult members are to address their leaders with parental titles...Elizabeth Claire Prophet (Church Universal and Triumphant) is known as 'Guru Ma,' David Moses Berg (Children of God/the Family) was called 'Father David,' and Reverend Moon is called 'Father Moon' by the Unification Church.

**What makes Cults Dangerous**

**1) Spiritual Dangers**

The Devil is called the 'Father of lies' (John 8:44). They are called Doctrines of Demons (1 Tim 4:1). If you believe a lie you are already deceived...if you act on the lie you are in danger. There is spiritual danger in believing a lie...it is a counterfeit Jesus which leads to a counterfeit gospel...which leads to a counterfeit salvation (which is no salvation at all).

**2) Psychological Dangers**

Many cults seek out loners and lavish 'love' on them until they are hooked. Cult leaders then become the absolute authority for their followers. Becoming enslaved to a cult leaders whims can cause lifelong damage to a person's psyche.

**3) Physical Dangers**

Many cults physically abuse their members or encourage their members to abuse themselves in the sight of God. (*David Moses Berg of The Children of God or The Family encourages women to offer their bodies to men to encourage them to join the COG. Unwed mothers are called 'widows' and getting a STD is a sign of suffering for Christ.*)

## Lesson 1 – Christianity.

In order to understand cults a Christian must also know first what should believe and hold as the unchanging truths of Christ. The first lesson will focus on these.

### Scripture

*"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar." - Proverbs 30:5-6*

Christians hold the scripture in high regard. They are the measuring rod for life and faith. If a teaching contradicts scripture then the teaching is false as scripture is always true.

God cannot speak falsely (2 Samuel 7:28; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), so all of Scripture is true and without any error or contradiction (Num. 23:19; Ps. 12:6; 119:89, 96; Prov. 30:5). But, the Bible also teaches the following:

- God's thoughts are much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9)
- God has secrets that He has not revealed to anyone (Deut. 29:29)
- We sometimes see dimly (I Cor. 13:12)
- We tend to suppress the clear truth of God's word because of our unrepentant sin (Romans 1:18-19).

Therefore, if it appears that there is a contradiction in Scripture, we must humbly assume that we—not God's word—are somehow in error. God leaves provision for seeming "contradictions" by telling us that some things in His Scriptures are very hard to understand (2 Peter 3:15-16). This does not mean that we cannot know the truth; it does mean that we only know it in part (I Corinthians 13:9) and must live by faith and trust God.

### What are the Scriptures?

The New Testament speaks of the Old Testament as Scripture, for which the Greek word is *graphe*, meaning writing. The word *bible* comes from the Greek word for book. *The Bible* contains 66 separate books (39 Old Testament and 27 New Testament), written in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and a bit in Aramaic), over a period of more than a thousand years, by over 40 authors (of varying ages and backgrounds), on three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe).

### Some statements from Scripture about Scripture

- Given by inspiration of God – II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:19-21.
- The very words of God - I Thessalonians 2:13
- A perfect guide for life - Proverbs 6:23. Pure - Psalm 12:6; 119:140 True - Psalm 119:160; John 17:17.
- Flawless – Proverbs 30:5-6 Perfect - Psalm 19:7

### The Apostles viewed Scripture as:

God's Word (Gen. 12:3 cf. Gal. 3:8; Ex. 9:6 cf. Rom. 9:17)

Sacred Scripture (Mt. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Lk. 24; Jn. 5:39; 10:35; Acts 17:2,11; 18:28; Rom. 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26; I Co. 15:3-4; Gal. 3:8; 3:22; 4:30; I Ti. 5:18; II Ti. 3:16; II Pt. 1:20-21; 3:15-16). Furthermore, the New Testament authors quote the Old Testament as sacred on roughly 300 occasions.

## **Can Scripture be written today?**

Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that God has spoken to us through Jesus and that we have no need of any more revelation beyond what was recorded of His life and work and the subsequent apostolic explanation. The Book of Revelation deals with the end of all things and tells us to expect no more Scripture than what we already have (Revelation 22:18-19). Any new book of the Bible would require eyewitness verification, a new working of God after 2000 years of silence, absolute consistency with the rest of Scripture, and perfect prophecy without any error. We would also have to assume that God had some pertinent revelation that He has withheld from His people for the past 2000 years that He has for some reason now decided to make known. Lastly, the Scriptures warn us of adding to them (Dt. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6).

## **God**

*“...I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me.” Isaiah 46:9*

### **How is God known?**

God is not known by any instrument or human ability. He is known only through self disclosure, which is called revelation. God reveals Himself by what he has created (General Revelation). He also reveals himself by the deeds performed by Him alone and the employment of language (Special Revelation). Language is employed because of human necessity and limited capacity, not a deficiency of God's character.

Special Revelation, represented exclusively in the Bible, is particularly important because God speaks to us about Himself, our relationship with Him and others, and the precious nature of being image bearers reflecting His very character to other humans, as well as, rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Eph. 3:10).

### **How many gods are there?**

The Bible is abundantly clear that there is only one true God (2 Chr. 15:3; Jer. 10:10; John 17:3; I Thess. 1:9; I John 5:20-21) and that all other “gods” are false and therefore mere idols that are not “gods” at all (Deut. 32:21; 1 Sam. 12:21; Psa. 96:5; Isa. 37:19; 41:23-24, 29; Jer. 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19-20). However, demons (fallen angels) may also pose as gods and illicit worship, possibly even through counterfeit signs, wonders, and miracles (Deut. 32:17; Psa. 106:37; I Cor. 10:20; Gal. 4:8).

God is not an idea or a proposition but instead a living and free person who is completely other, or holy. His attributes are not something merely attributed to Him, but qualities inseparable from His very Being. In every way that God exists, He exists without limit, that is, in perfection.

### **God Is:**

**Omnipresent** - God is everywhere at all times. (Psalm 139:7-12, see also Jer. 23:24, Prov. 15:3, Deut. 31:6, Col. 1:17).

**Omniscient** - God has complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including the past, present, future, and everything actual or potential (Psalm 147:5, see also Is. 40:12-14, 46:10; Ps. 139:1-6, Job 42:2, Heb. 4:13).

**Omnipotent** - God is all-powerful and able to do all that He wills (Job. 42:2, see also Ps. 147:5,

Mt. 19:26, Eph. 3:20).

**Immutable** - God does not change (Malachi 3:6, see also Num. 23:19, Ps. 102:27, Rom. 11:29, Heb. 13:8, James 1:17).

**Eternal** - God has no beginning or end and is not bound by time, though He is conscious of time and does work in time (Psalm 90:2, see also 93:2; 102:12; Eph. 3:21).

**Sovereign** - God is supreme in rule and authority over all things (Psalm 103:19, see also 2 Sam. 7:28, I Chron. 29:10-13), though He does allow human freedom (Gen. 50:21, 22).

**Righteous and Full of Justice** – Inherent with God being the exclusive creator of all was a right and perfect creation. All the laws of order, including human conduct were right. God does not conform to a standard of right and wrong, but right and wrong flow out of His character (Exodus 34:7, see also Gen. 18:25, Deut. 32:4, Acts 17:31, Romans 2:11).

**Spirit** - God is invisible and immaterial (John 4:19-24, see also John 1:18, 3:1-10, 14:16-17, 16:12-16, 2 Cor. 3:15-17, 1 Tim. 6:15-16). A Spirit is personal with a mind (Ps. 139:1-4), emotions (Eph. 4:30), and a will (John 6:40)

**Holy** - God is absolutely separate from any evil (I Peter 1:16, see also Ex. 3:5; Lev.19:2; Psa. 5:4-6, 99:5; Isa. 6:3, 8:13, 57:15; Hab. 1:12-13; 1 Jn. 1:5, I Pet. 1:14-19).

**Love/Goodness** - God alone is perfectly good and loving, and He alone is the source for all goodness and love (1 John 4:8-16, see also ex. 34:7, Ps. 84:11, Jn. 3:16, Eph. 2:4-7, Gal. 5:22).

**Truth** - God is the source of all truth. He is the embodiment of truth (Jn. 17:17, see also John 14:6, Titus 1:2, Num. 23:19, 2 Cor. 1:20).

**Mercy** - God does not give some people what they deserve because He is loving and gracious (Titus 3:5, see also Eph. 2:4-7, Ex. 34:6-7, Matt. 18:23-35, Rom. 12:8)

**Beauty** – God is beautiful and His creation reflects His beauty. God made men and women in His image and likeness to also create works of beauty (Psalm 27:4, see also Psalm 50:2, Isaiah 33:17, Ecc. 3:11).

**The Father is God** - Throughout the Scriptures, the Father is unequivocally called God (John 6:27, 17:3; I Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; I Pet. 1:3).

**Jesus is God** - Jesus Christ is clearly called God throughout the Scriptures (Matt. 28:9, John 1:1-4, 1:14, 5:17-18, 8:58, 10:30-33, 12:37-41 cf. Isaiah 6:9-11; 20:28-29, Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; Col. 1:16-17, 2:8-9, Php. 2:10-11, Heb. 1:8; 1 Co. 8:4-6, 1 Tim. 6:15, Titus 2:13; I John 5:20; Rev. 1:8, 1:17-18, 17:14, 19:16, 22:13-16).

**The Holy Spirit is God** - The Holy Spirit is clearly called God throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament He is all-powerful (Micah 3:8; see also Acts 1:8, Rom. 15:13, 19), eternal (Heb. 9:14) all knowing (Isaiah 40:13-14; see also 1 Cor. 2:10), creator (Gen 1:2; Ps. 104:30) and all present (Psalm 139:7). In the New Testament, He is also clearly declared God (Acts 5:3-4, see also John 14:16, 2 Co. 3:16-18).

The Holy Spirit is not merely an impersonal force, but a person who can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), resisted (Acts 7:51), and insulted (Heb. 10:29).

**The Trinity** - The word “Trinity” does not appear in Scripture, but the concept very clearly does. To say that God exists as a Trinity does not mean that there are three Gods, or that one God merely manifests Himself as either Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on various occasions.

To say that God exists as a Trinity is to say that there is one God with a unified essence who exists in three equal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By person it is meant that God

thinks, feels, acts and speaks. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) summarizes the doctrine by saying, “In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.”

- *Isaiah 48:16b; Matthew 3:16-17; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 14:17-18; Romans 15:16: 1 Corinthians 2:2-5; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 3:16-17; Ephesians 4:4-6; Colossians 1:6-8; 1 Thessalonians 1:3-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13*

### **The Trinity and Creation**

The Trinity is involved in the creation of the universe. God the Father devises the plan, God the “Word” orchestrates His plan, and God the Spirit brings it forth with the power of His might. That is why the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus Christ (John 1:3; John 1:10; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:2; Heb 1:10; Rev 3:14), as well the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:2; Psalms 33:6; 104:30; Isaiah 40:12-14) is the creator of all things

### **The Fall**

God created this world in a perfect state and upon the creation of the man and woman God declared His entire creation “very good” (Gen 1:31). This intended state of perfect beauty in all things is described in the Old Testament as “Shalom” (Isa. 2:2-4, 11:1-9, 32:14-20, 43:1-12, 60:1-22, 65:17-25; Joel 2:24-29, 3:17-18). Surveying the condition of our planet and human life (including death, suffering, injustice, boredom, annoyances, miseries, fears etc.) it is obvious that something has gone terribly wrong. All of the individual and corporate shortcomings of God’s perfect intentions for all of creation, whether intentional or unintentional or through omission or commission, qualify as sin.

The fall was the descent of the human race and the rest of God’s creation (Romans 8:18-27) into a state of rebellion against God. Despite his depravity, man continues to have dignity because He still remains an image bearer of God even though that image is marred by sin (Gen. 1:26, 9:6; Jam. 3:9).

God does not tempt us to sin, but instead the temptation arises from within our own hearts. Therefore, mere behavioral change is not sufficient to remedy the human condition, but instead we need a new heart and nature if there is to be any true victory over sin in our lives.

James 1:13-15; Proverbs 27:19; Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34b; Proverbs 20:9; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 6:45 .

### **What is salvation?**

Salvation is defined as deliverance by God from God and His wrath (Romans 5:9-10). God is holy and righteous and our sins against Him cause His wrath to burn against us, which can continue forever (Exodus 34:6-8; Deuteronomy 29:24-29, 32:21-22; Psalm 11:4-7; John 3:36; Romans 1:18-32, 5:5-8; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 1:21-22, 3:6; Revelation 14:9-11, 14:18-20, 19:11-15).

Salvation is made possible through Jesus Christ alone and there is no possibility of salvation apart from Him (John 1:29, 3:17-18, 4:42, 5:19-23; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:15; I John 2:2; Revelation 5:9). This is because Jesus our Priest laid down His life as the substitute sacrifice for the sins of His people (Isaiah 53:6-12; John 11:50, 15:13; Romans 5:17-19; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 5:21;

Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 10:10, 10:12; I Peter 3:18). Jesus' death and resurrection were a propitiation (appeasing God's wrath, cleansing us from sin, and granting us mercy from God) for His people (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:14; I John 2:2, 4:10).

### **What is Faith?**

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen" Hebrews 11:1 Hebrews 11:6 states that "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." The word faith is used 232 times in the Bible, and is the primary way that man enters into a relationship with God. God is not found through human reason (1 Corinthians 1:21). Subsequently, faith is the medium by which God is known. This is primarily because man's reason is flawed and incapable of knowing God in this way. So God, rich in mercy, and according to His grace, saved us through faith, a faith that He gave us (Acts 3:16, 14:27; Ephesians 2:8). It is not a matter of the quantity of faith, but the object of faith, which is always God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Proverbs 3:5, therefore, admonishes us to "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding*"

Faith takes us beyond our reason and empirical abilities and allows us to see the spiritual world that God has revealed. He gives us this faith in order for us to experience the world as He sees it and trust Him (Romans 10:9-10). Though this knowledge is not exhaustive (Deuteronomy 29:29; Isaiah 55:8-9; I Corinthians 13:12), it is adequate to know God intimately (John 17:3), and it gives us a fuller understanding of reality as it really is, and as it has been revealed by God.

### **What is Grace?**

Grace, or "Charis" in the Greek, means a gift from God (Acts 15:11; Romans 4:5, 11:5-6; Galatians 2-3, Galatians 5:1, 5:13; Ephesians 2:1-10; Philippians 1:6) and reminds us that we were saved by God's gift to us, and that our salvation had nothing to do with human works, religious or otherwise (John 1:13; Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:5-6). God's grace is His continuing gift to His people. It is a completely undeserved act of mercy that He bestows on His people.

We are not only saved by grace, but we are established and empowered by God's grace in our lives (Acts 4:33; 6:8; 13:43; Romans 3:24; 5:15; 12:16; 15:15; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9). In addition, we are given life and cleansing from sin by God's grace (Romans 6:1, 6:14-17; 2 Corinthians 6:1; Ephesians 1:7, 2:5-8). God's grace also comes to His people by means of spiritual gifts that are unique abilities that enable Christians to serve God fruitfully (Romans 12:6; I Peter 4:10). Therefore, Christians know that whatever good comes from their works is ultimately the fruit of God's grace working in and through them (I Corinthians 15:10).

### **Heaven**

Christianity sees Heaven as, cosmologically, one of two great divisions of the universe; the earth and the heavens (Gen 1:1; 14:19); (or one of three--heaven, earth, and the waters under the earth Exod 20:4). In the visible heavens are the stars and planets (Gen 1:14-17; Ezek 32:7-8). The term "heaven of heavens" or "highest heavens" (Deut 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps 148:4).

It is also considered the abode of God (Gen 28:17; Ps 80:14; Isa 66:1; Matt 5:12; 2 Cor 12:2) and of the good angels (Matt 24:36). It is the place where the redeemed will someday be (5:12; 6:20;

Eph 3:15), where the Redeemer has gone and intercedes for the saints, and from where he will someday come for his own (1 Thess 4:16).

One of the Bible's main themes is the lordship of God in creation and redemption. The Almighty God is the Lord of heaven and earth. God's lordship is seen in his sovereign rule over all things. Adam and Eve were created to rule for God by establishing his kingdom on earth for God's glory and humanity's good. Where the first Adam disobeyed and failed to establish God's kingdom, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, succeeded. One day we will also be inhabitants of heaven, God's home (essentially His house). (Luke 15:18; Rev 18:20).

## **Hell**

The real existence of hell is irrefutably taught in Scripture as both a *place* of the wicked dead and a *condition* of retribution for the unredeemed (e.g., Ezek 3:18; Dan 12:2). Sheol, which is in one sense the undifferentiated place of all the dead (cf. Job 3:13-22), is in another sense the special doom of the wicked (Ps 49:14).

The *nature* of hell is indicated by the repeated reference to eternal punishment (Matt 25:46), eternal fire (18:8, Jude 7), everlasting chains (Jude 6), the pit of the Abyss (Rev 9:2, 11), outer darkness (Matt 8:12), the wrath of God (Rom 2:5), second death (Rev 21:8), eternal destruction from the face of God (2 Thess 1:9), and eternal sin (Mark 3:29).

The *duration* is explicitly indicated by the word "eternal." This Greek word (*aiōnios*) is derived from the verb *aion*, signifying an "age" or "duration." Scripture speaks of two *aeons*, or ages: the present age and the age to come (Matt 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Eph 1:21). The present age—this world—is always contrasted with the age to come as temporal, while the future age will be endless. As the everlasting life of the believer is to be endless, just so the retributive aspect of hell refers to the future infinite age. In every reference in which *aiōnios* applies to the future punishment of the wicked, it indisputably denotes endless duration (Matt 18:8; 25:41, 46; Mark 3:29; 2 Thess 1:9; Heb 6:2; Jude 7).

Three basic ideas are associated with the concept of hell: absence of righteousness (Mark 3:29), separation from God (John 3:36), and judgment (Matt 8:12; 25:31-46).

## **For Further Reading**

**God In Three Persons** by Millard J. Erickson

**Why Should You Believe In the Trinity**, An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses by Robert Bowman

**The Hunger For Significance** by R.C. Sproul

**Chosen By God** by R.C. Sproul

**The Origin of the Bible**, edited by Philip Comfort, is a good introduction to the authority and perfection of Scripture from a team of good theologians.

