

LIVING IN THE BULL'S-EYE

DEFINING WHAT ONE MUST BELIEVE TO GO TO HEAVEN

INTRODUCTION

There is a story in the Bible that has always captivated me. It is found in Luke 23:42. Jesus, along with two other men, is being executed. Shortly before one of the men dies, he looks to Jesus and says, "*Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*" (NIV).¹ Jesus responds, "*Today you will be with Me in paradise.*"

One reason this story is important to me is because I want to know that my family and I will go to heaven when we die. This story tells me that heaven is a real place for real people. But according to Jesus in Luke 16:23, hell is also a real place for real people. Jesus warns people of hell numerous times throughout the New Testament. If Jesus really did know what He was talking about and hell is real – and I know that this is a stretch for some people—then it would be the height of hate for Jesus' followers not to tell others about Him.

I worked for six years as a hospice chaplain. During that time, I visited hundreds of people who are all now dead. I wanted them to have the same kind of experience with Jesus that the man crucified beside Jesus had before he died.

Many of the hospice patients were too weak to speak more than a few words, so I would voice a prayer for them. I told them if they believed my prayer and wanted those words to be their prayer to God, then all they needed to do was say, "Amen." I told them if they did that, then God would hear them and save them.

The prayer went something like this: "Dear God, I know I have done wrong. I know I have done my part to make this world the kind of place where Jesus had to die. Jesus, you may already live in my heart. I just want to make sure because I want to go to heaven when I die. If you haven't already saved me, then please do so now. I am asking this not on account of anything good that I have done, but because of the good that you have done by dying on the cross and overcoming my sin and death through your resurrection. Thank you, God. Amen."

Some of my hospice patients said "Amen" before they died. However, many people refuse to pray such a prayer because they reject Christianity. Some reject Jesus because they say there are too many hypocrites in the church. However, I know one day I will have to stand alone before God, and it will not matter if I point to others and call them hypocrites. On that day, it will not be about anyone else; it will be about me and all of the terrible wrongs that I have done. All I will know to do is to depend upon Christ's death to save me, because pointing at others does not let me off the hook for my sins. What is more, no matter how many hypocrites there are, Jesus was no hypocrite--and it is before Him that we all will one day stand.

Some people reject Christianity because they believe one's presence in either heaven or hell is ultimately determined only by how well one has lived his or her life on this earth. In other words, it is as though a person's eternal destination is determined by a long balance sheet of all one's good deeds on one side and all one's bad deeds on the other. But what if this reasoning is wrong? The Bible says, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*" (Prov. 14:12, NIV). One problem with the balance sheet way of thinking is no matter how good I try to be, I cannot erase the bad that I know deep down inside has really hurt other people. What is more, the Bible teaches that it is only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that our bad and hurtful actions can be dealt with effectively (2 Cor. 5:21).

Regarding art, science, philosophy, mathematics, music, and literature, one cannot help but recognize Anselm, Descartes, Pascal, Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, Pasteur, Dante, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Tolkien, Michelangelo, Elliot, Dickens, and Bach. These brilliant people were wise enough not to allow any objection to Christianity prevent them from becoming a Christian.² Perhaps each prayed a prayer similar to the one I shared with hospice patients.

That prayer that I shared with the dying is at the heart of the issues listed in the red bull's-eye found on the main page of this site. Seeing so much death across so many denominational and religious lines made me wonder what was crucial to believe and what was not as important. The purpose of this study is to define and explain the most important beliefs that Christians, regardless of denomination or culture, have held in common over the centuries. While explaining these beliefs, I also hope to answer the following question: When it comes down to heaven and hell, which beliefs are primary and non-negotiable and which are secondary and not as important?

I wrote this material for the Christian and for the non-Christian who has already spent a considerable amount of time pondering the differences between religions and the implications of those differences. It is my hope that anyone who reads this study will take the time to work through it and consider the eternal significance of each of the issues I raise. While this material is not intended to be an in-depth study on philosophy, theology, or world religions, I have tried to reflect sufficient research in each of these disciplines so that we can seriously grapple with the important issues.

I chose the image of a bull's-eye because I thought it would be a good way to remember what is important and what is not as important when comparing religions and denominations. However, there are problems with such a metaphor. My experience with archery and darts has been extremely limited. When I have played darts with friends, seldom would anyone get a bull's-eye. It was not uncommon for some of us to miss the dartboard completely and hit the wall behind the board. We would then casually add up the points associated with the darts that landed on the board to determine the winner. This is where my metaphor breaks down.

I am arguing in this work that each of the issues listed in the red bull's-eye are non-negotiable and are essential in order to live with God for all eternity. It is not a matter of adding up "points" in the yellow and blue circles and hoping the score makes up for being wrong on issues in the red bull's-eye. If one is wrong on any issue listed in the red bull's-eye, or if one intentionally leaves off or chooses to ignore any of the issues listed in the bull's-eye, then I do fear that he or she will not be able to live with God

forever. The phrase "Living in the Bull's-eye," is simply a way to remember which issues are non-negotiable necessities of the Christian faith.

C.S. Lewis, perhaps recently best known in the United States as the author of the children's books *The Chronicles of Narnia*, was an Anglican layperson. Lewis wrote a book entitled *Mere Christianity*, in which he also sought to explain the essentials of Christianity. He writes,

Everyone has warned me not to tell you what I am going to tell you in this last book. They all say, "The ordinary reader does not want Theology; give him plain practical religion." I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means "the science of God," and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?³

Let us begin "the science of God" by studying the teachings listed in the red bull's-eye found on the main page.

BULL'S-EYE NECESSITIES

Inspiration of Scripture

Inspiration of Scripture is in the bull's-eye mainly because if one does not believe the Bible is inspired and true, then how can one really trust what Jesus says in the Bible and be saved? At the same time, having a perfect definition of the inspiration of the Bible is not a requirement for being a Christian.⁴ Entrance to heaven is not going to be based on a theology test score.

Every person, no matter where he or she lives, can see the handiwork of God. When that person holds a newborn baby or sees a beautiful sunset or mountain range, he or she witnesses the handiwork of God and sees traces of who God is. However, it is only through the Bible that we have the fullest revelation of God. It is as though the Bible were a set of spectacles—like "divine eyeglasses for the spiritually nearsighted"—through which we can see God more clearly.⁵

The Bible gives us the clear perspective that we matter to God. According to the Bible, we matter to God as individuals and as a group. This can give a sense of purpose and meaning to life.

In contrast, Eastern religions do not offer this sense of purpose and meaning. "The concept of nirvana as the highest ideal suggests that the individual is utterly meaningless and without purpose. The concept of karma argues for a blind, inevitable fatalism."⁶ For Buddhism and other Eastern religions, it is as though each person loses his or her personality and individuality, like a drop of rain that falls in the ocean.⁷ However, the Bible teaches that through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, we can have a meaningful relationship with God and with each other throughout all eternity. In Christ, we do not have to worry about an almost endless cycle of reincarnations that will ultimately allow only an unconscious oblivion.⁸

The Virgin Birth and the Death and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus

Masao Uenuma, a professor at Japan Bible Seminary, says that in Buddhism there is frequently a strong sense of guilt springing from one's wrong actions toward others, but there is no way of alleviating this guilt. Whereas in Christianity, Jesus died on the cross for all of the things we have done wrong and provided us with a way for our guilt to be eliminated (II Cor. 5:21).⁹ I used the color red for the bull's-eye in order to symbolize the blood that Jesus shed as he died on the cross.

Christians believe not only that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins, but that he also was virgin born. Islam and Judaism are partly right, for Islam teaches of Jesus' virgin birth and Judaism teaches of Jesus' death on the cross. However, Muslims and Jews are also partly wrong. For example, Muslims do not believe Jesus died on the cross, and Jews do not believe Jesus was virgin born.

According to the Koran (Quran) 4:157-158, Islam denies Jesus ever died on the cross. Muslims say somebody else died in Jesus' place. They say a true prophet is not worthy of death on the cross. Muslims say Jesus was raptured before the crucifixion. Muslims also argue that one day at the Dome of the Rock, Jesus will defeat Satan and break all of the Christian crosses. They argue that Jesus will then marry and have children and die in Medina. At this point, they say he will be buried in a tomb reserved for him next to Muhammad.¹⁰

In addition to the major world religions of Judaism and Islam, there are also numerous smaller groups that reject Jesus' virgin birth and His death and resurrection. For example, the Unification Church ("Moonies") denies Jesus' virgin birth, and the Baha'i Faith denies Jesus' resurrection.¹¹ However, Jesus' death and bodily resurrection are crucial to the Christian faith. Without these two historical events, both of which point to the incarnation of Jesus, there is no salvation (I Cor. 15:13-14).

This truth was recognized by Ignatius (A.D. 107) and other early Christians. Ignatius, who was a Bishop of Antioch and a martyr for the Christian faith, argued that a real resurrection of Jesus requires a real death of Jesus; otherwise there would be no salvation.¹²

It is often said that all religions are the same and that it does not matter what one believes as long as one is sincere in his or her beliefs. However, as we have already seen when it comes to the virgin birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, all religions are far from being the same. As we continue in our science of God, we will see other major differences between religions.

To clarify, I am not advocating any form of coercion or domination of one religious group over another. I am writing in the spirit of religious liberty and tolerance. We should all have the freedom to research any religion and choose what we, as individuals, believe. When we die, God will be the judge.

There Is Only One God

The belief that there is only one God is called "monotheism." For two millennia, Christians have held to this belief. The religions of Islam, Judaism, and Jehovah's Witnesses also teach that there is only one God. In this, they are right.

Mormons, also known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, believe in more than one god.¹³ Hinduism also teaches more than one god.¹⁴ I wonder if some who attend the Mormon Church even realize the organization teaches there is more than

one god? Many people who are attracted to the Mormon values of family and who want their own families to be moral, healthy, and happy may not even realize that the Mormon Church teaches, "As man is, god once was; and as god is, man can become." In other words, they teach men can become gods. This is in direct contradiction to the Bible's specific teaching that there is only one God and that all humans should worship only the one God.

A valuable resource on this topic is a video entitled *The Mormon Puzzle*.¹⁵ The video does not feature an evangelical Christian telling you what Mormons believe but rather official Mormon teachers and leaders telling you what they believe.

The idea that there is more than one god has been around for thousands of years. For example, in A.D. 144, a man by the name of Marcion was excommunicated from the Church. Marcion taught there were two gods, the god of the Old Testament and the god of the New Testament. He taught the god of the New Testament, Jesus, was trying to rescue humanity from the cruel god of the Old Testament, the creator. It was probably tempting for the leaders in the early church just to let Marcion's teachings go because as Presbyterian scholar Frank Thielman notes, "Marcion was content to work within the established church structures and, according to one tradition about him, even offered the church at Rome a considerable sum of money."¹⁶

Marcion also denied the virgin birth of Jesus. According to Marcion, Jesus "simply appeared as a grown man during the reign of Tiberius."¹⁷ Marcion also started his own church and developed his own bible. He cut out the entire Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament), keeping only the Gospel of Luke and the Epistles of Paul. Even then, he removed any Jewish influence from the Gospel of Luke and from Paul's letters to the early church.¹⁸ Nearly 1,800 years later, the Nazis would treasure Marcion's work by using it for their own anti-Semitic religion. One of many valuable things we can learn from the sins of Marcion is to be suspicious of any religious group that takes away from the Bible or adds its own religious books to the Bible and declares these additions to be the source of authority.

In the second and third centuries, it was difficult to distinguish a Marcionite church from an orthodox Christian church. Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, even warned Christians of that time not to worship in Marcionite churches by mistake.¹⁹ This is not unlike the difficulty people face today in distinguishing the authentic Christian church from the Mormon Church. Many in the Marcionite churches expressed intense devotion to Jesus and were even martyred for their faith; yet because they trusted in more than one god, they were found outside the bull's-eye. Again, this is not unlike the well-meaning, devout, Mormon missionaries of today.

Before we move to the next bull's-eye issue, I need to make a clarification. Most of the essential beliefs in the bull's-eye deal with believing the right things about who God really is. While this is the case, I do not want to suggest a person can believe a list of certain things about God and then live life any way he or she pleases. The Bible says even demons believe God is one (James 2:19), but that certainly doesn't mean demons are saved. For example, one cannot believe right things about God and also be sleeping around and getting drunk and think everything will be all right when death comes. Authentic Christianity is not a license for a person to do whatever he or she wants. This issue will be more fully explained in the "Living a Godly Life" section of this work, but for now it must be stated that right behaviors must flow from right beliefs.

In authentic Christianity, the Holy Spirit (which we also will study later) gives the Christian the ability and power to live a godly life. A godly life is one in which the Christian uses the gifts that God has given—whether it is food, drink, sex, recreation, money, time, or family—to enjoy God. For the Christian, people and things are enjoyed in the way God intended them to be enjoyed, which brings so much more peace and joy to life!

I know this study will seem long and tedious at times, and readers may lose interest at some spots. But I ask you to be open-minded enough to read the entire study, for this is the only way to see how the issues fit together. The science of God is like completing a puzzle; if you stop before putting all the pieces together, you cannot see the final picture and give it a fair assessment. Let us now move to the next piece of the puzzle and study who Jesus Christ really is.

Jesus Is Fully Human and Fully God

The Bible teaches that God came to this earth through the incarnation of Jesus Christ to demonstrate his love for all humanity (Rom. 5:6-11). This incarnation means that Jesus was both completely human and completely God. Another way of conveying the same truth is to say that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Buddhism and other Eastern religions, however, tend to portray an impersonal, remote, and disinterested divine essence.²⁰

In respect to the incarnation of Jesus, there is also a huge difference between Christianity and Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Christians believe in the incarnation, but Jews, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses do not.²¹ These religious groups believe Jesus was only a good man and prophet, not also God. Christians worship Jesus as God, but Jews and Muslims consider this blasphemy.

Around the side of the beautiful Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, written in Arabic, are the words *God has no son*. Facing, as it does, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, no other expression could illustrate so pointedly the one fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam.²²

The Bible says in John 3:16 that God does have a Son. So God either has a Son or He does not; both teachings cannot be true.

“*The Lord is one*” is taught in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4, NIV). “*Jesus is Lord*” is taught in the New Testament (Rom. 10:9, NIV). Putting these two Biblical affirmations together helps you begin to understand the concept of what Christians throughout the centuries have referred to as the *incarnation*.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, the eternal Son who has never had a beginning (John 1:1-2) became flesh and dwelt among humans (John 1:14). This eternal Son was named Jesus (John 1:17-18, 29-30, 34, 36), was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18, 23-25), and is the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16). Jesus was mysteriously completely human and completely God. Christians simply accept these facts by faith, for “*without faith, it is impossible to please God*” (Heb. 11:6, NIV).

The story of Jesus as recorded in the Bible is quite different than, say, the story of the Hindu god Krishna.

The *Bhagavad Gita* relates the story of the god Krishna, who took human form as a chariot driver for a warrior. But in Hinduism though the gods have many avatars or manifestations, they do not partake of humanity, experiencing neither birth nor death.²³

In contrast, because Jesus was completely human, he experienced all that we experience as humans. He experienced both birth and death.

The Apostle Luke accentuates Jesus' humanity by describing Jesus as a boy: "*And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*" (Luke 2:52, NASB). Jesus was continuing to grow in wisdom. He was not born with all the wisdom he would eventually attain on this earth; he was not solving challenging calculus problems as a baby lying in the manger.

Because Jesus was human, he can empathize with us in our pain, sorrow, suffering, and weakness (Heb. 2:17; 4:15; 5:8). He knows what it is like to need the support and friendship of other people (Matt. 26:37-45). The Bible says that he experienced weariness (John 4:6) and that he even wept (Luke 19:41; John 11:35), just like we have. When I have the flu or aches and chills associated with a fever, I remember that Jesus knows what I feel like because he probably had the flu also. Somehow this brings me a measure of comfort. And just like us, Jesus also knows the coldness of death.

At the same time, Jesus could not have saved anyone from eternal death if he were not also God. Matthew 1:23 reads, "*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him 'Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us'*" (NIV). Because Jesus was God, he is able to save people from eternal death just like an adult with one foot on the riverbank can save a child from drowning.²⁴

The Doobie Brothers, a rock band that gained popularity in the 1970s, sang a song titled "Jesus Is Just Alright." It is not enough just to acknowledge that Jesus was "alright". It is not enough just to acknowledge that Jesus was a good man or a good teacher and stop there. In John 8:24 Jesus said, "I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you shall die in your sins" (NASB).²⁵

Jesus did not speak in English. I wish that he had because it would make our interpretation of his words a lot easier, but he did not. So to best interpret his words, we must study the Bible in the languages in which it was originally written. The New Testament was originally written in Greek. The following is a literal, word for word translation from Greek to English of this same verse of John 8:24: "*I said therefore to you that you will die in the sins of you for if you do not believe that I am you will die in the sins of you.*"²⁶

The New American Standard translation of John 8:24 that I quoted earlier definitely flows better in English. However, the literal, word for word translation better captures the theological meaning of the verse. Did you notice that in the first translation, the italicized word "*He*" is present, but in the other more literal translation, it is not present?²⁷ This is because the word "*He*" is not in the original Greek; it is only included in English translations to make the language read more like our modern English.

According to the original language in which the New Testament was written, Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I AM" not "I am He." Why is this significant? What does it matter whether Jesus said, "I AM," or "I am He"?

The wording is significant because when Jesus said, "I AM," he intentionally claimed to be God, using the exact same identity or name that God claimed for himself in

the Old Testament. When Moses asked God, “Whom shall I say has sent me?” God responded, “*Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, I AM has sent me to you*” (Exodus 3:14, NASB).

So when Jesus called himself “I AM” in John 8:24, he was claiming to be the same God of the Old Testament. Jesus’ original audience understood this claim, which is precisely why many wanted to kill. This is why John 10:33 reads, “*For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God*” (NASB).

Jesus then takes his claim one step further. He says unless you believe “I AM,” then you will die in your sins. In other words, unless you believe that Jesus is God, you will die in your sins. I am honestly afraid for adherents of Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah’s Witnesses because they all deny that Jesus was anything more than “just all right,” and because of this, according to Jesus, they will die in their sins.

I had a family member who belonged to a Jehovah’s Witnesses congregation, and as far as I know, he died believing that Jesus was nothing more than a mere man. This troubles me because, following the evidence of what Jesus said in John 8:24, my relative died in his sins. He died believing outside of the bull’s-eye.

Many Christian teachers have said that once Jesus claimed to be God (as he did in John 8:24 and numerous other Bible verses²⁸), then he had to be either Lord, lunatic, or liar. We cannot say he was just a good human being, or only a good prophet or teacher. Jesus did not leave that option open to us. Once he claimed to be God, then he either was who he claimed to be (the Lord), who he believed himself to be but actually was not (therefore a lunatic), or a deceiver (a liar) who deliberately misled us. Jesus forces us into a corner to decide who he really is.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.²⁹

The fact that most cults deny Jesus is Lord should, in and of itself, serve as a warning. These groups include Baha’i, Christian Science, the Unification Church, and Scientology.³⁰ American culture has, in many ways, popularized the belief that Jesus was “just all right”. For example, actors Tom Cruise, John Travolta, and Kirstie Allie are Scientologists. They, like the Doobie Brothers, lend their influence to the idea that Jesus was just a good man.³¹

Another example is the movie *The Da Vinci Code*. In the movie, Jesus is portrayed as just a good man or good teacher like the Muslims, Jews, and numerous smaller religious groups believe he was.³² *The Da Vinci Code* suggests the divinity of Jesus Christ hinged on a few votes at the Council of Nicaea. However, “the Council of

Nicaea did not suddenly invent Jesus' divinity, but formalized a teaching that had been blossoming for 300 years."³³

A seminary professor of mine gave a great summary of the church councils. He said the intention of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) was to say that Jesus was God. At the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381), Christian leaders affirmed Jesus was man. At the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), it was affirmed that Jesus was one person. And at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), Christians said even though Jesus was one person, he had two natures: human and divine. In each of these councils, ancient Christian leaders gathered together and acknowledged what God had already revealed through the Bible concerning the incarnation of his only Son, Jesus Christ.

It is worth noting that the Nicene Creed flowed out of the work done at the Council of Nicaea. Here is a portion of the Nicene Creed in modern wording:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us and for our salvation He came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate; He suffered death and was buried. On the third day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son He is worshiped and glorified. . . .

For over 1,600 years, countless Christians have agreed on the teachings about God presented in this creed. These Christians are found in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Protestant Church. As you have read, the creed contains affirmation of the incarnation as well as affirmation of the Trinity. And it is to the doctrine of the Trinity we will now turn.

The Trinity

Not only do many cults deny Jesus as Lord, they also deny the Trinity. Baha'i, Christian Science, the Unification Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientology all reject the Trinity as do Islam and Judaism.³⁴ However, the Trinity is the genetic code or the blueprint of the entire Christian faith.³⁵ The Trinity is extremely relevant to us because the Trinity is God himself, and nothing is more relevant to us than that truth.

Christian denominations that teach the Trinity include Assemblies of God, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Anglican, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Baptist, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox. Non-denominational Christian congregations also fit in this category. As we hold on to the Trinity, we can have the unity that Christ commanded Christians to have in John 17:20-23. On the topic of different denominations, Roman Catholic scholar Avery Dulles writes, "Belief in the Trinity shows the way to deepening the communion we already have. The more closely each of us is conjoined to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the closer shall we be to one another."³⁶

In our earlier exploration of the incarnation, we established Jesus Christ as the Son, who is one person of the holy Trinity. However, we must also think about the Father and the Holy Spirit as well.

The Bible presents us with the one true God who reveals himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians have historically described this one God as the Trinity, and although the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible the concept is purely Biblical.

Galatians 4:6 reads, “*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’*” (NIV). The book of Galatians was one of the earliest portions of the New Testament to be written. It dates to A.D. 49, which is approximately only 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus.³⁷ The book’s author, the Apostle Paul, recognized the Trinitarian significance of the one, true God way before there were any church councils, creeds, or denominations.

Matthew 28:19 reads, “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (NIV). At baptism, which is usually at the beginning of the Christian journey, one is baptized in the name of the Trinity. It is the triune God who initiates this experience of baptism, an experience that most Christians have had in common throughout the centuries.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all essential persons of the one true God. We could not understand the Father if it were not for his relationship to the Son, and vice versa. Anglican scholar Gerald Bray writes:

Father and Son imply each other’s existence: the names would otherwise be meaningless. You cannot have one without the other. If there were no Son, the first Person of the Trinity would not be the Father; He would have to have some other name that does not imply a parenting relationship.³⁸

The Father seems to be that part of God who is anchored, in many ways, beyond our sight and experience. We experience the Father, but it does not seem that we experience him as fully as we experience the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father is the Holy Other (Is. 6:3). This does not mean the Father is somehow more divine or superior to the Son and the Holy Spirit. It simply means the Father represents the part of God who is more hidden from us than the Son who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14) and the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts as Christians (Gal. 4:6).³⁹ All three persons of the Trinity are equal to one another in every way, including their divinity (Godness), power, and status.⁴⁰

Some Christians question whether believers outside their particular denomination have received the Holy Spirit. John 14:15-20 indicates if we have met one person of the Trinity, then we have met them all. If we have met the Son as our Lord and Savior, then we have automatically received the Holy Spirit as well. This is true even if we did not realize it at the time that we received the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not just an impersonal force like the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim.⁴¹ The Holy Spirit is not impersonal like the electricity we purchase from a power company. The Holy Spirit is the presence of the living Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is not an “it.”⁴² For example, a new mom usually does not like people referring to her newborn baby as “it.” Her baby is a person, a *him* or *her*. How much more is the living God not an *it!* The Holy Spirit is a *He* because the Holy Spirit is a *person*.

A major action of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Father and the Son.⁴³ Each of us was created in the very image of the Holy Spirit to perform this same action all the days of our lives. At the same time, as Eastern Orthodox scholar Stanley Harakas says, “God has no need of anything outside his own existence, including praise and worship from us.”⁴⁴ And yet God created each of us with the need to worship him, and we are most human when we worship God.

Just as there have been heretical teachings (such as Marcion’s) that there are two gods, there have also been heretical teachings concerning the Trinity. Unitarianism is one such heresy. Unitarian churches reject both the Trinity and the incarnation of Jesus. Christians should avoid Unitarian churches today just as early Christians over 1,800 years ago were warned to avoid Marcionite churches.

Jehovah’s Witnesses say the Trinity is too difficult to understand; therefore, they say, the Trinity cannot be true.⁴⁵ However, this reasoning is flawed. God has never had a beginning, nor will God ever have an ending. This concept is also too difficult for any human to fathom, yet that does not mean God’s eternal presence is false.

Southern Baptist scholar Millard Erickson writes,

It [the doctrine of the Trinity] is so absurd from a human standpoint that no one would have invented it. We do not hold the doctrine of the Trinity because it is self-evident or logically cogent. We hold it because God has revealed that this is what He is like. As someone has said of this doctrine: “Try to explain it, and you’ll lose your mind; But try to deny it, and you’ll lose your soul.”⁴⁶

Furthermore, not only did Athanasius (A.D. 328), Bishop of Alexandria, adamantly defend the doctrine of the Trinity when it was under attack, but he also passionately argued that Jesus was fully God and fully human because he believed this was an issue of salvation.⁴⁷

In discussing the Trinity, there is a temptation to think that there are three gods or that there is no distinction of persons within the one God. Both are errors that are inconsistent with Scripture. And in the history of the Church, both errors have always led to heresy.

When I was a young pastor, I shared a children’s sermon. I was excited because I thought I was really going to be able to help the children, and the adults for that matter, understand the Trinity. I said that the Trinity was like an egg. It consists of yolk, white, and shell, all of which together form one whole egg. I said that even though it is one egg, it has three parts. Then I said that is the way the Trinity is—one God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

What I did not realize at the time was that I had just taught a heresy.⁴⁸ When I used the egg analogy, I described three gods instead of one God who reveals himself as three persons. Was I no longer a Christian because, after all, I had taught outside the bull’s-eye? Of course not—but when I learned of my error I needed to turn and get back on track.

Another favorite analogy for the Trinity is water: It can have solid, liquid, and vaporous forms. But the problem with this analogy it is that it can lead to the heresy of *modalism*, which means not allowing for any distinction of persons within the one God. This error is the opposite of describing the Trinity as three gods.

There is no simple analogy to explain the Trinity, and neither is there one to explain the fact that God has no beginning or ending. Should all of this talk about the Trinity make you afraid even to think about God? Should we be terrified that we might end up in hell because we are a little off in our understanding of God? Of course not, for the Bible says that there is no fear in love and that perfect love casts out all fear (I John 4:18). It is good from time to time to pray, “I don’t know all about you, God. I trust what you have shown me about yourself in the Bible, but I can’t explain you fully. I just relax and revel in you who love me the way I am and have already demonstrated this by dying for me on Calvary’s cross.”

Our experience with God always comes before a theological understanding of God. If you are a Christian, then you were drawn by the Holy Spirit through the Son to God the Father before you even reflected upon the Trinity.⁴⁹ You were praying to the Father and relying upon the Holy Spirit without even realizing it, and you were probably even praying in the name of Jesus way before you knew much about the Trinity.

It has been helpful for me to learn that the Bible does not answer many of my *how* questions. For instance, how did God create the heavens and the earth? The Bible does not answer this question but just describes *what* God did: God created the heavens and the earth, and God created humans in his very own image. *How* can God be one God who reveals himself in three persons? This is the wrong question to ask.⁵⁰ It’s better to ask *what* did God do? According to the Bible, God revealed himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *How* could Jesus be both God and human? Again, there is no answer, but the Bible does say *why* God did this:

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, NIV).

Let’s review the essentials of salvation we have studied so far. While you aren’t required to have an absolute perfect definition of the Bible’s inspiration from God, you must believe the Bible is true. Otherwise, you cannot trust the words of Jesus from the Bible and be saved. If you deny the virgin birth of Jesus as described in the Bible, then Jesus is no different from any other human being. If you believe that Jesus is no different from anyone else, you are on the path to reject Jesus as Lord. When you reject Jesus as Lord, then you disregard Jesus’ words that warn the one who rejects him as Lord of dying in his or her sins (John 8:24). If you reject the death and resurrection of Jesus, then the Bible says that the entire Christian faith is in vain (I Cor. 15:14). Each of these essentials is mysteriously based on the God of the incarnation and the Trinity.

Please notice how each of these bull’s-eye necessities builds on another—if one of them is removed, it removes the foundation of another. These are not just arbitrary issues that *I* think are important. These are doctrines for which countless Christians over the centuries have lived and died.

Saved by Grace/Gift Alone through Faith Alone

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4:4-5, NIV).

Do you work at your place of employment for free? Of course not. You work and expect a paycheck in exchange. The paycheck is not a gift to you; the company is obligated by law to give it to you in exchange for your work.

Here's another example: It is Christmastime, and you have worked many hours to earn the money needed to buy a great present for your child. On Christmas morning, you do not give your child the present along with a sales receipt indicating how much money your son or daughter owes you. The gift is freely given and freely received, if it is truly a gift at all. God's gift of salvation is like that Christmas gift. Although it was very costly to God, purchased with the life of his only Son, the gift of salvation is as free to you and me as your Christmas gift is to your child.

Trying to earn our salvation by "paying" God with our good works is not pleasing to Him. As a matter of fact, when we try to do this, the beauty of the gift begins to disappear, and we may even inadvertently move outside of the bull's-eye. That was the apostle Paul's warning to the Church in Galatians 1:6-9.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (NIV).

The opponents to the authentic gospel in Galatia were called "Judaizers". They were trying to add to God's gift of salvation, saying that circumcision and keeping a kosher diet also were required. Paul warned the Christians in Galatia not to move outside of the bull's-eye by believing what the Judaizers were teaching. In fact, his warning in Galatians 1:6-9 seems every bit as harsh as if they had been worshipping other gods or no longer believed in the resurrection.

I have been told by members of the Church of Christ denomination that if someone accepts Jesus as Lord, drives home for a change of clothes in order to be baptized, and then is killed in a car wreck before they are baptized, then that person will spend eternity in hell because having faith in Christ was not enough. According to this denomination, baptism is an absolute necessity for salvation, no matter what.

Members of the United Pentecostal Church denomination hold the same views but take them a step further. They believe that not only must you be baptized, but you also must speak in tongues at least once in your life. If you do not, according to this denomination's teachings, you will spend eternity in hell. They say faith in Christ alone is not enough to get you to heaven.

Both groups concern me because they seem to be doing the same thing the Judaizers were doing. They are adding other requirements to faith in order to be saved. I have friends who are members of the United Pentecostal and Church of Christ denominations. I honestly hope I am wrong and that I perhaps have misunderstood something. When it comes to understanding God's gift of salvation, I guess my biggest prayer—both for myself and for others—is the same as Jesus' prayer from the cross: "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*" (Luke 23:34, NIV).

I began this section entitled, “Saved by Grace/Gift Alone through Faith Alone” with the following verses:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4:4-5, NIV).

Notice that in these verses Paul not only uses the word “gift,” but also the word “justifies”. Just as one facet of a diamond complements another, so does the concept of *gift* complement the concept of *justification*.

Roman Catholic scholar Richard John Neuhaus, along with numerous other well-known Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants, drafted a statement on salvation. This was a powerful effort toward the unity that Christ commanded His followers to embrace in John 17:20-23. A portion of the drafted statement dealt with the concepts of gift and justification.

We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that He bears us in His Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. . . In justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer His rebellious enemies but His forgiven friends.⁵¹

Living a Godly Life

During the third century, Novatian, a presbyter of Rome, said that those who denounced their faith when persecuted could not be readmitted to Christian fellowship.⁵² Novatian did not add eating a kosher diet or speaking in tongues as necessary for salvation. Instead, he added not denying Christ in the face of death. According to Novatian, in this case, Christ’s death alone was no longer enough for salvation! However, whenever you add anything to faith in Christ for salvation, you are in essence saying that Christ “died needlessly” (Gal. 2:21).

I wonder how Novatian and his followers would have responded if they had been tortured or had watched their families be tortured. The apostle Peter was certain that he would never deny Christ, yet he did so three times (Matt. 26:34). While there is no doubt that Christians over the centuries who have remained faithful to Christ in the midst of persecution deserve a tremendous amount of respect, it is dangerous to say that those who have failed under persecution will never have a home in Christian fellowship.

Pelagius of the late fourth century over-emphasized the importance of perfect behavior for the Christian. “The Pelagians held right belief about Jesus, but they did not hold to faith in Jesus as the criterion for salvation. Instead, they stressed moral obedience as the basis for salvation.”⁵³ If it is dangerous to say that one must eat a kosher diet, or be circumcised, or be baptized, or speak in tongues, or never deny Christ in order to be saved or remain saved, then it is certainly dangerous to add complete moral perfection to the list.

If moral obedience were the basis for salvation, then no one except Jesus could be saved (Gal. 2:16). At the same time, moral obedience, baptism, and not denying Christ are still important for the Christian. This might seem like a paradox. Whether we are talking about God’s never having a beginning or an ending, or about the incarnation, or

the Trinity, there is great mystery. In a similar way, there is mystery when we try to understand how Christians are saved and kept saved solely on the basis of Jesus Christ, and yet authentic Christians still must live a godly, albeit imperfect, life.

Church historians explain that historical Christian orthodoxy involves not only right beliefs but also right behaviors. For example, if Hitler or Stalin had claimed to believe the tenets of the bull's-eye and yet still chose to annihilate great numbers of people, I do not believe they would spend eternity with God. If you truly believe the elements in the bull's-eye, then you are not going to be a mass-murderer. Jesus said that a tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 7:13-23).

If you truly trust in Jesus for salvation, you will be obedient to him in what you say and do. The person who is obedient to Jesus' commands is the one who truly trusts Him.⁵⁴ The preceding bull's-eye element of "Salvation by Grace/Gift Alone through Faith Alone" does not negate or contradict "Living a Godly Life" (see Matt. 25:31-46). As a matter of fact, grace causes good works and right behaviors to increase.

Faith and works are both important in the Christian life, and Ephesians 2:8-10 succinctly describes what the relationship between faith and works should look like.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (NIV).

Imagine a building is on fire and there are firemen below holding a net. It would take a leap of faith to jump out of the window of the burning building, but this jump would not be what would save you. The firemen's net is what would save you. In the same way, our faith does not save us; we are saved *by God's grace*. God's grace is like the firemen's net. Faith is not the cause of our salvation, but only the instrument *through* which we receive salvation.⁵⁵ Similarly, it has been said that faith is not an achievement but it is more of an attitude of reception.

Faith is not a good work. That is why we are told that salvation is "*not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works.*" If you jumped from a burning building, you would be a fool to focus on how fancy your jump was or to think you could save yourself. The one holding the net would be the one providing the *grace* of safety. And if anyone had the right to boast, it would be God who provided what was necessary for the rescue, not the one being rescued. In the same way, the Bible says our salvation is not by our own "*works, so that no one can boast.*"

This brings us to the last verse of this passage, which is sometimes forgotten: "*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Because we are not saved by our good works but by God's gift of Christ, we have the freedom to do the good works that God has created us to do. A fish does not swim *in order to become* a fish. A fish swims *because it already is* a fish and does what comes naturally to it. In the same way, Christians do not do good works in order to be saved or stay saved. Instead, Christians do good works because they *are* saved and these good works come naturally to them as the Holy Spirit lives in them.

While authentic Christians do good works because they are saved, nowhere in Scripture are we told that authentic Christians are perfect or sinless for the rest of their lives. As a bumper sticker says, "Christians are not perfect; they are forgiven." Now this

brings us back to the mystery. How imperfect or sinful can a person be and still be an authentic Christian? What if a person claims to believe all the tenets of the bull's-eye and does not kill millions of people like Hitler, but does kill one person? We must trust our loving God revealed in Jesus Christ to work this mystery out.

Christians must be alert and careful, for the Bible says that the devil is like a lion seeking whom he may devour (I Pet. 5:8). For example, I worry about those who advocate abortion as a form of birth control just like I worry about those who were advocates of the Third Reich. Hitler's destruction of Jewish babies is not unlike those today who view unborn babies more as parasites than as people. Christians, regardless of denomination, need to be prophetic and speak out against abortion as a form of birth control.

However, Christians must also be pastoral. Imagine that a couple had an abortion simply because they did not want to be inconvenienced with a baby. Now they wish that they had not done it. They wish they could go back and have the baby. They are sorry for their sin. Of course this past sin would not move them out of the bull's-eye, for Christians are not perfect; they are forgiven. There is no sin that Christ did not overcome when he died on the cross (Rom. 5:6-11, 8:35-39).

Examples of this mystery or paradox abound. For the person who is having sex outside marriage or the actively gay person who is seeking ordination, the church, regardless of denomination, must be prophetic and share passages of Scripture such as:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Rev. 21:8, NIV).

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6:9-10, NIV).

At the same time, when a Christian fails in these and other areas and is repentant, the church must be pastoral and remind him or her of the good news of forgiveness, based on Christ's death on the cross (I Cor. 6:11; II Cor. 5:21). The Christian who has struggled with lust and fallen to sex outside of marriage but is repentant can be forgiven and live in the bull's-eye. The Christian who is tempted to act on temptations concerning homosexuality or heterosexuality outside of marriage yet who does not give up and keeps fighting these temptations, can be at home in the bull's-eye.

A defining point in this mystery is the attitude of Christians. The greatest danger is our attitude toward sin. Are we open to admitting our failures and trying to get back on course? The prophetic voice of the church, regardless of the denomination, cries out to each of us as Christians, "Do not start calling *wrong, right* and *right, wrong*, for God is not mocked; what we sow, we shall reap" (See also Gal. 6:7). The pastoral voice of the church comforts us when we do sin: "*This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (I John 4:10, NIV).

When you confess that Jesus is your Lord, you are confessing not only that Jesus is your God and Savior but also that Jesus is your God and ruler. In other words, you cannot have Jesus only as a Savior and not as a master or ruler, and vice versa. Yes,

Jesus saves us from our sins, but at the same time, we must be obedient to what he commands. We cannot disobey all his commands and allow him only to be our Savior. At the same time, we cannot strive so much to obey his commands that when we sin, we do not turn to him alone to forgive us and save us. When we call out to Jesus to be our God, he automatically becomes our Savior and our ruler, master, and king as well.⁵⁶

Jesus Is the Only Way to Salvation

In Acts 4:12, we read that salvation is found in Jesus alone. Acts 4:12 also says, “*There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” (NIV). While I believe this verse, I still struggled with whether or not to put “Jesus Is the Only Way to Salvation” in the bull’s-eye. I thought about moving it to the yellow concentric circle found on the main page.

Millions of Christians over hundreds of years have agreed with me that Jesus is the only way to salvation. There have been very few Christians who have believed that all people will go to heaven no matter what. Those who do believe this are called “Universalists”.

The most famous Christian Universalist was Karl Barth.⁵⁷ Barth held to all of the other tenets in the bull’s-eye except, “Jesus Is the Only Way to Salvation”. Barth, a pastor, put himself in danger by speaking out against Hitler during the time of the Nazi regime. But just because Barth believed that all people will live with God for eternity does not make it true. I want very much for all people to live with God for eternity, but wanting that does not make it happen. I believe Universalism is a dangerous teaching, and I would never teach it; but I honestly cannot say that Barth is spending an eternity in hell because he believed it. This is why I struggled with whether or not to put this issue in the second ring.

I am more concerned about those Universalists who do not hold to other parts of the bull’s-eye. I remember the son of one of my hospice patients who had New Age beliefs that were a blend of Hinduism, Buddhism, reincarnation, and an eventual one world religion. He did not believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation; nor did he hold to other tenets in the bull’s-eye. I do worry that he will not live eternally with God.

It would be unloving for me to tell people they can get to heaven any other way than through Jesus alone. Imagine I am driving, and in the road is a human-shaped pile of clothes. I do not know if it is a person who has collapsed or just a pile of clothes that has fallen off a truck. If I swerve to avoid the pile and later learn it was just a bunch of rags, then what have I lost? If, on the other hand, I accelerate and run over the pile in the road and later learn it was a person, then I would be horrified.

In the same way, if I live my life sharing there is absolutely no other way to live eternally with God than through Jesus Christ and find out that I am wrong, what have I lost? But if I live my life saying it does not matter what religion you choose because all will live eternally with God, and then find out I was wrong, I would be horrified. If I get to heaven and am surprised to see certain people there, I certainly will not curse God for allowing them entry. But if I get to heaven and people are missing because I refused to share that Jesus was the only way to get to heaven, then profound will be my loss.

What is more, it makes no sense that Christians would take seriously Jesus’ words in some parts of the Bible but not in John 14:6: “*Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’*” (NIV).

To conclude “Bull’s-eye Necessities,” here is part of a prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father:

. . . that they may all be one, even as Thou, Father *art* in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one: I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me (John 17:20-23, NASB).

Jesus prayed that all Christians would be one in unity. This is, for me, a comforting prayer to read. At the same time, I must realize that for unity to be authentic, it must be based on truth (see John 14:26; 17:17). Unity is an imposter without truth. The apostle Paul never called for unity at the expense of truth when the Judaizers were teaching false doctrine in Galatia (Galatians 1:6-9).⁵⁸

However, it is also comforting for me to realize that so many Christians, regardless of historical time frame or continent, have had unity in their beliefs concerning each of the bull’s-eye necessities of the gospel that we have just studied.

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND RING ISSUES

The issues or doctrines presented in this next section correspond to the yellow, concentric circle found on the main page. These are second ring issues or teachings that are important but not essential for salvation. They most likely will separate Christians into different denominations, but Christians can still find unity on the essentials inside the red bull’s-eye.

C.S. Lewis said different denominations are like different rooms in God’s home. He said you cannot live your life in the hallway. You must eventually choose a room and go inside and eat and fellowship with other believers around the fire. He also said that his motive for writing *Mere Christianity* was to get people at least into the hallway of God’s house by them becoming a Christian.⁵⁹ He then encouraged people once they were Christians to take their time and select the right denomination or room for them in God’s house.

No one denomination has it all figured out. We all have blind spots, whether we realize it or not. Sometimes believers in other rooms of God’s house can identify our blind spots better than we can, yet we are all loved by God and are called to love one another.

My purpose in reflecting upon some of the issues in the yellow ring is not to go into the kind of depth that I did with the essential issues found in the bull’s-eye. It is also not to try to persuade someone to be on one side or the other of each of these issues. (Books and articles already exist that do that.) My purpose is to demonstrate briefly how these issues can place Christian believers in different denominations. You will also notice that I have not dealt with every second ring issue there is.⁶⁰

To use Lewis’s analogy of God’s house, the introduction and the bull’s-eye necessities got us into the hallway; this next part dealing with second ring issues will describe some of the different rooms leading off the hallway.

Drinking in Moderation

The Bible is clear that drunkenness is a sin (Isaiah 5:11, 20-23; Matthew 24:49; I Corinthians 6:10). However, Christians have disagreed over whether drinking alcohol in moderation is a sin. Christians who believe that drinking in moderation is acceptable to God have a legitimate interpretation of the Bible. And so do Christians who believe alcohol should not be consumed at all.

Those who believe it is acceptable to drink in moderation refer to Bible passages such as Psalm 104:15, which reads, “*Wine gladdens the heart of man,*” and Isaiah 25:6, which speaks of the Lord preparing for His people “*a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.*” They also refer to John 2:1-11, which recounts Jesus’ turning water into wine.

John 2:10 says, “*Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now*” (NASB). New Testament Greek scholar D.A. Carson says that Jesus turned water into *oinos* (wine)—not grape juice.

In verse 10 the head steward expects that at this point in the celebration some of the guests would *have had too much to drink*: the verb *methysko* does not refer to consuming too much liquid, but to inebriation. On the other hand, wine in the ancient world was diluted with water to between one-third and one-tenth of its fermented strength, *i.e.* something less strong than American beer. Undiluted wine, about the strength of wine today, was viewed as “strong drink”, and earned much more disapprobation.⁶¹

A valid Biblical case can also be made for abstaining from alcohol. Many Christians who have given up their right to drink have done so because they do not want to cause another brother or sister to stumble. They know there are many people who may be genetically prone to alcoholism, and they do not want to play with fire. Or maybe they have seen the dark side of an alcoholic within their own family, and they want no part of bringing that possibility into their children’s lives.

The same kind of logic applies to smoking; many believers do not smoke cigarettes, pipes or cigars even in moderation because they are afraid their kids may pick up the habit in excess and end up developing major health problems. No one can blame a Christian for giving up his or her right to drink or smoke in moderation. This is not unlike what Paul encouraged believers to do when they gave up their right to eat meat offered to idols (see Romans 14:1, 15, 17, and 21 and I Corinthians 8).

For about a year, I attended a United Methodist Church. I was active in Sunday school, and I remember attending one Sunday school party where beer and wine were served. As I drank my soft drink and noticed my Sunday school teacher drinking her beer, I could not help but think there was no way a Southern Baptist Church, for example, would endorse or even tolerate members drinking at a church gathering.

Drinking in moderation, especially at a church event, is one of those issues that will push a person out of the Southern Baptist room of God’s house into the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian or Methodist rooms of God’s house where drinking in moderation is accepted. The key word here is moderation; drinking to excess is not condoned by Scripture no matter what denomination, or room in God’s house you belong to. I’ve personally experienced good, Christian people drinking way too much even at church events. This must sadden the heart of God.

Mass/Lord's Supper/Communion

For the non-Christians reading this study, I run the risk of, at best, boring you with the details of many of these second ring issues. At worst, I turn you off completely by describing how inappropriately some Christians have behaved as they have disagreed over these issues. However, I must re-emphasize that no matter how badly Christians have behaved, Jesus never acted in an evil fashion, and it is before Jesus that one day we all will stand.

Another issue that will determine your room in God's house is communion. Much controversy has occurred over this throughout church history, and what you believe happens to the bread and wine during communion will determine the Christian denomination in which you will be most at home.

The Roman Catholic Church, with an estimated 63 million members, is by far the largest Christian denomination in the world.⁶² In A.D. 1215, the Roman Catholic Church officially departed from the teaching of Augustine (A.D. 354-430) who believed that the bread and wine only symbolized Christ's death.⁶³ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* now teaches that the body and blood of Jesus Christ are actually present in the bread and wine during the communion.⁶⁴ Because of the importance placed on this teaching, only Roman Catholics are invited to share in the communion in the Roman Catholic Church.

From A.D. 1526-1528, Huldrych Zwingli and Martin Luther argued fervently over what exactly happens to the bread and wine during communion. Luther retained the Catholic belief that Christ's body and blood were physically present in the elements.⁶⁵ Luther quoted Jesus' words during the last supper, "*This is my body*" (Matthew 26:26, NIV).

Zwingli, on the other hand, believed that when Jesus said, "*This is my body*," He was speaking symbolically—not literally. Zwingli said that it was just like when Jesus said, "*I am the true vine*" (John 15:1, NIV), he did not mean he was a literal plant.

The period after Zwingli died was a sad time in the history of the church. "Luther, as uncharitable to Zwingli in death as he had been in life, remarked that if God had saved Zwingli, He had done so above and beyond the rule!"⁶⁶ Luther had allowed disagreement over a second ring issue call into question his brother in Christ's very salvation.

Mode or Method of Baptism

In Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, Christians persecuted each other (though keep in mind that not all who claimed to be believers were authentic Christians). Michael and Margaretha Sattler, a married couple, were among those who were killed for their beliefs on baptism and other second ring issues.

The Sattlers were Anabaptists. The word "anabaptist" means to be re-baptized. The Anabaptists did not believe in the validity of infant baptism; therefore, they believed those who had undergone baptism as babies should be rebaptized as adults. For this belief, Margaretha was murdered by drowning. It was as though her persecutors were saying to her, "OK, you choose to be rebaptized and circumvent the powers that be, so we will kill you by baptizing you to death."⁶⁷

The political climate during these times was complex. Looking back, it seems like everyone was persecuting everyone else. Disagreement over the mode and method of baptism tied into many other issues, not the least of which was the desire for political

control and power. The seriousness of the issue of baptism impacted the church greatly, and so affects to some degree which room in God's house a believer resides in today.

While some denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church in America, encourage members to agree to disagree on mode and method of baptism and remain in the denomination, other denominations underscore baptism as a second ring issue but one that will divide Christians into different denominations. One example is the Southern Baptist denomination, which requires that a believer be baptized by immersion for membership. With an estimated membership of 16 million, Southern Baptists comprise the largest non-Catholic denomination in the United States.⁶⁸ Just as the Roman Catholic belief concerning communion will separate Christians in different rooms in God's house, so will the Baptist belief on baptism.

Roman Catholic Vatican II documents refer to non-Catholic Christians as "separated brothers."⁶⁹ This is because of the differences in belief on many second ring issues, including baptism and communion. It is my hope that even though we are separated, we can still be brothers and sisters *in Christ*.

Calvinism Versus Wesleyanism

Perhaps a better title for this topic would be "Predestined Versus Foreknew." John Calvin, the father of the Presbyterian Church, emphasized God's predestination; John Wesley, the father of the Methodist Church, emphasized God's foreknowledge. The tension between predestination and foreknowledge dates prior to both Calvin and Wesley. Augustine, who died in in A.D. 430, was one of the early Christian theologians to deal with the topic.⁷⁰

As with all the issues included in this study, it is tempting to write too much, but I will try to present a brief summary. For Calvin, predestination meant God predetermines who will be saved and who will be damned. For Wesley, foreknowledge meant God knows ahead of time who will choose Christ and be saved and who will not choose Christ and so be damned. Calvin believed God could foresee or foreknow nothing good in humans except what God had already determined to give them in Christ. For Wesley, it was the other way around: First God foreknew who would accept and who would reject Christ, and then God predestined the former to be saved and the latter to be damned.⁷¹

These views are closer than they sometimes seem. As a matter of fact, one of my seminary professors said that at one point, Wesley said he was a hair's breadth from being a "Calvinist." Both Calvin and Wesley agreed that God chooses Christians and Christians choose God. There were just subtle differences in what each one meant when he said this.

What is more, a soul is a soul. Whether the emphasis is on God's choice that sends a person to hell or on a person's own choice that sends him or her there, that person is going to hell. The solution to the hell problem is to choose Christ so damnation is not a possibility. If a person chooses Christ for salvation, then there is no doubt God has chosen him or her for salvation. Both Calvin and Wesley would agree that this is how to solve the hell problem.

There have been millions of faithful Christians over the centuries who have held opposing views on the predestination/foreknowledge debate.⁷² This means there is a place for people on both sides of this issue in the Christian church. The point is one can disagree—or even be wrong—on this issue and still be a Christian and go to heaven. The

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association historically has not taken a side on this debate and has just focused on preaching the gospel and letting God take care of the rest. Perhaps this is a wise way of handling this issue.

When you look at a photograph of a child, many times you can see the resemblance to the child's father and mother. In the same way, when you look at Christian believers around the globe, you can see both John Calvin and John Wesley in their beliefs. Just as it is perfectly normal for a child to bear more resemblance to one parent than the other, it is perfectly acceptable for a believer to lean a more toward John Calvin's teachings than John Wesley's, and vice versa. However, if believers become rigid in their adherence to either Calvin's or Wesley's teachings, then this can separate believers into different rooms of God's house.

Speaking in Tongues

I had a seminary professor once say that in his 40 years of ministry, he had never witnessed a case where a Southern Baptist church allowed speaking in tongues in a public worship service and that remained intact without splitting. It is one thing for a Southern Baptist to speak in tongues in a private prayer language; it is another to speak in tongues in a public Bible study or worship service. If you have the Biblical gift of speaking in tongues or the gift of interpretation of tongues, then you may feel more at home in the Assemblies of God denomination of God's house.

I used the Southern Baptist denomination as an example of this issue. However, there are many Lutheran, Presbyterian, and other non-charismatic churches in which speaking in tongues in a public worship service could cause division and push a believer into a different denomination.

INTRODUCTION TO THIRD RING ISSUES

The issues presented in this final section correspond to the blue, concentric circle on the main page. These are third ring issues that Christians can agree to disagree on and still remain in the same denomination and perhaps even remain in the same church within that denomination. Again, this is not an exhaustive list. And although these kinds of issues are important, how Christians treat each other when they disagree is probably more important to God than the issues themselves. The apostle Paul taught in I Corinthians 13:1-3 that if we do not have love, then we have nothing. Our goal as Christians should be to agree to disagree in order to stay focused on the greater goal of working together to reach the world with the "Bull's-eye Necessities" of the Gospel found in the red, middle circle on the main page.

Just War Versus Pacifism

In the book *The Politics of Jesus*,⁷³ author John Howard Yoder, a Mennonite scholar, presents a compelling case for pacifism, but few American Christians today even consider pacifism as a viable option. However, there was a time in the history of the church when church members disagreed over whether God favored pacifism or military intervention when the cause was just.

The just war theory was developed by Augustine over 1,600 years ago. According to this theory, certain criteria must be met before Christians participate in any war, regardless of what the government tells them to do. This is a way of making sure Christians are rendering unto God appropriately and rendering unto Caesar appropriately, and of holding Caesar accountable, whoever Caesar may be. This is also a way of decreasing the number of people, both soldiers and civilians, killed in war.

One reason I included just war versus pacifism in the third ring was to make the painful point that many Christians have functionally been more concerned about the style of music in their churches or in figuring out exactly when Christ will return than whether young men and women going into the military or the police force have a solid understanding of just violence.⁷⁴ I wonder which is more important to God. How we handle sanctity of life issues, such as violence, abortion, world hunger, euthanasia, and others, is extremely important to God.

We Christians would do better to spend less time on the controversial issues found in the third ring and just agree to disagree so that we can spend more time on the more important sanctity of human life issues. When we deal with third ring issues, especially when we put too much weight on some of them, we are always in danger of swallowing a camel and straining a gnat.

Lawsuits and the Ordination of Women

Willard Swartley wrote a book entitled *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women*.⁷⁵ The title itself vividly captures the many emotional issues that can divide Christians. The ordination of women certainly is one topic that good, Bible-believing Christians have found themselves in disagreement over throughout the centuries.

When some Christians use Scripture to convince another believer that it is acceptable to ordain women, the hearer probably is thinking, “This person is really stretching it to try to convince me the Bible teaches ordaining women is acceptable in God’s sight.” In the same way, a person who reads I Corinthians 6:1-8 may be equally skeptical when he or she hears a preacher use the text to prove it is acceptable to take someone to court.

I Corinthians 6:1-8 reads,

Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren (NASB).

It is possible that those who believe it is acceptable to take someone to court are wrong. So perhaps we should treat those with whom we disagree on the issue of

ordination of women how we want God to treat us in case we are wrong on being willing to take someone to court.

The truth is no matter what side you come down on either of these two issues, ordination of women or lawsuits, you could be wrong. Since this is the case, in God's mercy for us and our mercy for ourselves and each other, we may agree to disagree on these and other third ring issues and still worship beside each other in the same church.

There is an important practical matter concerning this and other third ring issues. For example, if you attend a church where the leadership and church as a whole believes one way on the ordination of women (whichever way that is), then you should submit to the authority of that local church and not try to convince people there to believe otherwise. The point is that unity on the issues of the bull's-eye and on second ring issues is too important to disrupt fellowship over a third ring issue. Otherwise, we risk splitting again over third ring issues and creating yet another denomination. In Ron Rhodes' book *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations*, he lists over 100 different Christian denominations in the United States today. Perhaps the answer is not in continuing to splinter off into even more denominations.

We must remember it is a luxury to have so many churches from which to choose. In many areas of the world, churches are few. Christians, whether Protestant or Catholic, must worship together because that is the only option for them. Furthermore, many times these Christians are even risking persecution by attending church. This underscores the importance of agreeing to disagree over some issues in order to have unity on the bull's-eye issues and fellowship with one another in Christ. As Psalm 133:1 reads, "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity*" (NIV).

Hairstyles

At a funeral I attended, the preacher officiating said very little about the deceased. Instead, he used I Timothy 2:9 as his text and spent most of his time talking about how bad the world was, as evidenced by the fact that men have long hair and women wear pants instead of skirts. By the end of that event, one would think we were all going to hell because of not following the appropriate dress code.

The reason I mention hairstyles and dress codes as examples of third ring issues is to show how some people try to make these non-essential beliefs into bull's-eye issues.⁷⁶

Worship Styles

In I Thessalonians 5:26, we read, "*Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss*" (NIV). As we know, in many cultures throughout the centuries, men kissing other men on the cheeks is similar to what Western men do today when they shake hands warmly. Most American men would not be comfortable greeting other men with a kiss, and we certainly do not require it.

In the same way, we must not require each other to lift our hands in worship or not lift our hands in worship. We must not require only contemporary praise music or only traditional hymns. We must be open to our brothers and sisters in Christ who have different preferences on worship styles. Unfortunately, churches have split over these issues as if they were second ring issues instead of third ring issues.

CONCLUSION

When, as a child, I first prayed a prayer similar to the one I would share with hospice patients decades later, I did not understand everything in the bull's-eye. Yet I believe that Jesus still saved me. As a matter of fact, I do not know of anyone who has come to faith believing all of the things in the bull's-eye to the degree that I have presented them in this study. However, I still believe these people are authentic Christians. Nevertheless, just as it is important for a baby in a mother's womb to one day grow into an adult, so is it important to continue to grow in the right beliefs about God.

As a Christian, you have a relationship with Jesus, and this is the most important aspect of the Christian faith. What is more, you can have a wonderful relationship with God and also strive to have right beliefs about God. Through a loving relationship with Jesus, the Christian has the Holy Spirit, who empowers the believer to develop right beliefs and right behaviors.

Some early Christians in the Corinthian church fell victim to numerous sins, including pride over their wisdom and knowledge.⁷⁷ When I say one must believe all the things in the bull's-eye in order to spend eternity with God, I fear I come close to over-emphasizing knowledge about God in order to be saved. At the same time, I honestly do not think orthodox Christianity has ever taught that someone who, for example, refuses to worship Jesus Christ as God, or denies his death and his resurrection, can spend eternity with God. Knowing and believing the right things, at least to some degree, is essential for salvation. Just as good works will flow from an authentic Christian (at least to some degree), so must right beliefs flow from an authentic Christian. This may seem like a paradox to us, but so does God who has never had a beginning or an ending.

Just as all analogies for explaining the Trinity fall short because God is just too awesome to be summed up in an analogy, so is the Christian life too magnificent to be summed up completely in the analogy of a bull's-eye. However, I do hope I have presented a helpful way of at least discerning who is and who is not on the same team.

I am an ordained Southern Baptist minister who has been active over the years in three different denominations. I have friends who belong to the Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Assemblies of God, and Roman Catholic denominations. I am glad to pray with these friends and with brothers and sisters in other Christian denominations because I believe we are all on the same team.

Here's a saying that is centuries old: "In all things necessary there must be unity. In all things less than necessary there must be liberty. And in all things there must be charity." The apostle Paul had the Spirit of unity and charity when he wrote to his brothers and sisters at the church in Ephesus:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4: 1-3, 15; NASB).

ADDITIONAL READING

Other people have written complete books in which they have done a better and more in-depth job of explaining many of the issues that I have sought to define. The following is a list of some of these works:

Written from a Roman Catholic perspective,

- Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, InterVarsity Press.

Written from a Protestant perspective,

- Paul Little, *Know What You Believe*, IVP Books.
- John Stott, *Basic Christianity*, Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press.

ENDNOTES

¹Scripture quotations with “NIV” noted at the end are from *The Holy Bible*, New International Version, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society. Used by permission of International Bible Society.

²Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 41.

³C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Collier Books, 1952), 119.

⁴There have been authentic Christians who have disagreed on three major views of the Bible and still remained Christians. The three views are as follows: *inerrancy* described by B.B. Warfield, *infallibility* by I.H. Marshall, and *neo-orthodoxy* by Karl Barth. For discussion see William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 89-90.

⁵Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 193.

⁶Harry Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 76.

⁷*Ibid.*, 180.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Masao Uenuma, “Justification and the Buddhist Context,” in *Right With God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D.A. Carson (Guernsey, Channel Islands: World Evangelical Fellowship and Baker Book House, 1992), 251.

¹⁰Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 97, 100-101.

¹¹Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 326, 364.

¹²Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 173.

¹³Geisler and Rhodes quote primary Mormon sources. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 1997), 94.

¹⁴Martin quotes primary Hindu sources. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 389.

¹⁵Southern Baptist Convention, Publisher, *Understanding Mormons: The Mormon Puzzle*, 75 min. 200, DVD.

¹⁶Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary*, “Philippians” (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 184.

¹⁷Justo Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: Complete in One Volume, The Early Church to the Present Day* (Peabody: Prince Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 62.

-
- ¹⁹Thielman, "Philippians," 184.
- ²⁰Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 129.
- ²¹Jehovah's Witnesses say that Jesus was a "creature separate from God" in their pamphlet entitled "Should You Believe in the Trinity? Is Jesus Christ the Almighty God?" (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. 1989), 17.
- ²²George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* 76.
- ²³Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 109-110.
- ²⁴This analogy was adapted from a similar analogy found in Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 46.
- ²⁵Scripture quotations with "NASB" noted at the end are from the *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
- ²⁶This literal translation found in *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1990), 352.
- ²⁷The word "He" is italicized in the New American Standard Bible and the King James Version translations in order to indicate that the word is not in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written. The word "He" was added to smooth out the English and make it more readable; but adding "He" inadvertently obscures important theological insight. What is more, the Greek translation of the Old Testament is called the Septuagint. In the Septuagint, in Exodus 3:13-14, the phrase εγω ειμι (I am) is used. This is the exact same phrase used in the Greek language of John 8:24 where Jesus said unless you believe that εγω ειμι (I am), you will die in your sins. Again, the significance is that Jesus claimed the same identity that God claimed to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14.
- ²⁸John 18:5 is one of numerous other examples of Jesus' claim to be God. In John 18:5 Jesus says the same thing that He said in John 8:24. He says, εγω ειμι (I am), and everyone who came to arrest Him falls to the ground. This is another hint that Jesus is more than just a human being.
- ²⁹Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 40-41.
- ³⁰Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 329, 259, 364, 382, 383.
- ³¹*Ibid.*, 379.
- ³²The movie was based on Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
- ³³Ben Witherington III, "Why the Lost Gospels Lost Out," in *Christianity Today*, June 2004, 27.
- ³⁴Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 325, 329, 259, 364, 366, 367, 382, 382, 383.
- ³⁵George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* 87.
- ³⁶Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., "The Trinity and Christian Unity," in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2006), 72.
- ³⁷Gerald Bray, "Out of the Box: The Christian Experience of God," in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2006), 38 and Gerald Bray. "Christian Theology I," audio-taped class lectures from Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, Birmingham AL.
- ³⁸Bray, "Out of the Box," 50.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 48.
- ⁴⁰Bray Lectures and Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 12.
- ⁴¹Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Should You Believe the Trinity?* 20-21.
- ⁴²Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 831.
- ⁴³Bray Lectures.
- ⁴⁴Stanley Harakas, *Orthodox Christian Beliefs* (Minneapolis: Light and Life, 2002), 122.
- ⁴⁵Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Should You Believe the Trinity?* 4-5.
- ⁴⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 342.
- ⁴⁷Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 173.
- ⁴⁸Erickson shared how he personally struggles with erring in one direction or the other when it comes to the Trinity; I found this to be especially helpful. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 338-342.
- ⁴⁹William Hendricks, *Who is Jesus Christ?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 153.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 147, 152.

⁵¹The complete document can be found at <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/09/001-the-gift-of-salvation-28> and at Corporate Author, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation,” in *Christianity Today*, 12-8-97, 36.

⁵²Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 201.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 299.

⁵⁴This is explained in numerous ways in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

⁵⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 959.

⁵⁶MacArthur stresses Jesus being Master. John MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988). Ryrie emphasizes Jesus being Savior. Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1989).

⁵⁷Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 88, 91, 118-119, 132.

⁵⁸Joseph M. Stowell, “The Evangelical Family: Its Blessings and Boundaries,” in *This We Believe: The Good News of Jesus Christ for the World*, eds. John N. Akers, John H. Armstrong, and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 207.

⁵⁹Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, xi.

⁶⁰One’s theory of atonement is another second ring issue. The Christian theories of atonement differ on *how* exactly Jesus’ death breaks down the sin barrier and brings people close to God. The major theories have been treated extensively in many systematic theology books and cannot be repeated here. Charles Finney and Dwight Moody, two of the great 19th century American revival preachers, disagreed with the Congregational and Presbyterian clergy of the day on the correct theory of the atonement. However, there were thousands of Christians on both sides who, I believe, were still authentic Christians. For further discussion, see Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 154-160.

⁶¹D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 169.

⁶²Frank Mead, Samuel Hill, and Craig Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 12th Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 94.

⁶³This occurred at the Fourth Lateran Council. Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 150.

⁶⁴*Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications From The Editio Typica*, Second Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 394.

⁶⁵Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1117. While there are differences between Luther’s view and the Roman Catholic view, Luther’s view is the closest to the Roman Catholic view. The four major views on the Lord’s Supper are as follows: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Zwinglian. Presbyterian churches teach the Reformed view, and Baptist churches teach the Zwinglian view. For a summary of each see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1115-1121.

⁶⁶George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 160.

⁶⁷The movie, *The Radicals*, by Sisters & Brothers Studio and also by Gateway Films, vividly depicts the Sattlers’ testimony and martyrdom.

⁶⁸Mead, *Handbook of Denominations*, 213.

⁶⁹Timothy George, “Catholics and Baptists Together” in *Christianity Today*, February 2013, 73.

⁷⁰Even though Calvin is more frequently compared to James Arminius, I chose to compare Calvin to Wesley because Wesley may be more familiar to the modern reader.

⁷¹Adapted from Fisher Humphreys and Paul Robertson, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans: Insight Press, 2000), 10. In order to articulate Calvin’s theology, Humphreys and Robertson quote John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.23.1, 3.21.5 and 3.21.7.

⁷²The most well-known Christian thinkers such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther all agreed with Calvin on predestination; so if one agrees with Calvin, then one is in good company. However, there have been faithful Christians who have disagreed with Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin on this issue. One example is Menno Simons, the father of the *Mennonite Church*. His magnificent story can be found in George’s, *Theology of the Reformers*, 308-323.

⁷³John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁷⁴While the fact that Christ will return is agreed upon by most all Christians over the centuries, exactly when Christ will return is something no human will ever know (see Matt. 24:36).

⁷⁵William Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 1983).

⁷⁶Some of the 16th century Puritans made the issue of church government an issue of salvation. Poe, *The Gospel and Its Meaning*, 210-211. This is an example of taking a second ring issue (church polity) and making it into a bull's-eye issue.

⁷⁷Gordon Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 11.