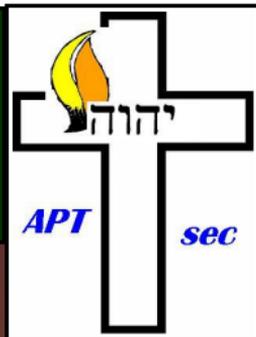


# HEAR THE WORD OF GOD



**Biblical  
Discipleship  
2000+**

**JESUS**

**Rod Adamson**

**Internet: [www.resurrectlife.co.za](http://www.resurrectlife.co.za)**

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### For Family and Faithful

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# 1. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD

## 1.1 CONFUSED VIBES

People have always known of some "being" distinctively greater than themselves called God. Only in modern time is this widely denied. So, who or what is God? **Ancient and traditional cultures** in Africa, Egypt, Europe, India, China and the Americas accepted this greater "being" as one high God ruling over lesser "gods" or "spirits" of rivers, mountains, storms, or of dead relatives. But these lesser gods have been exposed as forces of nature like earthquakes, floods and droughts, or confusion of family patriotism with worship of the dead as in ancestral spiritism. These can be made to take over from the high god for a competing fashion of petty spirits. Atheists claim that "God" or "spirits" do not exist, only superstition about forces of nature or family patriotism projected into the imagination of a community so it has "big, kind fathers in the sky" to help it when forces of nature or political and economic change scare the community and it struggles to deal with instability.

All these ideas of God or gods or spirits, or no such things, is widespread confusion. Some people like this because then they can do as they please. If they can't be sure about God, there is no reason for moral behaviour - be rich and powerful and enjoy yourself, no matter who is hurt, let the others defend themselves if they can. But what about those who won't cop out of spiritual responsibility so easily? Those who want to live responsibly don't find help in people's confused ideas about God and life.

## **1.2 GOD REVEALS HIMSELF, HE'S NOT MADE UP BY HUMAN INGENUITY**

God has known about the confusion from the beginning. He revealed himself to all people in such a way that those who do want to know His way can clear their confusion and doubts about Him. It began with a man called Abraham in Mesopotamia, today's Iraq. His experiences with God in Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt founded a people called Israel. Their experiences with the same God at the time of Moses, the judges, the prophets and ultimately in Jesus showed He was not just the God of their clan or tribe. He was the only true God, the God of all

nations and the Lord of all the earth. From Jesus' time anyone who wanted to could tune in to the way God had set up.

Other religions claim their own fake revelation above the Abraham-Jesus legacy, but the Christian way remains unique. It is grounded in fact and its most important principle is Jesus, the only person with live experience of the other side and the only person who shares what only God has - life irrespective of death. Jesus is the only person to experience resurrection. If death can't hold him, he has eternity like God. He is God. The opinion given here is that Jesus alone has the "rap of the righteous dude." This unique claim is the heart of Christianity. Its meaning for the individual will be explored under the different themes which follow.

### **Prayer Suggestion:**

Heavenly Father, help me to open my spirit for how you reveal yourself and to meet with You.

## 2. LET MY PEOPLE GO...

### Exodus 5.1 -



God reveals himself in his acts saving the Hebrews

#### 2.1 God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – *El Elyon, El Shaddai*

God first gave special revelation of who he was to Abraham, first ancestor of the Hebrews. In +/-2000 BC in Ur in Mesopotomia, God told Abraham *"Leave your country, your people and your father's household & go to the land I will show you"*. (Gen12.1-5) Abraham went and many times thereafter he saw God act in power. His son Isaac was born after Sarah, his wife, conceived in old age and despite infertility. After God tested Abraham in the near sacrifice of his only son Isaac, God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac. God said *"Because you obeyed me and did not withhold your only son, I will bless and multiply your descendants; they will defeat their enemies. Through your offspring all nations will be blessed."* (Genesis 12.1-5, 17.1-27, 22.1-19). Abraham knew God by the attribute names *El Elyon* (Gen

14.19f - *God Most High*) and *El Shaddai* (Gen 17.1 *God Almighty*). God's covenant bound him to act in faithfulness to the Hebrews, to bless them and through this to bless the other nations. He and his descendants Isaac, Jacob (Israel), and Joseph and their extended family, saw this in acts which protected them in Palestine and internationally. God protect them against hostile Egyptians, and destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Egypt was also greatly enriched by the work of Joseph in +/-1650 BC, who caused God to be widely known there too.

## **2.2 God of Moses, Passover and Exodus – Yahweh “I Am who I Am”**

Between Abraham and Jesus, God best revealed himself in +/-1445 BC to deliver the Hebrews from vicious slavery under oppressive new pharaohs who did not know Joseph or God. God had allowed the slavery so the Exodus could reveal his nature as loving and liberating. First God gave his name to Moses of Egypt as יהוה *Yahweh* - *I AM WHO I AM*" (Ex 3.1-17). He told Moses *"The cry of the Israelites because of their slavedrivers has reached me. I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So I have come to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring*

*them up out of that land into a good land - a land flowing with milk and honey.*" Moses was to tell pharaoh *"Let my people go that they may serve me alone."* Pharaoh's heart was hardened against God, but 10 plagues swept his hatred and rejection aside. As never before, Hebrews and the nations around them experienced God's total might then Passover. God also parted the sea for the Hebrews' final escape, and closed the water again to destroy Pharaoh's pursuing army. So God mocked all the so-called 'gods' of Egypt who proved powerless to stop him, even in their own territory. Yahweh alone was God, the others fake. (*Exodus 3.1-17, 5.1-9, 11.1-12.42 and 14.10-31*). At Mt Sinai God gave the Hebrews the 10 commandments with revealing of his power. But the Hebrews soon turned back to the false gods of Egypt and elsewhere, erecting a golden calf idol which supposedly implied sexual potency, and fertility in life for worshipers. (*Ex 19.10-20.19*).

God stopped this then punished the unfaithful Hebrews with 40 years' wandering in the wilderness, though he did supply quail, manna and water in the desert. This took care of anti-Yahweh rebels before God again parted the waters, this time of the Jordan river, and led the

Hebrews into the Promised land. God is a jealous God and the Hebrews were to be a pure people.

### **2.3 12 Tribes, Judges, David's Kingdom and the Prophets – Yahweh Sebaoth**

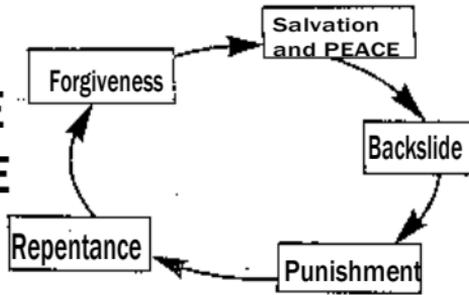
God had rejected the evil of the Canaanites' false gods who demanded human sacrifice and sexual immorality. His historical answer was to hand Canaan/Palestine over to the Hebrews. Once the sun stood still in the sky for 24 hour light so the Hebrews could be victorious as God fought alongside them against false gods.

*(Joshua 3.14-4.14, 10.1-14, 24.1-29).*

Whether the Hebrews were just a looseknit group of twelve tribes under the Judges (leaders like Samson, Gideon, Deborah and Samuel in *Judges*), or under their kings (*1 Samuel-2 Kings*) - a **cycle of repentance** became their trend. From peace, the leaders backslid into idolatrous sin, taking the people with them; the Hebrews experienced God's punishment by catastrophe or defeat at the hands of evil oppressive nations, repent back to God, and be saved in forgiveness with God and from evil.

*(Judges 3.5-11, 4.1-23, 6.1-7.23/8.33)*

## HEBREW CYCLE OF REPENTANCE



The Hebrews showed little self-responsibility in keeping God's covenant, and felt the Judges gave too little leadership. They asked for a king to lead them on God's behalf.

From +/-1030-930 BC Saul, David and Solomon led defeat of the Philistines and other enemy nations as God led the Hebrews to be a strong unified kingdom. Jerusalem was its capital, God's temple with no idols or images in it, was built, and God renewed his covenant through David, his beloved king and prophet. (*1 Samuel 8.1-11.15, 15.1-17.58, 2 Samuel 5.1-7.29, 1 Kings 4.29-6.38*). However, the usually wayward kings led the people in cycles of backsliding, repentance and deliverance. (*1 Samuel 15.1-35, 28.1-19 & 31.1-13 // 2 Samuel 11.1-12.25 and 1 Kings 11.1-13.*)

God continually raised up prophets to call the Hebrews to spiritual obedience to the Covenant of Abraham, Moses and David, for human selfishness quickly came to the fore with

prosperity. Led by the royal house, idolatry oppression and corruption ruled widely and the Hebrew people split into two kingdoms, Judah in the South with Jerusalem as capital, and Israel in the North with Samaria as capital. For 400 years God sent prophets to call the kings and the people back to true worship and justice.

*(1 Kings 18.1-46, 2 Kings 18.17-19.37; 12.20-31/16.21-28, 2 Kings 14.23 & Hosea 8.1-14; and 2 Kings 21 & Jeremiah 15.1-9.)*

Prophets Elijah and Amos are examples of many prophets God used to challenge the people:

*(1 Kings 18.21/ /Amos 2.6-8/3.11/6.7)*

The Hebrews were bad listeners, slavery happened again (Assyria conquered Israel in 722BC, Babylon conquered Judah in 586 BC). Even in exile God let his name be known internationally through people like Daniel, Esther and Ezekiel. God brought back a remnant of the Hebrews to Jerusalem in +/-530BC to start the cycles again. God's prophets again called for justice and reminded the people of God's promise to send the Messiah.

*(Daniel 5.1-31, Ezekiel 14.1-23, Ezra 1.1-11, Nehemiah 2.1-9, Zechariah 7.1-14/ 12.10-14)*

## The Messiah's New Covenant and the Age of the Spirit

The 'ANointed ONE', (Messiah in Hebrew/Christ in Greek) would truly be an upright king and God's son. The Hebrews were to look for his coming with a global unending kingdom he would establish to lead the world by his standards and never decline. This would also be the new "age of the Spirit".

*(Is 4.2-6/9.1-7, Jer 23.1-8/33.14-16, Mic 5.2-4, Ez 17.22-24/34.22-24/ 37.24-28, Dan 7.13-14, Zech 3.8.)*

**Prayer Suggestion:** Heavenly Father, You used the Hebrews to help reveal yourself to us. Help me to see and hear your Word in the Old Testament.

### Discussion Tasks:

- 1. READ Genesis 12.1-5, 17.1-27, 22.1-19.** Why do you think God's covenant with Abraham was successful?
- 2. READ Gen 14.18-24, Ex 20.1-6, Is 46.1-13, Dan 3.1-30** From Abraham on, what kind of worship did God want? What is it called? How do you think God will respond if we follow other gods/religions?

3. What were the sins of Saul, David and Solomon? What were the two great sins that the Hebrews of Israel and Judah committed? Do you think God was fair to punish the Hebrews with defeat and exile? Why?
4. **READ 2 Kings 17.1-41/Amos 7.1-17 & 2 Kings 23.31-25.30 /Jer 22.1-22.30.** The prophets called the people away from idolatry and oppressing the poor, and back to God, or they foretold future punishment and redemption. How is it possible for God's prophets to let the people know the future, good or bad?
5. Christians say Jesus fulfils messiah prophecies like 2 Sam 7.12-17, Is 9.6-7, Jer 23.5-6, Dan 7.13-14, Zech 9.9-10 and Jer 31.33-34, Ez 36.26, Joel 2.28-29? What do you think?

### How the Hebrews use the THE LAW, THE PROPHETS AND THE WRITINGS

The Hebrews knew of three divisions in the Old Testament:

- **The Law** (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and
- **The Prophets** (Books Isaiah to Malachi, and Historical Books Joshua to Esther), and the same message runs through
- **The Writings**, some of which are The Psalms, the hymnbook containing the songs of David's kingdom and later Hebrew hymns (*Read Psalms 23, 110, 121*); Job, a drama about the wisdom and sovereignty of God and faith; (*Read Job 1, 29-31, 38-42*); Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, collections of wise and common sense sayings from the time of David's kingdom; note parallels between these and wisdom sayings of other faiths and nations; (*Read Proverbs 22.17-24.22 & Ecclesiastes 3.1-15*). The Song of Solomon, which is a series of love songs/poems between a man and woman (*Song 2.1-3-5*).

Books like Ruth, Daniel, 1&2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah are traditionally included in the Writings, but are more historical/prophetic books.

### 3. THIS IS MY SON, WHOM I LOVE...

**Mark 9.7** - God is  
completely revealed  
in Jesus Christ



#### 3.1 JESUS' ROOTS

Jesus was born poor +\-6-4 BC, his parents only able to sacrifice 2 doves instead of a lamb at his dedication as the firstborn son. His parents knew that unusual events had marked his birth in a stable in Bethlehem and he was of the royal line of David - a mark of the messiah. Yet Jesus grew up normally, passing through the challenges of adolescence. In adult life he was a carpenter in his father's business – with one difference. Jesus knew that God was his father in a unique way and had given him a special task in life - be the messiah who would bring in the eternal kingdom of God. (*Exodus 34.19-20; Luke 1 & 2/2.23-24; Matthew 2.1-12*)

#### 3.2 JESUS' WORK AND MINISTRY

The prophet John the Baptist baptised people for

the forgiveness of sin, prepared them for the coming of the kingdom, and preached that he was sent to point out the messiah. When Jesus was about 30 years old John identified him as the messiah. (*Mark 1.1.1-11; John 1.1-31*)

**3.2.1 Jesus' Baptism:** Jesus' first public act of ministry was to be baptised by John. He fulfilled John's work and took over John's preaching of the kingdom. He was not baptised for his sins (he had none), but for ours. Baptism pointed to his death and resurrection and identified him with us, and us with his death on the cross. By faith people would have their sins and sinful old life crucified with him and have him put his new life within them - recreation from old to new life, which the Holy Spirit does in us, is God's forgiveness and victory. (*Rom 6.1-14; 2 Cor 5.16-21; Heb 2.17-18/4.15*)

**3.2.2 Jesus' Ministry in the Spirit:** The Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and empowered him for ministry as the messiah. In his first sermon given at Nazareth, he read from the scroll of Is 61.1 to outline his work:

- minister in the power of the Spirit
- preach good news to the poor
- heal the sick physically/psychologically

- proclaim freedom for prisoners
  - bring release for the oppressed
  - proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
- (Mark 1.12-13; Luke 4.14-21; John 1.32-34)*

**3.2.3 Jesus Called and Trained Disciples:** In order to keep his work going and make it spread more widely, Jesus called disciples and trained them in the work of the kingdom. He set up 2 sacraments for worship by which the disciples would remember Him and his work - Baptism and Communion. *(Mark 1.14-20/3.13-19/4.1-34/14.12-26; Matthew 5.1-7.28/28.16-20; Luke 6.12-49; John 1.35-51).*

For about two years Jesus continued this ministry of healing and teaching among Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. Thereafter he also taught his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem, suffer and die and then rise again. Through this he would save the world from perishing in sin. Jesus said that this was him as the Good Shepherd and that he would lay down his life for his sheep. In this laying down of his life would be the global salvation of God for all humans *(Mark 8.31-9.1; John 3.16; John 10.14-18)*

### **3.3 JESUS' CROSS AND RESURRECTION**

The disciples and the Jews didn't want to hear this. They wanted a political liberator to bring salvation by defeating the Roman overlords. Yet it was only salvation by life re-creation which addressed the cause of sin and violence; political liberation dealt with the symptoms of sin only and would peter out. Jesus' work upset the civil and religious leaders of his time; it threatened their positions of wealth and advantage. They plotted to remove Jesus from Palestine and the world, had him betrayed by Judas and crucified near naked as a common criminal on a false charge of blasphemy and treason. This was to disgrace Jesus' work and his disciples so that the followers of this executed criminal would just give up. Bible, Jewish, Roman and other evidence agrees 100%, Jesus was crucified at Passover under Pontius Pilate. But their sad plot only served God's plan better; God resurrected Jesus and through this won salvation for all people.

*(Mark 14.12-16.8 and parallels/ John 18.1-20.30)*

**3.3.1 Jesus' Resurrection:** This was shocking then, and is still a shocking claim. There's adequate evidence for reasonable faith in it. It means God vindicated Jesus and his claims. He is

God's messiah, and his sixfold work goes on in the ministry of the Church. It means that the Kingdom of God is at hand on earth, all kingdoms, states and human plans are now measured by Jesus for God's favour and support or disfavour and active opposition. In Jesus God has entered human affairs to stay. Jesus' resurrection also showed that in him, life greater than death is God's plan.

**3.3.2 Jesus represents us before God:** As God's servant Jesus represented all people before God; he took upon himself the death result of our willing condition of sin and alienation from God. But he was sinless, so was resurrected for us too. By faith in him, as signified by baptism, sinner and their sin are crucified with Christ to rise again as born again to live in desire of God's way; the old sin desiring life is over. As we live the new life in a Spirit-democratic church, society can also be liberated. (*Mark 10.43-45; Acts 2.22-24,36; Romans 1.2-4,16-17/3.21-26; 1Corinthians 15.3-7; 2 Corinthians 5.16-17; Ephesians 2.1-10*).

**3.3.3 Jesus represents God before us:** Jesus also represented God before humankind. Jesus revealed God as love (*1 Jn 4.8*): God's love took our side in Jesus' ministry, cross and resurrection.

Sinful, alienated humankind are enemies of God headed to self-destruction, but God, prodigal in grace (undeserved favour), let his own Son take our destruction on himself. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (Jn 3.16). God abandoned his son to our collective deaths, Christ took our sinful lives on himself and died our eternal death, and gave us his resurrected life as our new life. Jesus' resurrection is God's vindication of him and God's favour to deliver in him. This also means Jesus is the measure of God's judgement of people. Those who reject Jesus reject love and God's grace, key to real humanity, for Jesus is its model. So they judge themselves, for God's favour in Jesus is always there.

*(Acts 2.22-24, 29-39/ 4.27-32; Romans 1.2-5/5.6-11; Colossians 2.13-15; 1 Peter 1.17-21)*

### **3.4 WHO IS JESUS?**

**3.4.1 Jesus was and is HUMAN:** Jesus was angry, he became tired, he wept, he went to the toilet and he died. The New Testament gives him special Old Testament titles which signify his humanity in the service of God's people and kingdom:

- ◆ **The Prophet:** Israel continually expected a prophet like Moses to come; this was linked to the title Messiah. (*Deut 18.15-22*)
- ◆ **Son of David/Messiah/Son of God:** The "Anointed One" would save Israel from her enemies and establish David's kingdom forever. Jesus says he is these: The rest of the NT repeats this very often to make it clear this was who Jesus was. (*Deut 18.18; 2 Sam 7.12-16; Is 7.14/9.2-7/11.1-5; Jer 33.14-16; Ez 34.22-24/37.24-28; Mic 5.2; Mark 8.29/14-61-62; Matt 4.1-11/16.16/26.63-64; Luke 4.3-13/9.20/22.67-70; John 20.31; Rom 1.2-5; Heb 13.20-21*)

**3.4.2 Jesus is GOD:** Jesus' disciples were witnesses of the resurrection, they could only conclude that he is life like at the resurrection of the last day, so he has eternal life like God, he is God and the titles above didn't explain all there was about Jesus. As Jews they knew such claims were blasphemy unless for the Messiah. They stuck to their witness, and used some Old Testament titles only used for someone divine.

- ◆ **Son of Man:** This title from *Dan 7.13-14* was always trinitarian about a divine being. The New Testament has only Jesus using

this title about himself; the apostles don't use it about Jesus and no one else in history ever used this title of themselves, only Jesus. (*Mark 2.10/2.28/ 8.31/9.9/ 9.31/10.33/10.45/ 8.38/13.26/14.62; Matt 12.32/13.37; Luke 19.10 & and often in John's gospel*). This was Jesus' way of talking about himself, and tells us what we should think. It meant Jesus came to take sins on himself, die and rise for believers to set the cross as the pattern of final judgment, and to come again to do the final judgement. Only God did all this so Jesus claimed to be God.

- ◆ **Jesus' "I AM" sayings** in John's gospel also point to this (*Jn 6.35/8.12/10.11/ 11.25/14.6/15.1*) The apostles rather speak of Jesus as trinitarian using the other titles:
- ◆ **Son of the Father**, showing Jesus' divine relationship (*Mat 11.27; Jn 5.19-29; Col 1.15-20; 1 Tim 3.16; Heb 1.2-3 and often*);
- ◆ **Logos** - eternal Word (organising principle of the universe (*Jn 1.1-14; 1 Jn 1.1-4*),
- ◆ **Lord** (*Jn 20.28/Phil 2.5-11* linked to '**Son of Man**'; and often) and
- ◆ **God** the only divine eternal being (*Jn 1.1/20.28; Rom 9.5; Tit 2.13; 2 Pet 1.1*).

So:

**JESUS WAS AND IS GOD:** The way Jesus spoke of himself is explicit, he claimed to be God and was understood as claiming that (*John 8.58*) - so He is either insane, or we must worship him, there is no middle ground. He did not claim to be just some religious teacher, he had power no other man had or will have, healing many, walking on water, calming storms, miraculously feeding large crowds and even raising the dead. Most of all he claimed he had come to show that God is love by dying on the cross to take away the sins of the world. When dead he did not remain so, but returned to life - he showed one nature with God, eternal life dominated by love.

(This will be looked at further in the Chapter on the Trinity)

### **3.4 JESUS IS COMING AGAIN**

Jesus is also coming again to end time by so filling existence with his life power that bondage, evil and decay will end forever. Sin, selfishness, alienation and death characterise human nature now, but Jesus' cross and resurrection broke through it all for new life for each person in the

here and now that guarantees resurrection to eternal life is for us when he returns. Then people will strive and fellowship together in the nature of love, not sin and self-centredness any longer (*Matthew 24.42; 1 Corinthians 15.23; Philippians 2.6; James 5.8; Hebrews 9.27-29*)

### **Prayer Suggestions:**

Heavenly Father, you revealed yourself most fully in Jesus. Help me to know You in Jesus as You want me too.

Lord Jesus, forgive me for my sin against you and open my relationship with God through you.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. Why do Jesus' Hebrew/Jewish roots matter? In Africa, ancient Ethiopian church murals have a black Jesus, in European churches Jesus is white, Asian churches he is Asian. Does the racial and cultural background of Jesus matter?
2. What do you think the quality of Jesus' miracles and teachings say of Him?

3. Jesus' claims and his resurrection are that He is unique, one with God in love and existence in giving his life for us at the cross. What do you say?
4. Explain "dying and rising with Christ in baptism" (Rom 6.3-4) and "born again" (John 3.3,5,8) in your own words.
5. The following words are taken from the rock song "THE OUTLAW", by Larry Norman, on his rock album "Only Visiting This Planet.." (MGM Records 1972). It gives an interesting insight into how people thought then and still think about Jesus. **THE OUTLAW**

**Some say he was an outlaw,  
that he roamed across the land,  
With a band of unschooled ruffians,  
And a few old fishermen.  
No one knew just where he came from,  
Or exactly what he'd done,  
But they said it must be something  
that kept him on the run.**

**Some say he was a poet,  
That he'd stand upon the hill,  
And his voice could calm an angry crowd,  
And make the waves stand still;  
That he spoke in many parables  
that you could understand,  
But the people sat for hours  
just to listen to this man.**

**Some say he was a sorcerer,  
A man of mystery,  
He could walk upon the water,  
He could make a blind man see;  
That he conjured wine at weddings,  
and did tricks with fish and bread,  
That he talked of being born again  
And raised people from the dead.**

**Some say a politician,  
who spoke of being free;  
He was followed by the masses  
on the shores of Galilee.  
He spoke out against corruption  
and he bowed to no decree,  
But they feared his strength and power,  
So they nailed him to a tree.**

**Some say he was the Son of God,  
A man above all men,  
That he came to be a servant  
and to set us free from sin.  
And that's who I believe he was,  
And that's who I believe;  
And I think we should get ready  
'Cos it's time for us to leave!**

5. In the Larry Norman rock song, he sings that Jesus is the Son of God, one with God. Modern new age people like to think of Jesus as a wise sage only, like Buddha or Muhammad, but the New Testament makes clear that only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Explain what you think.

## 4. FOR THE PROMISE IS TO YOU...



**Acts 2.39** - God mobilises  
his people by the Holy Spirit

### 4.1 'spirit' in the Old Testament

The Hebrew and Greek words for spirit mean 'wind', 'breath' (air movement) or vital life force. To say God is spirit is to say he is life. When speaking of the Holy Spirit, however, a distinct reality is meant - one who is 'spirit', but the adjective Holy links this spirit only to the doings of the God who works and acts. So the Spirit of God worked to bring about creation, sustains creation, and acts to bring about God's purposes among people, particularly the purpose of each individual's redemption. (*Genesis 1.2 / Job 27.3 / Psalm 104.30 / Micah 2.7 / Isaiah 61.1-2*)

The special task of the Holy Spirit was to be the mobiliser of God's people as they worked out the promise to Abraham to bring blessing to all nations. He came upon or empowered the leaders of the Hebrews and those given particular tasks to enhance the Abrahamic purpose. Prophets

(Numbers 11.17/2 Kings 2-9-16/ Zechariah 7.12), judges (Judges 3.10/6.34/14.9), kings and civil leaders (1 Samuel 11.6/16.13/Numbers 11.17/ Nehemiah 2.12), craftsmen (Exodus 31.1-5/ 1 Kgs 7.13-14) were empowered for the duration of their ministry, short, medium or lifeterm. So the Hebrews were mobilised to fulfil the Abrahamic blessing, or God judged them for unfaithfulness by exile, then redemption.

#### **4.2 The Age of the Holy Spirit**

The Hebrews avoided the Abrahamic promise to the nations, were idolatrous and too often showed a racist/Zionist attitude, claiming God mobilised only Hebrews. Good leaders and prophets tried to correct this, but the Hebrews slowly backslid further. This decline led the Spirit to prompt prophets to speak of the time coming when the true people of God would take the Abrahamic promise of God's salvation to all people in the eternal Kingdom of God. In this time of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit would indwell and empower the Messiah to lead in these events (*Isaiah 11.2/42.1/61.1-2 /Jeremiah 33.14-16*), be the revelation of God (*Isaiah 9.6-7/ Jeremiah 23.1-8*), light and judge of the nations (*Isaiah 11.4-5/49.5-6 / Daniel 7.13-14 / Ezekiel 34.20-24*), the salvation

of the true people of God, and establisher of God's eternal Kingdom. (*Isaiah 4.2-6/49.6 / Jeremiah 23.5-6 / Ezekiel 17.22-24 / Amos 9.9-15 / Micah 5.2-5 / Zechariah 3.8-9*).

In this time the Holy Spirit would also baptise in the Spirit those who were God's true people through the messiah's salvation, then they would share in the building of the Kingdom of God and the fulfilment of Abraham's promise. This time unfolded with Jesus, Baptiser in the Holy Spirit. (*Jeremiah 31.31-34/Ezekiel 36.26-30/Is 49.6 / Joel 2.28-29*)

### **4.3 Jesus and the Holy Spirit**

As expected, Jesus lived and worked in the power of the Spirit as messiah. (See Chapter 3 again)

### **4.4 PENTECOST**

After Jesus' resurrection, something new was needed - Jesus working everywhere present in individuals. The Ascension marked the end of Jesus' work in bodily presence (*John 7.38-39/16.7*) opening the new way for Jesus to work. At Pentecost the OTHER HELPER was given. In him Jesus baptises Christians in the Holy Spirit and is present everywhere (*John 14.16-18/14.25-26/15.26-27/16.7-11/16.13-15*).

Acts Chapter 2 tells of the first Pentecost. The disciples *"were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (vs 4); they *"declared the wonders of God in other languages"* (vs 11) calling people to faith in their own language. Two months earlier they had run away in fear of arrest, now the Spirit mobilised them in boldness.

#### **4.4.1 The Baptism with the Holy Spirit**

Peter's sermon at Pentecost explained the link between Jesus and the Holy Spirit and the promise of the "baptism with the Holy Spirit" to Abraham's descendants and vss 37-47 tell of 3000 new members being added to the church. "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" given to each believer by Jesus Christ does 3 things:

- ◆ make the believer one with God's people
- ◆ mobilise each believer to witness to the good news of Jesus Christ
- ◆ works within each believer a new resurrected nature which develops and steadily replaces the old sinful nature.

For Jew and Gentile there was one common need to be "born of the Spirit" through the crucifixion-resurrection experience (*John 3.3-5*). The baptism with the Spirit which came at Pentecost completes

this becoming a new person with the assurance of God's favour, something those who don't know Jesus' crucifixion-resurrection experience lack and should be encouraged to find in Christianity.

## **4.5 THE SPIRIT AMONG US TODAY**

**4.5.1 Fruit of the Spirit:** The Spirit develops this aspect of the crucifixion-resurrection experience in us. Two bible passages, *Luke 4.18-19* and *Galatians 5.22*, list these results of the Spirit's work. They tell us we desire the new life of Christ individually and in our relationships with family, friends and others.

**4.5.2 Gifts of the Spirit:** This work of the Spirit specially empowers each individual in the church for some role which will aid other believers and the church to expand God's work. (*Romans 12.4-9/ 1 Corinthians 12.7-11/Ephesians 4.9-16/ 1 Peter 4.10-11*). For centuries these "gifts" were tied to church 'office' leadership only - ministers, bishops, etc. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement out of the 1904 Azusa Street revival renewed this practice among ordinary members and lay leaders across all churches, bringing widespread new dynamism to the churches. Our personal

career/hobby talents and skills overlap with these gifts; where they build up God's work, they are "gifts" of the Spirit. The career and hobbies we have are "gifts of the Spirit" meant to advance God's work as the Spirit mobilises us to advance God's liberation of a world trapped in confusion, sin and evil. Each member should ask what particular "gift" the Spirit has empowered them with and how it builds up God's work. Some of these gifts seem spectacular, communication gifts like speaking in tongues and interpretation, prophecy and wisdom, and also healing and exorcism. Their purpose is not - they help the salvation of the individual. God uses them to speak to the wayward, encourage the depressed, and give insight and conviction in times of confusion, and so help the congregation in which their use occurs. Members also need to know that the gifts have a messianic temptation factor about them - their purpose is for uplifting others, not ourselves. According to *1 Corinthians 13.13* "*These three remain; faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.*" Gifts of the Spirit build up faith, hope and love in members so that Jesus remains at the centre of individual and congregation life.

**4.5.3 Walking in the Spirit:** In *Ephesians 5.18* Paul said *"Do not get drunk with wine ... but be continually filled with the Spirit."* He describes a lifestyle for Christians in which self-centredness is always present, but is continually being pushed aside in us by the way of Jesus reaching out to others. This is the lifestyle of the Kingdom and the Age of the Spirit - the lifestyle called "walking in the Spirit" (*Ephesians 2.10/4.1*) It was by the Spirit that Jesus worked, was resurrected, and is with us forever. The Spirit has also begun *"a good work in you and will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (*Philippians 1.6*) So we should *"continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* (*Philippians 2.12-13*)

**Prayer Suggestion:** Lord Jesus, please baptise me in your Holy Spirit and grow in me the new life of the Spirit - Fruit of the Spirit, Gifts of the Spirit and Walking in the Spirit.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. Explain how the Holy Spirit works regeneration ('born again') in us.

2. Why is baptism with the Spirit often linked to things considered 'weird' - slaying in the Spirit, cultic style 'headcase' leaders?
3. Explain "baptism with the Holy Spirit" and how it happened to you.
4. Give a list of readings which show the Holy Spirit's
  - a. born again/regenerating work
  - b. baptism with the Spirit
  - c. fruit of the Spirit
  - d. gifts of the Spirit
  - e. walking in the Spirit
5. How is the Holy Spirit developing the life of Jesus in you? What fruit of the Spirit do you show, what gifts of the Spirit? How do you walk in the Spirit?

# 5. ALL THAT THE FATHER HAS IS MINE...



## John 16.15

### One God in Trinity

#### 5.1 GOD ATTRIBUTES

**5.1.1 God is Self-Revealing:** He revealed himself through his actions among the Hebrews in the Old Testament, then fully in Jesus Christ his Son, and He mobilises his people by the Holy Spirit.

**5.1.2 God is Spirit:** *John 4.24* explains the fundamental nature of God as spirit, in Hebrew and Greek meaning wind, breath, vital life force. God is life, creating, acting, giving energy to his creation and life to his creatures. He should be worshipped in spirit and truth.

#### 5.1.3 God lives, He acts in History

He alone is the **Living God**. When he delivered the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, idols and false gods were dead and inanimate. He liberates, protects from threats, judges sin and evil, and

takes care of our redemption. He became known as **God Almighty** because of the complete power with which he carried out his purpose – neither nations or nature stop him. He is the **Sovereign Lord** with purpose for all peoples willingly to accept him; he controls the rise and fall of empires, peoples and businesses, even using them against one another to judge evil. He is the **Creator**; his mighty acts in history led the prophets to understand he is also creator of all.

## **5.2 GOD IS ONE: totally other, the Holy One**

God is **One God**: no other gods, spirits, demons, ancestors or political kingdoms are equal; in the lands of idols or ancestral spirits, he mocks their lack of power.

God is **Faithful**; unlike humans who regularly turn away to idols and false spirituality, he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

God is **Just**: part of his acts of salvation is to liberate the poor and oppressed (*Proverbs 3.34/Matthew 5.3-12/Luke 6.20f/James 2.5-7/4.6*), as his laws summed up in the 10 Commandments, show in Jesus' perfect example. Be right with God and love your neighbour as yourself, for God sees each individual, to oppress or cheat anyone is to attack God. (*Psalms 146.5-10*).

God is a **JEALOUS** God: as no other idol or spirit is like him, to turn to false gods or take him lightly as modern people do, is to mock him (*Ex 20.5*). It's not negative, absolute respect is due to him for he has no rivals.

God is **All Knowing**: He knows the past, present and future of his purpose and any attempt to disrupt this (*Revelation 1.8/Psalm 2*), he knows the heart of each person (*Psalms 139*), no sparrow dies without him knowing (*Matthew 10.20*).

**God is Everywhere Present**; heaven isn't up in the sky, but where God is Spirit. No matter where God's people went, he went with and before them beyond 4 dimensional boundaries.

**God is Eternal**; he created the universe with the "4 dimensions" including time as part of it. Infinity is a concept about God's eternity.

### **5.3 God is Personal**

God called individuals and cut a covenant with them, and covenanted with a people - the Hebrews. Now God calls and covenants one-on-one with individuals globally in the one apostolic and catholic church under the new covenant in Jesus' cross and resurrection. Jesus work and parables, like the Prodigal Father's Love, show us that **GOD IS LOVE**. The best Old Testament

example had been the prophet Hosea's ongoing love for his unfaithful wife – even buying her back from sexual slavery. God is like that with us – redeeming us by and in Jesus' giving himself for us. (*John 3.16*)

Love is the centre of God's character, even before God's justness and holiness, which are complete only because God loves as he has in Jesus.

## **5.4 GOD IS TRINITY**

ONE GOD works creation and redemption, yet in interacting in person in self-revelation with us as Father, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit, God self-reveals as Trinity. With St. Augustine: “...we say 'three persons' not in order to express it, but in order not to be silent.”

**Prayer Suggestion:** Lord God, help me to appreciate You are one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to accept the power of love You give because this is who You are.

## **Discussion Tasks:**

1. **READ John 4.24:** God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. Explain what you think this means.

2. Write down what you think “God is One, God is totally other...” means.
3. What kind of things do you do which mean that you are not showing God respect and love, but giving honour to false spirituality or idols which are not equal to God, and so are under God's good jealousy.
4. How do you know God is personal? Why does this mean that we should keep a good relationship with Him?
5. Christians believe in one God, and describe how God – Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit – is one using the word Trinity. Try and explain this in your words.

## 6. IT IS BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED, THROUGH FAITH...



### Ephesians 2.8-9 -

## Who/what are we humans?

### 6.1 Who am I?

The questions "Who am I? What is my purpose?" worry the people of our small crowded globe today because internationalism has made the world such a small and crowded place. Competition in culture, evolution and science, religion, education, psychology and economics gives many answers, most of irreconcilable differences. Jesus' answer is probably least listened to. People either don't believe in God or aren't sure he exists and treat him as irrelevant. Whether agnostic, atheist, subsistence or welfare type, secular ideas make humans survivors of the fittest in the progress of biological and economic life, or victims, so people are supposed to be more educated and enlightened now. Yet this century has seen two world wars and more smaller wars, Nazi/ Stalinist/ Khmer Rouge/ Ugandan/ Rwandan and other

genocides, industrial pollution on global warming scale, arms and space races, nuclear arsenals of doomsday proportions. Much global tension also has religious confrontation. How humans act looks like Sisyphus the Greek myth rock roller... confusion reigns.

## **6.2 HUMAN NATURE AND FAITH**

In this confusion 'Who we are?' comes down to how we face up to responsible interaction with others.

**6.2.1 The Sinful Nature:** A destructive or negative act against another, oneself, creation or God is a "sin", be the act great or small. Our human nature is sinful – negative towards God, so continually shrinking our ability to interact positively and progressively with God, others and creation. Its about trying to make ourselves god and rejecting Him and Jesus whom He chose. The Bible speaks of the "old self of sin" as "powerless to deal with the negative without God, as "God's enemies" and as deserving the "wages of sin which is death" – unless fixed. Evil and sin cause this, and life's challenge is to live positively towards God and one's neighbour to overcome  
(*Romans 5.6,10/6.6/6.23*).

### **6.2.2 Sin, Crucifixion-Resurrection Experience:**

The Bible offers the "good news" or "GOSPEL" in answer: "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3.23), but Romans 6.23 says "*...the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" The Christian answer to "Who am I?", to sin, is the "CRUCIFIXION-RESURRECTION EXPERIENCE" of Jesus Christ to break the power of sin on the cross and in the resurrection with Jesus:

- ◆ **God's grace** (undeserved favour) initiated Jesus' death and resurrection in love as the only method to deal with sin. NB!! We can claim nothing as our own good effort. (*John 3.16; Rom 5.10; Gal 4.4; Eph 2.5-9; 1 Pet 1.10-12*).
- ◆ the **Holy Spirit uses our faith** to put us in Jesus' death & resurrection, to crucify sinner and sins, and to resurrect a new positive, progressive life of Jesus in us. This is a new life principle which develops and overwhelms the old sinful nature, as baptism shows (see Chapter 3, page 5; and Mark 8.35; Romans 6.1-4; 2 Corinthians 5.16-17; Colossians 2.11-15) NB!! It's always faith, never magic or ritual or duty, which liberates us from sin for new life.
- ◆ Its outcome is **Regeneration**, 'being born again' which many people use. (*John 3.3-7; 2 Corinthians 5.17; 1 Peter 1.3*).

- ◆ Finally, its finish is the 'baptism with the Holy Spirit' (see Chapter 4, page 8).

## SO WE ARE...

### 6.2.3 Crucified, Forgiven Sinners:

- ◆ **We are forgiven sinners,** God's forgiveness comes through the crucifixion-resurrection experience. We repent (turn away) from past sin and guilt, we learn from the past and it doesn't rule us, and we live in the present for God's future. The crucial part of our identity is that in Jesus Christ we are chosen.
- ◆ **We are individualists and republicans:** Since the same crucifixion-resurrection experience baptises each believer with the same Spirit, each believer hears something of God, so all participate in decision making. None is special, elite and can hear from God better than others - not kings, or any unelected political leaders, so we have no king but Jesus; not popes, archbishops or bishops, so we have no unelected church leaders. To admit unelected leaders is to deny that the same Holy Spirit works in each believer. We love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

- ◆ **We are family, friend, church and neighbour/stranger respecting:** The new life always builds up, and does not abuse, exploit or destroy others. We work hard in a career, are heterosexual marriage monogamous and family orientated, keep God's standards through church and personal faith, are sociable and sporting and helpful to friends, and interact positively with strangers. We love our neighbours as ourselves.
- ◆ **We are positive, progressive and self-sufficient:** The new life of Jesus in our situation always drives at overcoming unbelief, poverty, ignorance, disease and evil, as God's plan showed in Jesus' own death and resurrection. Key to this is to successfully stand on our own two feet and reflect the power of the crucifixion-resurrection experience as transformed individuals. Competitive education with a crucifixion-resurrection experience as motivation is vital here in developing right. We are salt of the earth, light of the world.
- ◆ **We are respecting and managing of spirit, self and creation:** Since this is our temporal home, how we handle it reflects

our faith. Sickly people living in filthy homes and in filthy, polluted neighbourhoods with high immorality and crime don't reflect the Saviour Jesus, but rather just how confused they are. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, our homes, neighbourhoods and nation are to be touched by the kingdom of God drawn near.

### **6.3 Be Part of God's Growth, not Confused Vibes**

Modern secular people don't believe humans are by nature sinful, that's seen as outdated. People are basically good, their environment and genetic background cause destructive behaviours against others, themselves and creation. There's no more good or evil. On a percentage sliding scale, each person in his/her biological, sociological, psychological, religious, sexual, economic, political, artistic and other aspect, over the whole person, has behaviour between 1 to 100% developed of normal/abnormal or social/anti-social level. The idea of individual personal responsibility, with value judgement against a person befitting the seriousness of the sin, is considered outdated, because each person has a percentage 'capable' or 'diminished responsibility' due to low develop-

mental level in one or more aspects.

Reality is so different. If we want real change and transformation in our lives it's better to live by Jesus' measure of us. Then confusion and sin don't just go on being glossed over, but the change of the Crucifixion-Resurrection experience and new life in Jesus by the Holy Spirit bring out victory in life.

**Prayer Suggestion:** Lord Jesus, you lived like me and won, By your grace, help me to live more like you and I will win for me, my people and others.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. The Bible sees humans as self-sufficient and individually responsible, accountable before God for our own positive or sinful actions, with allowance for one's development age. Explain what you think.
2. The Bible solution is "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.." How does this really change the old 'sinful nature' into Jesus' new life in us?

3. You know of 'friends' into drink/drugs/easy sex/gansterism/crime/ other vices because its cool, but is this their under-developed self-responsibility or sin? Explain your answer.
4. Modern viewpoint is that humans are only accountable to the greater or diminished responsibility of their development level, be it in positive or anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour happens because people havn't learnt or underdeveloped the positive; there is no sin or sinful nature which can cause this. What do you think?
5. Christianity claims that only proper 'born again'/ regeneration/sharing in the crucifixion experience fixes the problem of sin. How does it do this? List some results of this.

# 7. EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE...



## Matthew 7.24 -

God's Book, OR Hebrew myth?

### 7.1 THE BIBLE IS 'INSPIRED'

The Bible is God's book, 'inspired' by the Holy Spirit. To know God in Jesus, read the Bible, nothing else is accurate. It's not dictated by angels, but written by prophets or apostles as primary witnesses, or by those approved by them. It's the only consistently reliable witness to Jesus and God's way. Martin Luther said **"Go to the Bible itself, dear Christians, and let my expositions and those of all scholars be no more than a tool with which to build aright..."** The World Council of Churches says it is **"a fellowship of churches and organisations which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES"**... Most churches stick to this, if they don't, don't stick with them. Christians believe and live by balanced Bible teaching and practices. (*Exodus 34.27.28; Luke*

24.25-27; John 20.30-31; Romans 15.4; 2 Timothy 3.15-17; 2 Peter 1.19-21)

This role for the Bible in Christianity has been constant in all encounters with lobby groups, different eras, religions, cultures and political systems over nearly 2000 years. It's standards prioritise the Jesus way of life above standards like the new Constitution of SA, declarations of Human Rights, or other religious beliefs. *Acts 4.19* tells us that Christians, fully aware of possible repercussions, need to "*obey God rather than humans*": when prioritising life choices, prioritise by Bible standards

## **7.2 THE MEANS AND MANNER OF WRITING OF THE BIBLE WERE ADVANCED**

**7.2.1 The Hebrew Old Testament**: from Abraham to Moses, +/-2000-1450 BC, Hebrews lived in the Mesopotamia to Egypt fertile crescent - an area of commerce and learning recorded in cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing. From Moses, +/-1450-1350 BC, the Hebrews returned to Palestine with oral or written records of patriarchal times on clay tablets, leather scrolls or papyrus. Out of Canaanitic, the first alphabetic language of +/-1700-1600 BC, the

Hebrew of David's kingdom +/- 1000BC was developed. Records and laws behind Genesis to Judges, 1,2 Samuel and 1,2 Kings were available. (*Joshua 8.32-35/10.13/18.4-9/ Numbers 21.14/ 2 Samuel 1.18, and the books of the "Annals of the kings of Israel/Judah", 1 Kings 14.19,29*) These were edited into the Hebrew Old Testament between David and Hezekiah, with final edit +/- 520 BC in Ezra's time. Prophets like Isaiah and Hosea recorded or had their messages recorded +/-750-700 BC; Jeremiah, Ezekiel and smaller prophets +/-625-570 BC. 1,2 Chronicles, Ezra/Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther and others were written 550-450 BC, the Psalms Hymnbooks, Proverbs and others from David to Ezra finalised +/- 500 BC.

**7.2.2 The Greek New Testament:** After Jesus' resurrection +/-30AD, 20 years of oral remembrance of Jesus was followed by +25 years of apostolic writing. Paul in Galatians and 1,2 Thessalonians, and James (Jesus' brother) wrote +/- 48-49 AD. Paul and Peter wrote letters until +/- 61 AD. Peter's preaching is in Mark's gospel +/- 64-65 AD (used as the most reliable chronology for Jesus' life and work). Mark's gospel was used by Matthew and Luke in +/-62-75 AD for their

gospels, Luke also added Acts. John wrote his gospel independently in +/-68-75 AD, with his letters, then Revelation +/-95-96AD. The New Testament is written in 'Koine' Greek, the common language in market trade and politics of the Roman empire at the time.

## **7.3 THE MANUSCRIPTS ARE ACCURATE**

**7.3.1 OT Bible Manuscripts:** By about 500 BC all the books in the Old Testament were finalised in Hebrew. The Hebrew Old Testament was preserved in the Massorete manuscripts, +/-900AD. When the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts of 200-100 BC were found in 1948, transmission accuracy of the Hebrew Bible was verified.

**7.3.2 NT Bible Manuscripts:** The nearly 5400 ancient manuscripts and fragments of the New Testament dating from +/-125-500 AD, make it the best preserved ancient book on earth. The best manuscripts of the NT are Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Alexandrinus (+/-350-400 AD), written at the Catechetical School in Alexandria. Thousands of other manuscripts predate them, the earliest manuscript fragment, of John 18.31-38 from +/-120-130 AD, was found in Egypt.

**7.3.3 Reliable:** The above John fragment, called P<sup>52</sup>, closed down a widespread poorly evidenced scholar opinion that John's gospel was written +/- 160 AD not by the apostle, so wasn't reliable. The Dead Sea Scrolls did much the same with liberal Old Testament scholarship. **Archeology generally confirms the transmission accuracy of the Bible, and the accuracy of the events and history it gives.**

#### **7.3.4 Bible Manuscript Transmission is Superior to other History Manuscripts:**

Besides the Bible, Roman authors like Tacitus, Seutonius, Pliny the Younger, and the Jewish Talmud writers record that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate – it's 100% fact. Josephus notes a resurrection account. But how do manuscripts of history books by other writers of the time compare with the New Testament? Manuscripts of Julius Caesar, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, and Herodotus, are only few in number between 10 and 20 copies, and date from 900-1000 AD, 900 years later than earliest NT fragments. New Testament manuscript evidence is way better.

### **7.3.4 Bible Manuscript Transmission Superior to other Faith Manuscripts:**

The Qu'ran, written down about 644 AD, speaks of Jesus 600 years after Jesus' time so is not credible about either Jesus or the Old Testament. The "Aquarian Gospel" or "Testament of Levi" is a 20th century hippy hoax to link Jesus to the Hindu style New Age Movement. Other faith writings don't mention Jesus. The oldest known Vedic manuscript dates 1400-1500 AD, with oral transmission of +/-3000 years, so is very poor manuscript evidence. Buddha's dates are disputed (either 563-483BC or +/-400-320BC), and the Pali texts of Buddhism were written +/-80BC with 300-400 years of oral transmission; with poor manuscript evidence it could be more. Other faith teaching about Jesus has no historical credibility. Further, as manuscript and archeological evidence of most other faiths is poor, the validation of their own faith conclusions from their own evidence is of low value.

## **7.4 THE BIBLE MESSAGE IS STILL RIGHT**

**7.4.1 The Old Testament:** The Bible message is this - God created the universe with earth as home for humans, who are caught in a cycle of poverty,

ignorance, disease, sin and unbelief of their own and evil's making. Down history God revealed himself as the loving, only true God by the historical acts he did. He worked the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt to the promised land, and kept his people in other ways. He also used prophets and other leaders to preach his way amidst idols and backsliding, and unfold the promise of the messiah who was to come.

**7.4.2 The New Testament:** At the right time God sent his Son, the messiah of the universe whose life, death, resurrection and giving of the Holy Spirit is the perfect complete act of God in history, of self-revelation by God, of fulfilment of prophecy, and of salvation. Jesus' life is of such quality that to reject him or be apathetic to his love is to discriminate against oneself as not seeing true life value and standards. Those who hear and believe receive eternal life with abundant developing life in the present, so sin, evil and decay are dealt with now and forever.

God's jealousy also consistently rejected other gods, spirits and philosophies, for they are not from him and do not save. Outside his working in Jesus, those who do not hear of Jesus only have a maybe answer. God still saves, but as this is

only sure in Jesus and God's judgement outside Jesus is unclear, the Christian's care is best expressed in witness. (See Chapters 2 and 3)

## **7.5 MODERN VERSION TRANSLATIONS**

Modern versions of the Bible with full, excellent quality translations of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament, with specialist translation assistance from other ancient language versions of both are great. There are two types:

**7.5.1 Versions based on the KJV:** The King James Version of 1611 was the first widespread translation of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Its language was outdated by 1900, new English versions were completed based on the KJV because of the great spiritual power it had, and its influence on modern English. Most popular:

*NIV: New International Version*

*ESV: English Standard Version*

*NASV: New American Standard Version*

*NKJV: New KJV.*

**7.5.2 Other Versions:** Many new fully independently translated versions of the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts have also been published; most of high quality.

*GNV: Good News Bible (also known as TEV Today's English Version)*

*Living Bible (and other paraphrase versions which read easily)*

*Amplified Bible (and other expanded theological meaning versions) and*

*Study Bibles (with margin or footnote commentaries and study aids)*

**Prayer Suggestion:** Heavenly Father, open your Word in the Bible to me and help me to be faithful in quiet times and Bible Study.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

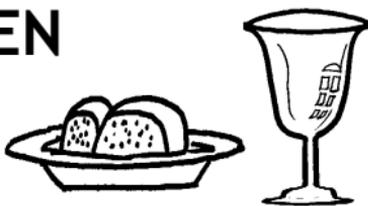
1. Why is your personal quiet time and Bible Study life good/sliding away?
2. List your favourite Old Testament and New Testament books/passages.
3. If the Bible was not dictated by God, who wrote it? Can it still be 'inspired'?

4. Why do you think Christianity has good evidence for the Bible gospels of Jesus?
5. Many modern people say "I don't believe in the Bible, I believe in science", but aren't honest in this because they still use star signs, charms, eastern meditations, spirit mediums and more. What do you feel about Jesus' gospel and about science?

# 8. LIVE AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

## Ephesians 5.8...

### Basic Christian Lifestyle



#### 8.1 WORSHIP

Paul challenged us to *"Offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, which is our intelligent worship. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world any longer, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind; then you will be able to test & approve what God's will is."* (Rom 12.1-2). Worship is more than just an attachment to our working week. It is a life service to God daily in walking in the way of his Kingdom, part of which is lifting up heart, soul and body in praise to God. It is mainly a meeting with God himself, acknowledging his acts as scripture tells them, thanking him for working on our behalf, and renewing trust to open the future for us. This we do through hymns, prayer, reading, preaching, sacraments and fellowship. The congregation is to worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of the resurrection and the coming of the Holy

Spirit. The power of worship and prayer in a congregation far outweighs individual prayer. (*Exodus 20.1-5; Matthew 18.19-20; Acts 4.23-31/2.42-47; 1 Corinthians 16.2; James 5.13-16; Revelation 4,5*)

## **8.2 PRIVATE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

Prayer isn't a private last chance with God. It is two way communicating with God at any time. Good spiritual practice is a regular 'quiet time' or 'meditation time': both Jesus and the apostles used such time to renew motivation and gain guidance. Most often they considered a Bible passage, as shown by the number of times they quote from the Bible. This spills over into house groups/Bible studies/fellowship groups in which the main principle besides fellowship is to use such groups as in *Rom 10.17*. John also wrote in *1 Jn 5.14-15* "*This is the confidence we have in Jesus, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.*"

(*Mark 1.35; Matthew 5.1-13/6.1-18; Colossians 3.15-17; 2 Timothy 2.15/3.16-17; 1 Peter 4.7-11*)

## 8.3 THE SACRAMENTS

Communion and Baptism were instituted by Jesus as the only two means of grace if linked to hearing his Word. They focus on the redemption Jesus won for us and help us in the CRUCIFIXION-RESURRECTION EXPERIENCE OF JESUS. They stress unity in Christ's catholic 'worldwide' Church and strengthen local church unity.

**8.3.1 Baptism/Confirmation:** John the Baptist started baptising to call people to be conscious of their sin and guilt, and to repent. So he announced Jesus' coming. Jesus was baptised by John not for his own sin but to link him to our sin, and to be revealed as the one who would fulfil the sign of baptism by his crucifixion, resurrection and sending of the Spirit. Jesus told his disciples to baptise, he never baptised with water. (*Mark 1.8/1.15; John 1.33;4.2; Hebrews 4.15*) The water act signifies faith that we 'go under' with his crucifixion and death to bury our sinner and sins in his burial; so we are forgiven. And we 'come up' with his resurrection and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to be in Jesus' new resurrected life developing in us. God and not sin dominates our new life. At Pentecost Peter said "*Repent, be*

*baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - all whom the Lord will call."* It is all by faith, the water or baptising never saves us.

*(Acts 2.38-39/10.45-48/19.5-6; Romans 6.1-10; 1 Corinthians 12.13; Titus 3.4-7)*

**Dual Practice of Baptism:** Christians use two baptismal practices - *Infant Baptism-Believer Confirmation*, and *Infant Dedication-Believer Baptism*. Christians squabble over which is correct, but we are saved by faith, not when the water, or how much water, is used. Christians use both types, often as parents' prefer. *Important components of baptism in both practices are:*

- ◆ *Personal faith:* whether it is to confirm belief according to their infant baptism, or receive believer baptism, each Christian must give confession of a personal faith relationship with Jesus for full Christian recognition. Adults who have not been Christian before or who have not been baptised before and who publicly profess their faith in and give evidence of their conversion to faith in Jesus Christ also receive believer baptism.

- ◆ *Covenant welcome*: babies and children of practicing believers also belong to God's covenant with his people, the church. When God makes his covenant of salvation with people who are parents, the extended family under the believing one is also considered part of the covenant until able to hold individual faith. The welcome is by infant baptism or infant dedication, as the parents choose. Remember, it is never the act of baptism that saves, it is always personal faith.  
(*Matt 28.18-20; Acts 2.38-39/8.38/16.15/16.33*).

**Three ways to use the water**: Baptism is done in three ways - by full immersion, literally following Jesus' example; by pouring the water which stresses the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believers; by sprinkling of water showing the sprinkling of the believer with the blood of Christ in our receiving the new covenant. Christians may use any of these. Remember, the amount of water does not save, faith does alone. (*Ezekiel 36.26; Acts 2; Hebrews 12.24; 1 Peter 1.2*)

**8.3.2 Holy Communion**: The Lord's Supper makes us act out in community the fact that Jesus died for us so we could become one with the body

of Christ/the family of God; Jesus' death is the reason for the bread and wine. In the communion:

- ◆ *We remember that we are forgiven sinners* - as we eat and drink we also swallow our pride, burying it at the cross of God's love.
- ◆ *We are a family united around the Lord's Table* and sharing his grace for us.
- ◆ *We have the peace that passes all understanding* for we know God loves each one of us with equal favour as we are.

We are thus nourished by Jesus Christ and have a renewed commitment to God's kingdom. Each member also renews his responsibility to his brothers/sisters in the Lord. Further, if we don't respect the Jesus of the communion and all whom He accepts as his, we put ourselves outside God's favour. In the sacraments we declare our perseverance in faith and love. Baptism is only received once; we partake regularly of Communion to continue developing and sharing as one of God's people.

*(Mark 14.12-25; Acts 2.42-47; Romans 8.32; 1 Corinthians 11.23-34)*

## 8.4 SHARING JESUS WITH OTHERS

Christians also have a responsibility to those in our society who are not christians. By example and verbal witness, as a church together and individually, we need to tell them what God has done for us so that they can also come to know him as Saviour and belong to his people. (*Matthew 28.18-20; John 18.20-23; Acts 1.8; Romans 10.14-15; Revelation 7.1-17*)

In John 4.5-26 we see a practical example of Jesus witnessing to the woman at the well:

1. *Jesus took opportunity*: He was tired (vs 5-6) but still began to interact positively with her, as we should.
2. *Jesus initiated the interaction*: He asked "Give me a drink", making himself vulnerable first and putting himself in her debt with water as common ground for conversation.
3. *Jesus aroused interest*: Her curious response had been aroused for Jewish men were not allowed to talk to women, especially not Samaritan women. We too can relate across social barriers for Jesus Christ.

4. *Jesus told of the true God:* He alludes to special water he alone can give, so we can tell of the real spiritual and material life and change Jesus can give.
5. *Jesus told of forgiveness for her sin:* She had serious men problems, so she tried to change the subject by alluding to denominational differences between Jews and Samaritans. Jesus gently led her back to the real issue - what was her relationship with him, for Jesus is the messiah? So too we will have people avoid talking of Jesus or sin, change the subject on us, or sidetrack us.

The issue is what relationship each individual has with Jesus, this is what to sort out. We must know what our own story is with God, how to tell others that story, and how to bring sidetrackers back to the real issue - personal faith in Jesus Christ. It will help in talking to people to know current affairs, traditions and prejudices to use them and not be sidetracked. But most important, witness without personal example and friendship is just JW style - offensive. Let's be humble, friendly and not ashamed to tell others of our personal faith and how it works for us.

## 8.5 WORK, STEWARDSHIP & BLESSING

God created the universe and earth as home for humankind, then humans in his image, with the responsibility to watch over and manage creation - stewardship over creation and the gifts God gave us for that - skills, talents, work, pleasure, relationships, etc. God is the owner of everything which He gave to humankind's management. He honoured creating us and shares his work with us.

**8.5.1 Work:** We should use our skills, work and income wisely in the modern fast buck, seductive advert and high unemployment world. To work creatively is to share something of God's nature, and is a part of God's will in making us in His image. When work is distorted by sin, it is a curse. Work done positively for God is worth more than wages. (*Genesis 2.15; Exodus 20.8/34.21; Deuteronomy 8.18; Galatians 6.4; 2 Thessalonians 3.6; 2 Timothy 2.4; 1 Timothy 5.18; Matthew 6.31-34; Genesis 3.17-18; Leviticus 19.13/25.1-55; Romans 8.18-21; Colossians 4.1*)

**8.5.2 Stewardship:** The Offering, the Old Testament "tithe", 10% of income, was given to God's work - to maintain the temple, expand its

work to reach more people, help the poor and support the priests so they could serve God free of worry over income for everyday necessities (*Genesis 14.17-24; Deuteronomy 14.22-29; Malachi 3.6-12*). In the New Testament stewardship is expanded. The "tithe or tenth" after tax (as in the OT) is the basic offering, but God's property is not just to be managed, but also used to expand the Kingdom of God. Those with abundance of income, housing etc. share with those in need, submitting it to Christ's body for use. The motivation is *Ephesians 2.8-9* that we are saved by God's grace alone, so we give in the same spirit that God gives to us - out of love. *Hebrews 9.14* shows this is threefold:

- ◆ SACRIFICIAL giving, for God did not hesitate to give his Son;
- ◆ SPONTANEOUS giving, for God knew our need of salvation and supplied it;
- ◆ SPIRITUAL AND JOYFUL, for from God's giving He rejoiced at our eternal life.  
(*Acts 4.32-37/2 Corinthians 8.13-15*).

2 Corinthians 8.1-9 has a Christian example. The churches of Macedonia, though suffering poverty and trial, gave sacrificially and spontaneously, for they wished to help the famine-struck Christians in Palestine; and they gave spiritually and joyfully,

knowing they had a special chance to share in God's work of redemption and show Christian love (vs 8-9). Our offering should be like this today - the work of God still needs maintaining, support to expand to more people with the gospel and with help and guidance for the poor.

**8.5.3 Blessing:** The one time God challenges us to test him is in our regular offering (*Malachi 3.10-12/1 Corinthians 16.1-2*). When we are faithful and we test him, He promises to respond in overflowing abundance of material and spiritual blessings. It is the only instance in which God actively challenges us to test him in any way. "Speaker's Sourcebook" (Doan, E) lists these "Financial Beatitudes/Blessings" from stewardship: **Blessed is the person who is out of debt, he shall be free;**  
(*Proverbs 22.26-27/Romans 13.8*)

**Blessed is the person who seeks Godly counsel, he shall receive wisdom;**  
(*Ecclesiastes 4.9-12/Matthew 6.19-24/James 5.1-6*)

**Blessed is the person who works as unto the Lord, he shall stand before kings**  
(*Daniel 6.1-3/Matthew 25.14-30*)

**Blessed is the person of integrity, he shall have a clear conscience;**  
(*Exodus 20.15-17/Mat 18.21-35*)

Blessed is the person who saves, he shall be able to provide for the family;

*(Proverbs 21.20/24.27/Ecclesiastes 5.13-15)*

Blessed is the person who shares mercifully, he shall receive mercy;

*(Proverbs 11.24/Matthew 6.19-20/1 Timothy 6.18-19)*

Blessed is the person who budgets, he shall have enough at the end of the month;

*(Proverbs 24.3-4/Luke 16.1-13)*

Blessed is the good and faithful steward, for he shall be content in every circumstance.

*(Matthew 20.1-16)*

## **8.6 MORAL CHRISTIAN LIVING**

When a rabbi asked Jesus "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?", Jesus gave an answer which is the key to personal peace and prosperity. *"The most important one is this: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

The two commandments Jesus quoted sum up the 10 commandments and moral Christian living:

1. we have a personal relationship with God in which we worship him alone, we worship in holy respect and repentance, not abuse;
2. we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ's crucifixion-resurrection experience for that alone satisfies this loving the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength;
3. we have a personal relationship with God in which the baptism of the Spirit so develops Jesus' new resurrected life in us that loving our neighbour as ourselves (summary of the the last 6 of the 10 commandments) is fulfilled in us in growing pattern of the way Jesus fulfilled it.

We honour a day of rest in order to eliminate abusing our own minds, bodies and work relationships. We honour parents, live to build others up, practice one husband-one wife marriage, practice honest and self-sufficient work and trade and ownership of goods and services. And we honour truth and true witness, and find peace with our own competence and ambitions and achievements. We reject abuse of work and resources, rebellion against family values into anti-

social behaviour and abandoning of the aged. We reject murder and criminal force and violent coercion, and betrayal of the marriage relationship. We reject stealing in all forms, we reject lies and false witness and cover ups and propaganda and hate speech. We reject covetousness.

*(Exodus 20.1-17; Mark 12.28-34; Romans 6.1-23/13.1-14; 1 John 2.1-11)*

## **8.7 CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

God created man and woman with the nature that desires marriage as the lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. The good marriage best builds up full life partnership between a man and woman. The good marriage provides the best role modelling and psychological and emotional environment for childrearing. And good marriages best lift up society to be strong and happy because of the huge positive spirit and trustworthiness and nurturing they offer in present and future generations.

*(Mark 10.2-12; John 2.1-11; 1 Corinthian 7.1-16; Ephesians 5.21-33)*

Only good Christian marriage gives the partnership and commitment which builds true

love and freedom in the relationship. Bible teaching is that any other relationship besides Christian marriage is not God's plan and will always be second best and sin: some, like polygamy or living together or free love/sex relationships or one night stands, are about the self-satisfaction of one or both individuals without partnership but in subservience, convenience or promiscuity; others, like affairs and escorting/prostitution, homo-sexuality and lesbianism, and bestiality are betraying and unnatural.

*(Exodus 20.14; Leviticus 18/20.10-21; Romans 1.18-32; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20; 1 Peter 4.3-6)*

### **8.7.1 Relationship Repentance & Forgiveness:**

Jesus called marriage sins and sex sins what they are - sins. But he ministered love and repentance, not judgement and condemnation. *"Go and leave your life of sin."*

*(Luke 7.36-50; John 8. 3-11; 1 John 1.9)*

**Prayer Suggestions:** Lord Jesus, keep me faithful in taking Communion and in living out the meaning of Communion and Baptism.

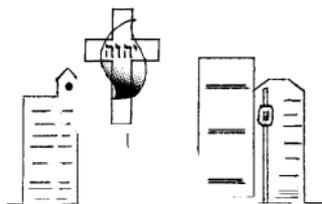
Help me to hear and obey your Word in worship, witness, work and tithing, and blessing.

## **Discussion Tasks:**

1. Explain how you practice your personal relationship with Jesus.
2. What is the main message of the Sacrament of baptism?
3. What is the main message of the Sacrament of Communion?
4. Why should we live moral lives, and be good neighbours?
5. Why should we live married lives in relationships?
6. God created work and gave the responsibility of stewardship. How are you responsible in this?

# 9. YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE

## 1 Peter 2.9...



The Church goes into modern life

### 9.1 THE APOSTLE'S CHURCH

Jesus' apostles wrote that the Church was Jesus' people gathering in worship of God. It is the assembly of the messiah's people, the people of the baptism with the Spirit in the age of the Spirit. Leadership and use of gifts were in servanthood under Jesus the living head, by the mobilising of the Spirit through the priesthood of all believers, not by position-jealous guardians of rigid institutional structures. The Church gathers for pastoring of God's flock so leaders can develop and grow each member's personal faith with God; it gathers to evangelise as gospel movement to all peoples. (*Matthew 28.18-20; John 13.1-17; Acts 2.42-47/4.32-35/10.9-23/13.1-3/15.1-35; 1 Peter 2.4-10*)

## **9.2 THE 'CATHOLIC GLOBAL' CHURCH**

After the apostles and their next generation of 'apostolic fathers' died, the 'church fathers' followed (+/-175-400 AD). Five leading Church centres - Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople (Istanbul) arose. Rome remains as centre of Roman Catholicism, Istanbul/Moscow as Eastern Orthodox centres, and Alexandria as centre of the Coptic Church. Islamic invasions of 700-1456 AD overran all except Rome. Roman Catholics lead Europe; Eastern Orthodoxy leads the Slavic East and Russia; Copts struggle in Egypt and Sudan, and lead in Ethiopia.

## **9.3 THE CHURCH ALWAYS REFORMING**

From 1350 Roman Catholic corruption saw many calls for reform from William of Occam, John Wyclif, John Huss and Jerome in Prague. Martin Luther (1489-1546) took over the call, starting the Reformation on 31 Oct 1517. Luther's studies as theology professor convinced him salvation was by faith alone. Paying 'indulgence money' to have sins forgiven and some salvation gained was fraud by Catholics. Similar protest grew in Switzerland

with Zwingli and John Calvin (1509-1564 - initiator of Presbyterianism), in Scotland with John Knox (1505-1572), England, Holland and Scandinavia. The pope reacted by excommunicating Reformation/Evangelical Christians violently, causing "Protestants" to resist oppression. Many years of brutal war followed till peace in 1648.

More than the elitist Renaissance, the Reformation changed the world because its followers came from all classes, even the majority common folk. Each mature believer is regenerated by the Spirit, each person is responsible for his own faith salvation with God, all could hear God and none heard better just because he was in some way 'superior', like a bishop or king. Protestant churches thus included ministers and members in church-democracy decision making: (in its Congregation-Presbytery-General Assembly structure, the first Presbyterian Scottish General Assembly was 20 Dec 1560). This individualism is a basis for Western democracy. Other church styles also arose - Baptists about the same time, Methodists in +/-1740. Adapted church-structure versions are used by most democracies today, the USA (largely founded by Protestants fleeing Catholic/Anglican persecution in Europe), UK, France, Germany, South Africa. Even the United

Nations, the WCC and other organisations use Protestant rooted General Assembly structures.

The Church had also undertaken huge missionary expansion: Catholics grew in South and Central America and Portuguese Africa, Russian Orthodox expanded across Siberia and even into Alaska, the Coptic/Ethiopian Churches struggled with no mission expansion as Islam pressed them. The Protestants first missionary task was to give Bibles to Europeans and Americans in their own languages so that each believer could read, make his own informed opinions, and properly support church democracy (modern democracies as well). By 1700 missionaries started to go all over the world, and the success of European Protestantism in the Industrial Revolution of 1750-1850 led to the great Protestant missionary expansion of 1792-1910. Christianity became the world's leading global religion.

#### **9.4 PENTECOSTALS, CHARISMATICS AND INDEPENDENTS**

Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic and Protestant churches battle with the modern era because their leaders often tie in with aloof elite global

leadership to overlord over the common majority. The Holy Spirit raised up a new "third Christianity" called Pentecostalism globally since 1906: the April 1906 Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles is said to have started the 'speaking in tongues' Pentecost gift again after non-use since the time of the church fathers. But Pentecostal speciality in Holy Spirit gifts was used to give roles again to ordinary people in God's mission, not just bishop or intellectual upper class style as in other churches, and was its real victory.

Similar reaction took place in previously colonised countries, from China to Chile, and started a new "fourth Christianity". Local peoples formed 'Independent Churches' with much closer worship and theological links to their own cultural background in very deliberate change from 'euro-centrism' of the other three church forms, but also seeking roles for ordinary people. Some 'inculturation' theology and leadership is still developing, so can be suspect. Independent churches are very strong in Africa. The Holy Spirit likes ordinary person involvement and not aloof globalist leadership.

## **9.5 THE GLOBAL CHURCH TODAY**

From 1910 the global church faced new challenges:

**Secularism:** After two world wars, the atom bomb and the Great Depression, science academics spoke of the Post-Christian Era. Science since Newton, Darwin and Mendel, and Einstein, takes secular 'non-religious' leadership in the global academic industry; religion is portrayed as "pre-scientific" in the Computer Space Age. In Russia and China this became the worst persecution of the Church since apostolic times, but these secular 666s collapsed as the persecution strengthened churches.

**Sharia Oppression:** In Muslim lands, Christians now suffer the worst persecution on earth, many losing their lives as Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism oppresses Christians and burns churches while being anti-west.

**Underdevelopment:** In the Third World, all four Church forms interact with Islam, Ancestral worships and the worst underdevelopment in the world - Africa's biggest problem. Perhaps African Christians from Cape to Cairo need to re-hear David Livingstone: **"I go to prepare a place for Christianity and Commerce..."** for trade success is

vital for upliftment. Inspiration of rugged faith is needed.

We live in confused society, despite lots of professors, politicians and schools. Each Christian should still be a SELF-SUFFICIENT follower of Jesus, each local congregation SELF-SUFFICIENT - fully self-responsible as individuals, and fully self-governing, self-financing and self-propagating as a church. We need no handout mentality, but cover expenses for continued life and growth, are mature in decision making including each member, and is self-propagating to the next generation.

**Prayer Suggestions:** Lord Jesus, churches are human, none are perfect, neither am I. Help me to find a spiritual family of blessing, and to be a proactive blessing to other Christians as you show me how to take my place and be involved.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. Words often used to describe the Church are "boring", "outdated" and "irrelevant". How do you feel? What would you do to change things?

2. Why does each Christian need a church ?
3. Is the Church really Jesus' Church, the congregation of the "salt of the earth" ? Explain.
4. Why is it important that each Christian takes part in decision making within his/her Church, even if they are still 'youth'?  
(Clue: How does Jesus rule in his Church, and the Holy Spirit work decision-making in Jesus' Church?)
5. What would you do about the fact that there are so many different forms of 'church' and so many different types of Church denomination?

# 10. THE ONLY NAME...

## Acts 4.12

### Other Religions and Christian Deviations



Does the sincere Ancestor worshipper, Buddhist, Hindu, Jew or Muslim share common religious experience with us, just names differ? Political correctness today says yes. Christians say that Jesus the ONLY way to God.

### 10.1 ANCESTRALISM

All of life has spiritual balance, even spirits of dead relatives, which are claimed to look after balance in the living by communicating through spirit mediums/ witchdoctors are within 'ubuntu': crises of misfortune occur when balance is upset. Health and wellbeing in the kraal and tribe are kept or restored through 'muti', magic and spiritism, usually with blood sacrifices to the spirits. There is a 'high god' who is theoretically able to be prayed to once the spirits have proved fruitless, but this doesn't happen. Ancestralism is usually third world and tribal, but also has city culture adherents. It is

strong in the East in China, Japanese Shintoism, among Australian Aborigines and many smaller tribal groups, and among Native Americans. It is widespread in Africa, upholds male superiority and inferiority of women, polygamy, bondage to spirit past, outdated 'superstitious medicine', often evil initiation training of sangomas. When Christianity spread in Africa, many Africans kept ancestralism within 'church' but Christ-less practice, or inserted the syncretism of 'Christ the highest ancestor' into discipleship to 'sanctify' séance ancestralism. Independent African Churches arose of 2 types:

- ◆ Ethiopians: have strong emphasis on African culture, are anti-European, with emphasis on Old Testament passages about Cush/Ethiopia (Psalm 68.31/Isaiah 18.7; Zephaniah 3.10).
- ◆ Zionist/Prophetic Groups: most linked to ancestralism, with 'prophet-apostle' leaders who are often spirit mediums in church dress. The 'prophet' often dominates so strongly, he becomes a new messiah.

Instead of just family history reminder, many independent church Christians still mix ancestral seances into discipleship. Educated African leaders often support this, claiming 'it's our culture/

colonialism/racism' against those who disagree. Like the Old Testament, Christianity abandoned séance practices in all or any cultures, as the NT shows, but this still has far to go in Africa.

**10.1.2 Spiritism/The Spiritual Church:** This is a euro-heritage, 'church'-styled ancestralism. The spirits of dead relatives supposedly continue their personal existence among the living, and communicate with them through fortune tellers, seances and spirit mediums (witchdoctors). In church-style services, reading of the Bible and preaching are replaced by seance practices. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are irrelevant; what the ancestral spirits say is crucial. The spiritual difference is very obvious.

## **10.2 BUDDHISM**

Buddhist salvation is called 'Nirvana', absence/extinction of desire that arises from one's illusion of self-individualism and into oneness with all living and inanimate. Pain, suffering and the cycle of birth, life, fertility and death and rebirth reincarnation come from desire and individualism; overcoming desire and illusion of self is achieved through correction of 'perverted' individualism by

holding to the '4 Noble Truths' by following the '8-fold path of Enlightenment' formulated by the Buddha. This is done using strong yogic meditation discipline to remove self-individualism.

◆ The Hinayana/Theravada branch of Buddhism is atheist or agnostic.

◆ The Mahayana branch has gods and saints. If God exists for Buddhists, he can't really help us achieve Nirvana, people do this themselves. Buddha never claimed to be a god, he was agnostic. Buddhists believe Jesus was a good, less important religious teacher, but not the unique Son of God.

### **10.3 HINDUISM**

Intellectual Hindus claim that the thousands of gods, like elephant headed Ganesha, or monkey headed Hanuman, or 'avatar' demigods like Rama and Krishna are mass religious elements in Hinduism behind which is the real thing. Hindu salvation is called 'moksha' and is unity with BRAHMAN that is the impersonal, infinite, universal 'atman' soul; all is ONE (Pantheism). It is achieved by escaping from the 'karma' cycle of birth, life, fertility and death and rebirth reincarnation, in which one has 'maya' (illusion of

self-individualism). The 'law of Karma' (sowing or reaping good or bad across one's many reincarnated lives) binds one into the reincarnation cycle; discipline in 'dharma', socio-religious duty or meditation, or other yogic forms, means one's good deeds may be raised to outweigh one's bad deeds enough for the next incarnation to be more pure. When all bad deeds and illusion of self end, one is free of reincarnation, one with BRAHMAN and has moksha. In Hindu pantheism, not only are many gods worshipped, like the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, but everything is 'atman' too. Separate material existence is 'maya' illusion. Hindus believe Jesus was just another 'avatar' demigod like Rama or Krishna, as the 'Brahman-atman' takes many avatar part-image incarnations in all cultures at various times of world crisis. So a Hindu is to be a better Hindu, an ancestralist a better ancestralist, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Christian a better Christian.

*[NB! Buddhism and Hinduism are meditational world denying religions. Perceptions like individual existence, suffering, pleasure and death are illusions. Women are usually inferior, leading men to fertility lust and illusion of self. Reality is the ending of self-consciousness for the all-is-one consciousness.]*

## **10.4 CONFUCIANISM**

Dominant among the Chinese only, it is taught as ancestral religion (for Confucian shrines abound), as politics, as morality and as philosophy. Confucius' teachings, recorded by disciples in the "Analects", is in essence the "wisdom" of sages, an Eastern equivalent of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Called the Master's Way, Confucianism can be summed up as "Duty to one's family, one's State and oneself; Charity to one's neighbour". 'Jen', it's key concept, concerns the bond between the divine and humans, ancestors and descendents, wise sages and the people. Confucianism is at heart a philosophical wisdom religion.

## **10.5 ISLAM**

Heaven is a paradise of wine, women and song for men who achieve what was denied them in this life. Islam has '5 Basic Tenets of Faith' - monotheism; a spirit world; the Qur'an as God's infallible word because it 'was dictated by an angel'; prophets who spoke God's word of whom Muhammad was the last and greatest; and a coming day of judgement. In doing their faith

Muslims religiously practice '5 Pillars of Islam' - *Shahadat* (confessing "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet"); *Salat* (prayer 5 times daily); *Sawm/Siyam* (fasting at Ramadan); *Zakat* (almsgiving to the poor); *Hajj* (doing pilgrimage once in life to Makkah or Mecca).

In Islam, God is almighty, impersonally transcendent and judging, who has dictated his will in the Qur'an. It is impossible that God could become human, as Christians claim for Jesus. Because the Qur'an is the 'Last Testament,' Jesus can only be a prophet inferior to Muhammad. Christians have twisted the Bible about Jesus' belief. The Qur'an misquotes the angel Gabriel in claiming that Jesus did not die on the cross (Sura 4.157-158). Sharia law is harsh religion: forced conversion by conquest characterised  $\pm$ 650 AD Islamic invasions; women are oppressed as legal minors and by polygamy; non-muslims face religious oppression.

## **10.6 JUDAISM**

Judaism shares the Hebrew background with Christianity, but rejects Jesus as the Messiah and rejects the New Testament, using the Talmud (Mishnah oral law finalised by 200AD and Gemara

commentary on the Mishnah +\|- 200-500 AD). It is original monotheism, using the Shma Yisrael "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Judaism is uncertain if there is life after death, but humans end their evil by obeying the Torah/Talmud Law in this life; if there is any afterlife, it will be based on this. Jews use synagogues for worship and prayer and remembrance of festival days like Yom Kippur, and also as the basis for Jewish cultural life. Jews think Judaism is only for them and tend to Zionism; they don't do mission work to other peoples, called Gentiles, who tend to be viewed as 'incapable or inabled' for God.

*[NB! Islam, Judaism, and Confucianism are legalist religions of worship laws and practices, with civil morality which make the faith. Theologising or saving are by obeying of the Law and traditions of the writings and elders. No one dies for the sin of another]*

## **10.7 SPACE RELIGIONS - STARMEN, SPACE IMMORTALS OR ALIENS**

Modern astronomy and the space race led to exploratory scientific space craft going to the Moon and Mars, and speculation about life on

other planets in other galaxies. Evidence is entirely lacking. Hollywood jumped in: War of the Worlds, Star Trek, E.T. and UFOs, X-Files etc, earned billions and created modern urban myth. Tabloid journalists and cults jumped in too: 'Chariots' or 'Fingerprints' of the gods books attempted to tie angels and ancient civilisations, in particular Egypt, to superior technologied space men visiting earth to set civilisation going; Jesus and angels may or may not have been part of such space schemes. Huge profit was made using tabloid 'ancient culture' claims, but NO PROPER RESEARCH METHOD through academic sources, ancient language studies, archeology. Real archeologists have answered; the 'Chariots/Fingerprints' of the gods books look like the cheap sensationalism they are; the star treks stuff just Hollywood special effects.

**In reality, no better environment for life exists than earth.** The same laws of gravity and nature, including humankind's sinfulness, apply everywhere else in the universe. Earth is our space ship now and if we don't get 'it' (life sustainability) right on earth, we won't get it right by exporting further into space or any other galaxy what broke our earth. Star treks and X-files remain manipulation

by modern myth to entertain and pacify the masses as global elites power on. Spaceman versions of Jesus, or Jesus of the Pyramids, are not Jesus of Nazareth of history, so are deviation.

**10.7.1 Scientology:** The 'Oscar winners' religion is a 'spacemen' angle. It was founded by Ron L Hubbard, through the book "Dianetics" and his science fiction writing. People possess immortal 'thetans' (soul-like consciousness) of space universe existence that have lost link with their immortality, which Scientology restores by a spiritual cleansing called 'auditing' (an auto-salvation) of one's spiritual state to encourage good and expose the negative for counselling attention. It is a theologically Christless, reincarnational faith claiming extra-terrestrial previous existences on extra-terrestrial planets in other galaxies. It is regarded as the only new religion of the 20-21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS DEAL WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS?**

All these religions are so different from each other and from Christianity that only a patronising, uninformed person says "we all worship the same God." This New Age platitude is from a Hindu

original saying all rivers lead to the ocean. But Jesus said: *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the father but by me."* This doesn't entitle us to a superior attitude in Christian witnessing. Jesus himself came not to condemn but to save, and our interaction with those of other faiths is the same. This does not mean we should be doormats to Muslim coercion, or 'remove the sandals of our discernment' at demand of Buddhist/Hindu 'meditativeness', or ancestrally slaughter bulls or goats. Christians should be steadfast and firm in their own belief while giving others their say.

What of those of other faiths who have never heard of Jesus? The Bible doesn't condemn such people. Judgement to salvation is sure for those in Jesus; we aren't sure about those who do not know of Jesus. Other faiths aren't regarded as 'saving', but a 'pricking' of individual conscience like Old Testament Law. Christians always regard this as a weak second best to Christian faith. It is thus great Christian responsibility to reach those who do not know and thus only rely on second best; it is Christian love to reach them, and not leave them without them hearing of the sure thing.

## **10.8 CHRISTIAN DEVIATIONS**

Christian Deviations or Cults have arisen since apostolic days: they operate as pseudo-churches, using doctrines and practices deviant from our apostolic, catholic creedal churches and withdrawing from them. They teach strongly that they alone are true faith, that they improve on the apostles themselves, and that only those who belong to them have salvation.

**10.8.1 Christian Science:** Defined critically as an interesting theory which is neither Christian nor scientific, it was founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1875 with her book 'Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures'. It teaches there is no such thing as sin or disease or illness, which are all in the mind. Believing right (ie in her system) will result in the elimination of these things entirely from one's life. Humans are not matter, but spirit only, God is pantheistic, Jesus is regarded as 'the most spiritual man who ever lived' but didn't die for our sins or get resurrected, as he is spirit; the Bible must have her interpretation. It clearly deviates from science and Christianity.

**10.8.2 Freemasonry:** Since churches formally declared as inappropriate the strange names and

linked teaching used for God, the absence of saving teaching about Jesus, and admission of members of other faiths (though it's well known that major religions don't agree) as in the higher degrees of Masonry, Masonry is more open by leaving faith matters to the Church. The claims that the Old Charges contain oral traditions about Biblical roots which are not found in the Bible, and that builders/craftsmen's guilds trace to the builders of Solomon's temple and further back, are academic, archeological falsehood. Since it has good charity and welfare activity for and from lodge members, often with sympathy from Church ministers, most masons not of the higher degrees get angry when called a deviation. Yet the past reputation for often working like a secretive insider old boys network that fosters elitist business and church connections is self-inflicted by past "codes of secret." These and other factors lead creedal Christians to suspect auto-salvation by dutiful good works and little of Jesus' costly grace - effectively renewing the Galatian heresy in a new cultus form for today. That Freemasonry recently became more open and charity-like, leaving faith issues to the churches, is far more suitable.

**10.8.3 Jehovah's Witnesses:** Like the Arians of 300-350 AD, they deny Jesus is God, but is the highest created angel; the Holy Spirit is just energy from God. Founded by Charles Taze Russel in a seven series book "Studies in the Scriptures", (1886-1917), backed by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, JW's have their own bible version, with 'other alternative' mistranslations where the original doesn't suit them. They have strong adventist/apocalyptic emphasis with much from Revelation: only their 144 000 witnesses can be saved, (the number is probably full by now), which is achieved by how well they have converted people and sold 'Watchtower' and 'Awake" on the street. The combination of 'other alternative' Bible version and salvation linked to performance in converting and selling 'Watchtower' or 'Awake', has been the strength of the group but is correctly said to be a deviation.

**10.8.4 Mormons/Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints:** The golden plates originals of the "Book of Mormon" were supposedly dug up in the USA by Joseph Smith in 1827, who gave special translation of them, after which they 'disappeared'. It makes up myth of two early

migrations of people, from Babel to Central America to found central American civilisation, then from Jerusalem to Peru to found Incan civilisation: these produced, then buried the plates, before dying out (archaeologists regard the stories as false). Smith wrote 2 more books - 'Pearl of Great Price' and 'Doctrine and Covenants' adding the special additions to Christianity that Mormons claim. These are a 'developing polytheism' (the Father was once human then developed into God, as did Jesus, Adam, Eve, the prophets and as can anyone; the Spirit is spirit without personhood.) Salvation is by good deeds; polygamy and baptism for the dead are used. All these depart from Christianity.

**10.8.5 The New Age Movement:** It originally used the "Aquarian Gospel/Testament of Levi" (Christian gospels rehashed by Hindu philosophy), published in 1908 by Levi H Dowling. Supposedly, the late teenage/early 20's Jesus did pilgrimage to Pakistan, India and Persia to learn eastern enlightenment, then return to Palestine about age 30 to minister to Jews and Gentiles in a form they could follow. This is fake: there is no evidence for this, either archaeologically or in Jesus' teaching.

The New Age movement is the mature stage of the 1960's hippy movement: most hippies explored Hindu/Buddhist meditation and religiosity linked to astrology, claiming a so-called 'dawning of the Age of Aquarius', heralded astrologically, in which universal peace and enlightenment would come into leadership and among people of the world. The hippies have grown up and come into positions of power and influence in the global establishment. With them has come the so-called "new age movement" - a surge in the Hindu/Buddhist version of the one world religion in which "all rivers lead to the sea". Each religion is a part of the one whole religion, all are already brothers in part enlightenment in the global scheme of things. Now they will find each other through astrology and westernised versions of Hinduism or Buddhism, or Eastern mysticism like the Hare Krishna/Ramakrishna movements, the Moonies (Unification Church) and other "guru" groups. Many 'trendy' churchgoers partake, accepting Jesus as the highest 'avatar' demigod or guru, thus justifying doing the whole meditation/yoga number. This Jesus is not the Bible Jesus, but a deviation Jesus.

**10.8.6 Seventh Day Adventists:** The nearest half-half group, they hold to some orthodox teachings of Christianity on Jesus, the Trinity and the Bible, but the influence of adventist founders, mainly Ellen G White in "Conflict of the Ages" (with Desire of Ages) books, is responsible for adventist apocalyptic teaching excesses like Saturday worship, the "Heavenly sanctuary (1844) and "Investigative Judgement", Satan as sinbearer, and their legalistic Sabbatarian lifestyle. The SDA's regard themselves as aligned with mainline Christians in that the Bible is inspired as supreme scripture, but that the Ellen White influences have acceptable 'prophetic' discernment of the differing priority of the contents of the Bible. It is this 'prophetic' discernment which Churches see as deviation.

**10.8.7 World Church of God / British Israelites:** Herbert Armstrong, through this deviation and the Plain Truth magazine, preaches global Anglo-Saxon superiority with religious sanction. The Anglo-Saxon peoples are supposedly the descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel, so the special heirs of God. The British are the present heirs. This is religious racism and not Christian. Further, he teaches that Jesus'

mortal body was left buried and he took on a new immortal body as we do, so 'born of God' turns people into gods, as with the Father and Jesus, and that doing good deeds like under Jewish law is the manner of earning salvation.

**10.8.8 Zionists, amaNazaretha and others:** The ZCC Zion Christian Church of the Morija, Pietersburg Easter pilgrimmage has Old Testament legalism in some of it's strict morality, like don't eat pork, don't drink. Its acceptance of polygamy, though African, has this legalism too, as do most independent African churches. The real issue is whether the prophetic leader/originator becomes a 'prophet' of the creedal Jesus Christ, or whether the leader/originator actually comes to replace Jesus Christ as a new messiah. This is not the case for the ZCC in which Jesus of Nazareth remains, but the same cannot be said of the amaNazaretha with their Ekuphakameni 'high place' at Nhlankakazi near Inanda, KwaZulu-Natal, (the Shembe-ites), where leader/originator Isaiah Shembe has come to replace Jesus Christ as the "black/Zulu messiah for black/Zulu people".

**Prayer Suggestions:** Lord, help me understand spiritual things through your Word.

Please help me understand how Jesus is the Way the Truth and the Life.

Please guide me as I interact with people of other faiths and secular people so that I can share the gospel well.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. Jesus knew of just as many other faiths/religions in his time, but still said: "I am the way the truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." What do you think?
2. What do you think Jesus would say about "Let the Hindu be a good Hindu, the Muslim and Jew and Confucianist and Buddhist and Ancestralist be good in their own way, and you be good in yours"?
3. Space travel, possible alien contact, has even bigger focus after year 2000. Larry

Norman, rock artist writes this: "If there's life on other planets, then I'm sure that He must know, And He's been there once already, and has died to save their souls." Why do you think life on earth originated on other planets in other galaxies, and that when we reach advanced 'spacemen/ starmen' level, we will have reclaimed 'immortal starman/ angel/ godlike' destiny?

4. The Bible has a 4000 year legacy that contacting ancestral or any other spirits, that spirit medium use is evil, that such practice is worship of other gods. Why should we change now, or why not?
  
5. A Christian deviation gives teaching about Jesus Christ which is not according to the Bible or creeds that Catholics/ Orthodox, Protestants, Pentecostals and most Independent Churches use. How should we approach/ interact with people of such deviation churches?

## THE UBUNTU/BOTHO EXERCISE

### **umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye**

#### Translation:

One is a person through others.

#### Concept expression:

I am, because we are; and  
since we are, therefore I am. (1)

*Discuss why you like/dislike this?*

#### Hebrew/Old Testament/

#### Jewish equivalent:

*Love your neighbour as yourself.*  
Leviticus 19.18; (of Moses ,Torah)  
c.1500-1000BC

#### Buddhist equivalent:

*All living beings are our mother.*  
Also

*Whoever in this world  
harms living beings,  
once born or twice born,  
in whom there is no compassion  
for living beings -  
know him as an outcast. (2)*

P.T.O

### **umuntu ungumuntu ngomuntu**

#### Translation:

One is a person through Him  
who became a person.

#### Concept expression:

I am, because Jesus is;  
He renews me,  
therefore I am. (7)

*How does this differ from Ubuntu?*

Why do you think that there  
will be no real global equivalents  
for the Jesus version of  
the ubuntu slogan?

Read John 1.14.

Discuss Jesus' uniqueness

Chinese equivalents:

*What you would not wish done  
to yourself,  
do not do unto others.*

The Golden Rule attrib to Kung Futzu  
(Confucius, dated (551-479 BC) (3)

*As he does not oppose himself  
to anyone, no one is opposed to him.*

In Tao-Te-Ching  
attrib. to Lao-Tzu (570-490 BC) (4)

Hindu equivalent:

*A man should raise himself,  
and should not himself  
demean himself;  
for he himself is the friend of his self,  
and he himself is its enemy.*

Krishna in Bhagavadgita,  
(500-300 BC) (5)

Jesus' New Testament equivalent:

*Do to others what you  
would have them do to you.*  
Matthew 7.12/Luke 6.31

Islamic equivalent:

There is no real Islamic equivalent;  
perhaps Surah 4.36, 2.263, 17.15  
give some Islamic reflection.

Read Philippians 2.5-11:

This passage gives a Jesus  
specialisation to Ubuntu.

How does this help us to avoid  
negative ubuntu?

(if one is a person through  
negative others,  
one is negative).

What do you think of the above UBUNTU equivalents?

Notes:

1. African Renaissance Ed Makgoba MW. 1999. Sandton:Mafube p153f
2. What Buddhists Believe. Harris EJ. Oxford:Oneworld1998
3. The Sayings of Confucius Ed. Giles, L. 1988 UK: Tiger Books p 62.
4. Tao-Te-Ching - Lao-Tzu. Trs. Bryce, D & Weiger L. York Beach: Maine. Book 1,22b p31/Book 2,66b p75/Book 2,81b p90.
5. The Bhagavadgita. Trs. Nabar V & Tumkur S. Wordsworth Classics:UK 1997.
6. In Bantu Messiah and White Christ. Sundkler B.

# 11. YOUR GOOD CONFESSION IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES

## 1 Timothy 6.12

### Vows of Faith...



#### 11.1 CREEDS OF FAITH

From Bible times Christians publicly affirmed their belief amidst confusion by making statements of faith, formalised in creeds.

**11.1.1 NICENE Creed 325/381 AD:** This is the only creed recognised across Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, Independent Churches:

**I believe in One God the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and of all things seen and unseen:  
and in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
begotten of his Father before all worlds,  
God of God, Light of Light,  
true God of true God, begotten not made,  
being of one substance with the Father,  
by whom all things were made:**

**Who for us humans and for our salvation,  
came down from heaven,  
was incarnate by the Holy Spirit  
and the virgin Mary and was made man,  
and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate.**

**He suffered and was buried,  
and the third day He rose again  
according to the scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven,  
and sits 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.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord and giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son  
is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**I believe in one holy, catholic  
and apostolic Church**

**I acknowledge one baptism for the  
forgiveness of sins,**

**I look for the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come.**

**AMEN**

**11.1.2 The APOSTLES' Creed c.340 AD:** This is the most well known creed of the West - Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals:

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
He descended to the dead,  
The third day He rose again;  
He ascended into heaven,  
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
from where He will come again  
to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body  
and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

These two creeds are second only to the Bible in defining Christianity, and are the most authoritative summary of what the Bible teaches.

### **11.1.3 Modern Statements of Faith:**

Churches today use the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds as foundation, adding statements of faith when laying out their Christian teaching. Past creeds/confessions/catechisms, like the Augsburg Confession (1530), Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Westminster Confession (1643-1649), dominated trends in Christian teaching.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) currently professes that it is:

**"a fellowship of churches and organisations  
which confess the Lord Jesus Christ  
as God and Saviour, according to the Scriptures,  
and therefore seek to fulfil their common calling  
to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."**  
That's consistent with the ancient creeds, even if  
much WCC activity seems to prefer modern  
political correctness more than this confession.

## **11.2 VOWS OF FAITH**

All churches let believers responsible for their own faith take Adult Faith Commitment/Confirmation/Baptism vows outlining faith, answered with the voluntary individual adult response "I do":

- ◆ *Do you turn away from sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, seeking his righteousness in your life and his justice and compassion in the world?*
- ◆ Do you confess your faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the words of the Apostles' Creed?
- ◆ *Do you promise to be a faithful member of the family of God, being diligent in public worship, in private prayer and in the study of the Scriptures, and in every way you can witnessing to Jesus Christ as Lord?*

The 3 questions of this vow form outline the Christian Church as a witnessing, worshipping, serving community united by common faith. They ask you to adopt a covenant of repentance in your relationship with God. They ask you to affirm faith as in the Apostles' Creed as the most simple widespread statement of faith in Christianity. They ask you to make a covenant of membership with God and your local church in all its responsibilities and privileges.

### **11.3 COMMUNICANT DISCIPLESHIP**

Jesus' disciples in Presbyterian churches have "Communicant Membership" One must be baptised, either as infant or believer, and have publicly confessed one's adult faith in Christ by vows taken in a church service. This assures the congregation that those joining are publicly Christian, not closet faithful, and disciples and followers of Jesus, not club members. One's support is at least measured as those who regularly attend Communion services to practise worship. While we return the Communion cards (or other indicator method) all responsibilities and privileges of Christian service are ours: full democratic vote in, for example, the call of a minister, at the AGM or any congregational meeting, for the election of elders to the Session. We may directly approach the Session to have any congregational need or problem debated by this elected and ordained management body. Should we drift away, not attending at least Communion services, our membership is taken as self-terminated. We can also fail in church discipline by serious problem of doctrine or life; membership is then regarded as lost discipleship, and either suspended or terminated.

The 'disciple member' reality is important for one other main reason too. The local church belongs very much to those who are members. The minister does not own it, neither is he a dictator in it. He/She is only a member of the Session, the elected body of local members that run the local church spiritually and materially.

## **FOLLOWING JESUS PERSONALLY AND ACTIVELY IS THE KEY**

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### **11.5 CONCLUSION: Hear the Word of God**

This book began by outlining the confusion in our world and teaching Jesus Christ's answer to these problems. It is the crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus Christ which makes him the real "righteous dude" and no one else. It shows God approved of a man executed as a cheap political criminal as the only one who truly was righteous. He had in fact committed neither sin nor crime; he had been set up by evil leaders who wanted him dead so he would not make the messianic challenge to their own greedy power. They failed; Jesus the messiah of God's love continues!

### **Prayer Suggestion:**

Lord Jesus, I am ready and involved with you.  
Help me make my responsible public commitment  
to you before my people and my church.

### **Discussion Tasks:**

1. The apostles and first disciples, and every next growing generation of Christians, took up the worship and service of the spreading of God's kingdom of love in Jesus. It starts in your local church.  
Are you with it?
2. Are you ready to take adult faith commitment or reaffirm your VOWS OF FAITH?

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