

***Proclaiming God's Kingdom
in a Culture of Legalism:
Studies in Galatians & Romans 14***

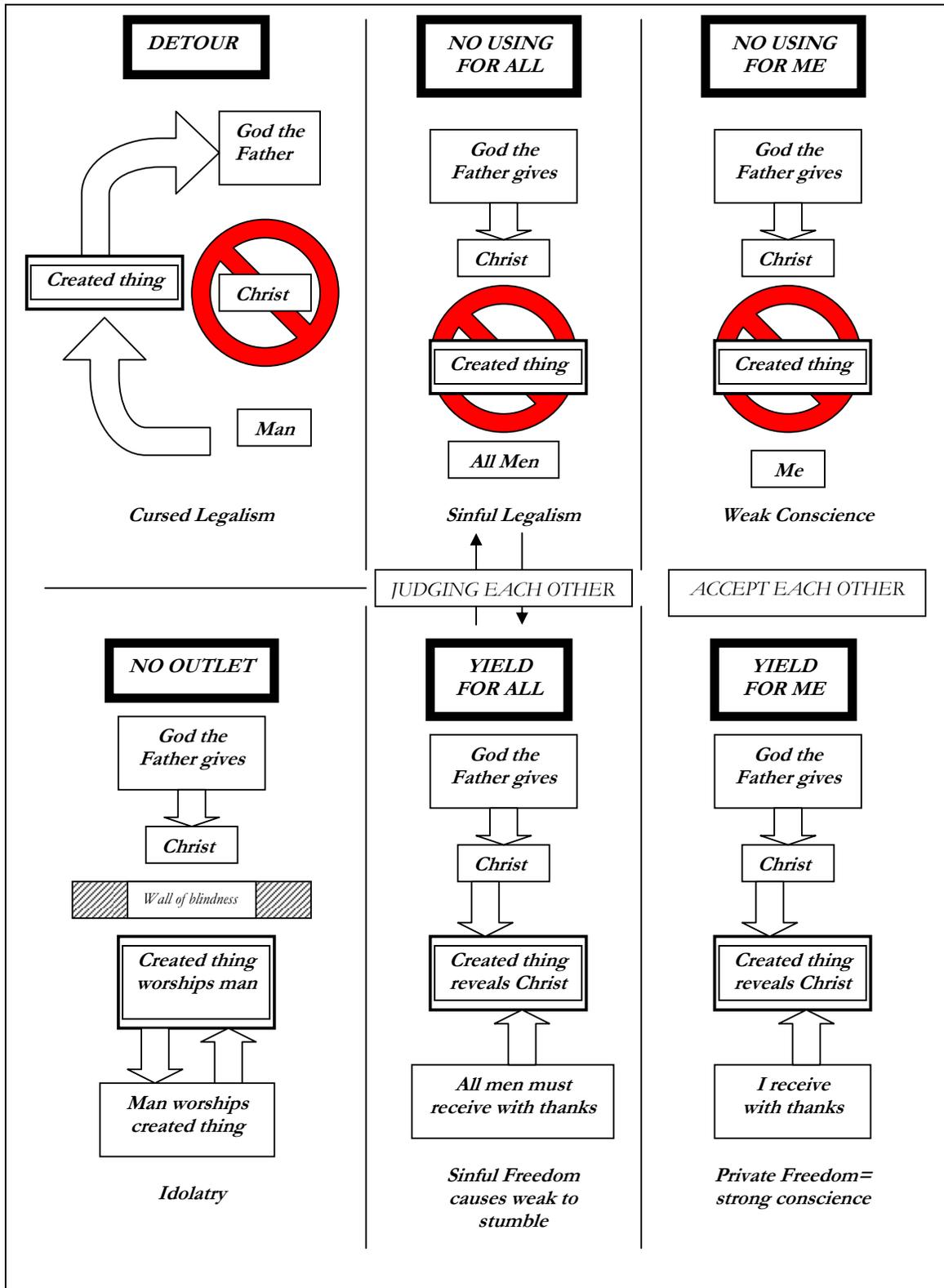
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Statement of Faith: Our Proper Relation to Creation and the Law

We believe that the Triune God created the universe out of nothing in six days to reveal his eternal power and divine nature and made living species separately according to their kinds by commanding it to happen. Man was formed from the dust of the ground, and woman from the rib of man. ***We must imitate Christ as he relates to this created world—as stewards over it, content with what we have, thankfully enjoying its pleasures as a gift from God, seeing aspects of his image (especially his goodness and inseparable love) reflected in every earthly situation to draw us into communion with himself, freely sharing with those in need, but not loving the world, worshiping it, coveting more of its temporary treasures, being enslaved to it, or legalistically regulating the use of it.*** Heb 11:3; Gen 1-2; Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6; Psalm 33:6; 104:30; Exod 20:11; Rom 1:20; Gen 1:26-8; 1 Tim 6:6-10; 1 Tim 4:4-5; Rom 8:28-38; Matt 6:33; Acts 20:33-5; 1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:15-17; Rom 1:25; Matt 4:4-10; 5; 1 Cor 6:12; Phil 3:19; Col 2:20-23; Matt 15:10-14 ; 23:23-4

We believe in the liberty of our Christian consciences. As we image Jesus in relation to the ten commandments, religious traditions and the world, each person's conscience should be free from the commands of men, tradition or legalistic forms of outward righteousness as a standard for joining the church or remaining in full communing status as a member. We believe that God curses any legalism that tries to present something or someone other than Christ as the basis of our peace with God and our righteousness. We believe the standards for church membership are found in imaging Christ by receiving and demonstrating the central kingdom principles of *righteousness* (a righteousness revealed in the gospel which implies biblical authority, Christ's righteousness credited through faith, repentance from idolatry and false righteousness, love for Christ's righteousness as the revelation of the righteousness of God the Father, yielding ourselves as instruments of righteousness by the Holy Spirit) *peace* (peace with God and peace with man in union with other believers who are in submission to leaders who faithfully represent Scripture) and *joy in the Holy Spirit*. In other words, these standards include submission to biblical authority, professed faith, repentance, participation in church fellowship, glad submission to the biblical leadership, teaching, counsel and discipline of the elder(s) and pastor(s) and evidence of preparedness for the return of Christ. Mark 2:23-3:6; Matt 15:1-20; 22:37-40; 23:1-38; Col 2:6-23; Gal 1:6-9; Acts 15:1, 5-11; Rom 14:1-15:3; [Rom 14:17; *righteousness* Rom 3:22; 4:24; 10:3-5; 5:18; 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 6:13; *peace* 5:1; 12:18; *joy in the Holy Spirit* Rom 15:13; 1 Thess 1:6; Luke 10:21] Gal 5:1-4; 1 Cor 6:12; 7:31

Sinful Uses of Created Things

I have observed three different sinful uses of created things: IDOLATRY, SINFUL LEGALISM & CURSED LEGALISM. This chapter will look more closely at sinful legalism and cursed legalism, comparing them and examining Paul's distinction between them in Galatians.

Idolatry: The object in view is used to satisfy selfish lusts or exalt self (pride) or protect against fears that threaten to hinder or remove personal, family, social or national comforts. I use the road sign "**NO OUTLET**" as a metaphor for this selfish use of created things because people who practice idolatry are like a black holes of insatiable desire. Everything goes in; nothing comes out unless it has the potential to bring more back to self. This has been a universal problem since Adam (Rom 1:18-25). See the previous chapter 13 on "Christ and Sin" for more details on this sinful use of created things and the accompanying illustrations.

Sinful Legalism

Created things that have both righteous and sinful uses are prohibited for everyone because some people use the "thing" sinfully. I use the road sign "**NO _____ING**" because people who have this view of created things are frequently legislating morality for themselves and others by painting the red circle with the slash line through it on things that God has created (or allowed man to create) that have righteous uses for his glory and the good of mankind.

This is a problem in many churches today, and apparently was a problem for the early church as well (Col 2:20-23; 1 Tim 4:1-5). This type of legalism is sinful because it calls another's freedoms evil (contrary to Rom 14:16) and because it legislates a man-made rule on a disputable matter for everyone (contrary to Rom 14:22). It is also sinful because it fails to see God's glory revealed in created things and fails to give

thanks for something God created to be enjoyed (1 Tim 4:3-5; Rom 1:20-21). It is sinful because it destroys joy in the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:15; Acts 13:52; Rom 14:17). These people are generally not part of the cursed legalism system because they hold these views more privately, in the sense that they do not require these things for membership, or enforce discipline for those who refuse to live by the rules. They do not separate from other believers for their different views on these issues. They do not condemn or persecute others as non-believers who will not go to heaven if they have different views about the issue. They do not believe that God accepts them because they do or don't do the "thing," but instead see these things as a kind of false maturity or holiness.

OBJECTION: We need to take a stand against evil in the culture by denouncing what is evil, bad or dangerous.

ANSWER: There are many balancing biblical principles to consider before we "take a stand" against evil. We cannot just condemn a thing without some careful consideration of the issues involved and the biblical texts relevant to the issues.

OBJECTION: Am I saying that rules are bad or unnecessary?

ANSWER: In general Scripture aims for heart change, making rules or condemnations of a certain thing less central to our faith, hope, love or to knowing God. "The law can't impart life," (Gal 3:21). "Make the tree good and the fruit will be good," (Matt 12:33). Also good rules ought to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24-5). But whoever loves Christ will keep his commands (John 14:23; 15:14).

What's Wrong with Sinful Legalism?

Parents who raise their kids using a sinful legalism style will likely produce a generation of Christians who are weak in all the five areas listed below. Pastors and elders who shepherd using a sinful legalism style will likely produce an immature church, easily tempted by the world and unable to speak constructively and winsomely to the non-Christian. The church will be viewed as irrelevant to the modern world if she does not engage the world in redemptive & reforming ways.

1. *Christians with this attitude towards the world are seldom able to reform the world.* The *cultural mandate* (Gen 1:26-28) to rule over the earth and subdue is best applied when Christians engage the ideas and "things" of the culture and reform their use for showing love to God and love to each other. Christians ought to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:4-5).
2. *Christians with this attitude towards the world are seldom able to critique the errors of the world.* If we "ban" certain books like Harry Potter, Christians will not be able to give detailed critiques of the world-view problems. However, not everyone is called to this type of ministry. Those who would be tempted by the world-views or visual seduction should not try to critique the problems. Dr. James Dobson was involved on a child pornography commission for the federal government. This did not tempt him and served an important task in helping set legal standards for child pornography.
3. *Christians with this attitude towards the world are seldom able to show that Christ has better answers to the cultural tendencies and themes.* If Harry Potter appeals to kids' desire for power and control over their world, then we can show how Christianity views power and greatness as service and Christ uses power to save and judge righteously.
4. *Christians with this attitude towards the world are seldom able to learn wisdom in sorting out various complimentary biblical perspectives.* Parents, pastors and church leaders need to teach believers to make decisions based on a variety of biblical concerns and texts. I have written a list of tests for making wise decisions based on different biblical considerations to assist my daughter in making some difficult choices dealing with friends at Morrison Academy who were involved with smoking cigarettes and marijuana. Should she report them to the school authorities? Should she not "hang out" with them? Were these activities a temptation to her personally? Rather than legislate her decisions (as a 16 year old believer), I gave her the list to make the decisions herself. I put her under the authority of God's Word for herself and let her decide based on these tests and her own conscience.
5. *Christians with this attitude towards the world are hopelessly inconsistent.* Who decides what things are "off limits" and what things are OK? If 4 inch long hair is too long for boy and 10 inches is too short for women, what basis do people have to determine these standards? Nearly all things have a good and a bad use, so we would be restricted from doing anything if we outlawed things

because some people use them sinfully. This inconsistency often produces resentment in teens raised in a legalistic home or church. Teens and young adults can see through the veneer of uniformity and notice that the rules lack a biblical basis, and that other Christians can do these things without guilt or without condemnation from family or church members. The answers given to their “Why this rule?” questions are unsatisfactory. Sinful legalism embitters and exasperates children raised in these kinds of homes (Eph 6:4). It eventually causes great discouragement in adult believers as well.

What Does Paul do when He sees Sinful Legalism in Christians?

We need to see the distinction in Galatians between a church of believers influenced by cursed legalism but *not yet in the cursed legalist system* and Paul’s manner of dealing with the cursed legalists. Paul never curses the Galatian church members. Notice that Paul calls the Galatians “brothers” or “you” or “the Israel of God” or “new creation” (Gal 6:1, 15-16, 18; 3:15; 4:12; 3:26), thus God has not cursed them. Those who God and Paul cursed were the Judaizers: Paul calls them “false brothers” or “they” or “those who” to show they are outside the church (Gal 1:6-9; 2:4-5; 4:17; 5:7, 10, 12; 6:12-13). Paul has several other affirming evidences of the Galatian believers’ salvation: they have received the Spirit (Gal 4:6; 3:2-3), they have evidenced faith in the gospel (Gal 3:2), they know God and God knows them (Gal 4:9). The problem with the Galatian church was that they were being tempted by the Judaizers to put themselves under the law for salvation (Gal 4:21; 5:3-4). They were not obeying the truth of the gospel of Christ (Gal 5:7). What did Paul do?

1. Paul swiftly and publicly opposed the public problem of cursed legalism (Gal 2:5, 11; 1:6-9). When many acted hypocritically, Paul publicly corrected them by teaching the truth and calling the errors wrong, both in person and by his epistle. Paul showed them that circumcision really meant nothing (Gal 5:5-6; 6:15); faith, hope, love and being made a new creation by the Holy Spirit were essential (Gal 3:2-5; 4:6-7).
2. Paul publicly corrected the problems when many were confused or naïve about the dangers. He warned them of being “alienated from Christ and falling away from grace” (Gal 5:4; 2:12).
3. Paul labored to develop spiritually mature believers. He wanted to see Christ formed in them. He wanted to see them following the Spirit’s leading and sowing to please the Spirit (Gal 4:19; 5:16, 18, 25; 6:8). He wanted them centered on the core of the gospel responses of faith, hope and love (Gal 5:5-6).
4. Paul told the spiritually mature believers to help restore those overtaken by legalism, while watching out for their own souls in case they too might be led away by legalism (Gal 6:1). Paul himself knew he needed to watch out for himself because of his own legalistic background (Phil 3:4-6). These are some of the characteristics of spiritually mature believers in Galatians:
 - a. they give an example of not fearing man or trying to please man (Gal 1:10; 4:12; contrary to Peter’s example in Gal 2:12)
 - b. they rely on Jesus (Gal 1:3-4, 16; 2:16; 3:13-14)
 - c. they stand firm in their freedoms in Christ and do not give in to legalistic demands (Gal 5:1; 2:5)
 - d. they are not afraid of legalist criticisms (Gal 2:12)
 - e. they accept the offense of the cross and resurrection of Christ as sufficient to establish our righteousness before God through faith (Gal 5:11; 4:4-7; 6:14)
 - f. they have a proper respect and submission to apostolic authority (Gal 1:11-16)
 - g. they have Christ formed in them (Gal 4:19)
 - h. they know God, especially that God does not judge by appearances (Gal 4:9; 2:6)
 - i. they have received the promise of the Spirit through faith, not through human effort (Gal 3:2-5; 4:4-7)
 - j. they have received the Holy Spirit and live in submission to the Spirit’s leading, pleasing the Spirit (Gal 3:2-5; 5:16, 25; 6:8)
 - k. they have a proper view of the law and its place in history (Gal 3-4)
 - l. they experience the core essentials of Christianity: faith, hope and love (Gal 5:5-6)
 - m. they have a proper view of their identity as *sons of God, new creations, the Israel of God*, this last name being a direct refutation of the Judaizers claim to be the true Israel who were circumcised, and

- incidentally, a refutation of Dispensationalism in its separation between Jews and Gentiles in the plan of salvation (Gal 4:7; 6:15-16)
- n. they live in grace and peace (Gal 1:3; 6:18)

Typical Sinful Legalism Today

This type of legalism is sinful because it calls another's freedoms evil (contrary to Rom 14:16) and because it legislates a man-made rule on a disputable matter for everyone (contrary to Rom 14:22). It is also sinful because it fails to see God's glory revealed in created things and fails to give thanks for something God created to be enjoyed (1 Tim 4:3-5; Rom 1:20-21). By listing things here I do not mean that the Bible has nothing to say about all these issues or that they are issues of Christian freedoms for everyone. All of them relate to the category of Christian ethics. I only mean that there are possible exceptions for all these issues that would permit Christians to do it in faith and in submission to the relevant biblical teachings on the subject (though perhaps at odds with the interpretation of other believers), making it sinful to legislate a blanket rule for all people. Further to make a certain standard for everyone on any of these issues and elevate it to an unmistakable evidence of Christianity would eclipse the central kingdom principles of *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* and unnecessarily divide believers (Rom 14:17, 19, 21). Here are some of the typical issues in the church today that fit into this category:

1. DRINKS: wine or alcoholic drinks, drinking coffee or tea
2. FOODS: eating chocolate, eating junk food, natural vs. genetically modified foods
3. SMOKING: smoking cigarettes or marijuana
4. MEDICINES: drug use, including psychiatric drugs, pain killers, beetle nut, vitamins, medicines, modern medicine vs. faith healing or traditional medicine
5. MEDICAL ETHICS: cloning, in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, birth control, sterilization, brain stem cell research, abortion acceptable in which cases?
6. DEFENSE: guns or weapons ownership, civil or international wars
7. ENTERTAINMENT: use of free time, card playing, gambling, watching certain movies or TV shows, reading Harry Potter books, reading other books with questionable moral content like horror stories, ghost stories, murder mysteries, romance novels, books with sexual content, computer games, music styles and lyrics
8. WEALTH: stock market, banking, use of discretionary money, tithing, credit cards, home & land ownership, car ownership, simple lifestyle
9. ECONOMICS: capitalism vs. other economic systems
10. GOVERNMENT: democracy vs. other governments, social security, political party
11. APPEARANCE: **men** wearing earrings, jewelry, long hair or wearing hats in church, **women**: skirt length, spaghetti strap tops or dresses, tube tops, pants, tops that show a bra underneath, nylons, heel sizes, open toed shoes, open heel shoes, colors of clothing, earrings, jewelry or make-up, hair length, covered head
12. RELATIONSHIPS: dating, divorce, remarriage, polygamy in some African cultures
13. EDUCATION: home school, public school, Christian school
14. WORLD RESOURCES: animal rights, animals used in experiments, endangered species vs. use of land, sea and natural resources, air pollution, global warming
15. CHURCH GOVERNMENT: (congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Roman Catholic [but their teaching on *essentials* is wrong]), the role of women in the church
16. BAPTISM: (adult or infant, immersion, sprinkling)
17. HOLY DAYS: Sabbath or Lord's Day practices, observing a religious calendar (Christmas, Easter, Lent, Passover, Epiphany, etc)
18. OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: circumcision, foods, drinks, food offered to idols, theonomists (for the OT law), antinomians (against the OT today), creation in 6 literal days vs. scientific views of very old earth
19. WORSHIP: singing of psalms, worship without musical accompaniment, types of instruments allowed in a worship service, types of music allowed in a worship service
20. GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT: charismatic views, cessationist views

21. END TIMES PROPHECY: pre-millennial, post millennial, amillennial, pan-millennial, the number 666 in society, the beast, interpreting the book of Revelation

Cursed Legalism

Created or man-made things (or my abstinence from something evil) replace the righteousness of Christ as the basis for one's acceptance with God. I use the road sign "**DETOUR**" as the metaphor for this problem because people who have this view substitute something of their own making in place of Christ, believing that God accepts them because of that thing. This was the problem in the Galatian and Colossian church controversies (Acts 15:1; Gal 1:6-9; 5:1-4; Col 2:4-23). They made the law a means to "impart life," (Gal 3:21) in place of Christ, faith, and the Holy Spirit. They were enslaved to weak and miserable principles. We should leave any church that participates in any forms of cursed legalism.

Those who have this view have four characteristics:

1. They think that others are not Christians because they do not affirm the same DETOUR. They condemn and judge those other believers as enemies and create confusion, discord, hatred and rivalries (Gal 4:16; 5:10, 19-21). They have a false assurance of their salvation, boasting about outward conformity to their rules but they will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 6:13; 5:21).
2. They separate from others who do not agree on this issue (Gal 2:11-14; 4:16-17).
3. The people in leadership in this system use membership standards, discipline and persecution to enforce the DETOUR system (Gal 6:12; 5:11; 3:4; 4:29).
4. They will show obvious acts of the sinful nature in opposing the true church and true gospel freedoms: discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy or persecution (Gal 4:17, 29; 5:15, 19-21, 26).

How does Paul deal with Cursed Legalism?

Paul distinguishes between believers and "brothers" influenced by legalism and the "false brothers." Paul first identifies the false brothers. Those who God and Paul cursed were the Judaizers: Paul calls them "false brothers" (Gal 2:4-5) or "they" or "those who" to show they are outside the church (Gal 1:6-9; 4:17; 5:7, 10, 12; 6:12-13). They must be cursed because God curses them. We are to separate ourselves by excommunicating anyone infiltrating our church believing this kind of system (Gal 4:30) or refuse to have fellowship with them if they come from outside our church. He then defines their cursed system:

1. they rely on the law for righteousness/acceptance before God (Gal 2:16; 5:4) substituting a man-made righteousness as a detour around the sufficiency of Christ for acceptance with God (Acts 15:1; Gal 1:7): specifically, circumcision (Gal 2:3, 12; 5:2; 6:12-13, 15), kosher foods & eating with the Gentiles (Gal 2:12), and days, seasons and years (Gal 4:10)
2. they set aside the grace of God (Gal 2:21; 5:4) by seeking life through the law (Gal 3:3, 21)
3. they put people under obligation to obey the whole law (Gal 5:3-4; 4:10)
4. they put people under a curse outside the grace of the gospel and alienated from Christ (Gal 1:7; 2:21; 3:10; 5:4)
5. they persecute the true believers (Gal 4:29)
6. they are afraid of suffering for the true gospel (Gal 6:12; in contrast to Paul 1:10; 5:11; 6:17)

Typical Cursed Legalism Today

We are called to separate from any systems or denominations that practice cursed legalism, based on the curse Paul puts on these people (Gal 1:6-9) and based on his application of Galatians 4:30, where the slave woman and her son represent cursed legalism: "But what does the Scripture say? '**Get rid of the slave woman and her son**, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.'"

1. those who will not baptize unless a person speaks in tongues (they deny the variety of gifts given to the body of Christ, and the hand says to the foot 'I don't need you unless you become a hand like me' 1 Cor 12, 14).

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2. those who will not baptize unless the person has had a certain type of conversion experience (crying and complete repentance from every known sin)
3. those who believe in the efficacy of the Roman Catholic system of sacraments (including required confession to a priest), praying to saints and Mary as the basis for their salvation or who believe that the Council of Trent's *anathema's* (curses) on the Protestant doctrine of justification are valid
4. those who belong to the Masonic Temple (Masons) and have not renounced their membership in this system.
5. those who have a very strict view of *tithing* or the *Sabbath* coupled with principles a, b & c above. Sabbath practices and tithing practices were not to be enforced in some rigid fashion by church leaders. God loves a cheerful giver, not one who gives by force, manipulation or by rules established by church leaders (2 Cor 9:7).
6. Jehovah's Witnesses are under a cursed system because they reject the true teaching about the person of Christ, (contrary to John 8:24, 28 where we must believe Jesus is the "I AM" in order to be saved)
7. those who belong to the Mormon system or the Mormon church who substitute the Mormon temple practices as the assurance and path to salvation
8. those who teach the necessity of rebaptism for salvation coupled with principles a, b & c above.
9. those in the Seventh Day Adventist who believe that vegetarian diet is essential to salvation or membership (not all may believe this—I'm not sure what their views are on this)
10. those in the TSPM (Three Self Patriotic Movement, the government controlled Protestant church in China) who use their authority to alienate themselves from true believers or persecute believers because they will not submit to the contra-biblical demands of the Chinese government.

Sinful Freedom

Romans 14 exposes one other kind of sinfulness: sinful freedom.

1. Call another believer's weaknesses unacceptable (Rom 14:1)
2. Look down on the weak (Rom 14:3)
3. Judge the weak (Rom 14:4, 10, 13)
4. Destroy the weak by causing them to stumble (Rom 14:13, 15, 20-21)

Christian Life Survey

NAME _____

1. My sins are too great and too frequent for Christ to deliver me. T F

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- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 2. My heart is not resolved to stop sinning yet, so I cannot be rescued. | T | F |
| 3. My sins are so infrequent that I don't need to be rescued. I'm not desperate. | T | F |
| 4. I'm able to rescue myself from sin. | T | F |
| 5. My behavior is genetically caused. I was born this way. If God made me this way then I don't need to be delivered from anything. | T | F |
| 6. Faith is too simple and uneducated. Science demands proof that Christ can rescue us from sins. | T | F |
| 7. The will of God in choosing the method of salvation is not important. | T | F |
| 8. I should not have to suffer for Christ if I obey God. | T | F |
| 9. We should never watch movies or television because they have a bad influence. | T | F |
| 10. The most important thing about Christianity is obeying the command to love. | T | F |
| 11. God forgives our sins because he knows we are trying hard to change. | T | F |
| 12. We should never read books written by non-Christians. | T | F |
| 13. When I tell people about the Gospel, the most important thing they should know to be saved is to stop disobeying God and start obeying his laws. | T | F |
| 14. The law of God is able to bring new life to sinners. | T | F |
| 15. God's grace and peace are given to me to make me feel better about myself. | T | F |
| 16. God forgives me because I have been baptized. | T | F |
| 17. God forgives me the first time I sin, but after that I have to be really careful because God won't be so kind the next time. | T | F |
| 18. God is usually angry with me because I sin so much. | T | F |
| 19. I must obey God's law if I want Him to stop being angry with me. | T | F |
| 20. The main job of the Holy Spirit is to make me feel guilty for disobeying God. | T | F |
| 21. When I read the Bible, the most important question to ask is "What should I do to obey this?" | T | F |
| 22. I should insist that believers agree with my views on hair length, jewelry, and clothing styles before I can call them Christians. | T | F |
| 23. People who do not agree with my views on the Lord's Day are not Christians. | T | F |
| 24. If someone teaches me that I can be made righteousness by obeying the laws of God, I should accept this teacher and learn more from him. | T | F |
| 25. I should stay away from people who have valid but different interpretations of the Bible than I do on worship, charismatic gifts, baptism or the millennium. | T | F |
| 26. A person who drinks wine or alcohol is not a Christian. | T | F |
| 27. Good Christians are busy doing church work. | T | F |
| 28. Good Christian counselors only tell you what to change in your behavior. | T | F |
| 29. A doctor's degree in psychology qualifies people for counseling sinners. | T | F |
| 30. Good Christian counselors get angry at sinners to show them God's anger. | T | F |
| 31. What must you do to be saved from sin and God's judgment? | | |

32. How do people change sinful habits like selfish ambition and envy?

33. How are people made righteous in God's evaluation?

34. How should people prepare for baptism and church membership?

35. How does God show that he accepts you?

Christian Life Survey
Suggested Answers

1. Galatians 1:4, 2:16; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; 1 John 1:9; John 11:25; John 6:35-40

2. Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 4:5-6
3. Galatians 1: 4; John 8:24: 9: 41; Romans 3: 19-23
4. John 14: 6; Hebrews 9: 15, 22; Acts 4: 12
5. Romans 1: 20-25; James 1: 13-15; 2 Corinthians 4: 4
6. 2 Corinthians 10: 4-5; 1 Peter 3: 15
7. Galatians 1: 4; Acts 4: 12
8. 2 Timothy 3: 12; 1 Peter 1: 6; 4: 12-16
9. We should reform the world by speaking the truth to their culture in an informed and winsome way; thus some people need to watch movies & TV to understand the culture 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Genesis 1:26-28; 1 Peter 3:15; Also we need to accept other believers who do watch TV and movies Romans 14:1-15:7; Not all TV is beneficial, nor should we be addicted to it 1 Corinthians 6:12
10. Romans 11: 36; 1 John 3: 23
11. 1 John 1: 9
12. See # 9 above.
13. The message of the gospel is God's wrath on all men for man's sin, Christ's propitiating death and God the Father raising Christ from the grave by the power of the Spirit, salvation through faith in this gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit as evidence of God's acceptance of us John 20: 31, 1: 14; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4: 6; Romans 8:9; 10:9-10; 4:24-25; Acts 15:1-11. The gospel is summarized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit Romans 14:17-18 and these words in the context of Romans.
14. No! Galatians 3:21 The weakness of the law for salvation is that it cannot impart life. We must have the Spirit to have life Galatians 3:1-5.
15. The central purpose of the grace and peace of God given to man is to magnify and glorify his own name within the Trinity and to bring man to praise and glorify God Ephesians 1: 2, 3, 6, 12, 14; Romans 9:22-23; 15:8-9; Psalm 79: 9; Psalm 63: 2; Psalm 96: 3, 8; Psalm 115: 1; Psalm 21: 5; Psalm 145: 11
16. No! Forgiveness is based on the grace of God in the Gospel, through faith in the name of Jesus 1 John 1:9; Luke 24:47
17. No! Grace is abundant, to seventy times seven each day Matthew 18:21-35
18. Examples of people who sinned: Moses hit the rock and could not go into the promised land; King Saul; Uzziah; Ananias; Hebrews 10: 26; Yet there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit Romans 8:1-3, 39; Psalm 32
19. God's anger toward man removed when man has a right relationship to Jesus Christ & the Holy Spirit; Removal of anger is not based on man's obedience to the law. Romans 8:1-16; Hebrews 4:2, 10-11; 10:16-22; Colossians 2:17; Faith is God's command: 1 John 3: 23 Our repentance glorifies God's mercy, kindness and faithfulness: 1 John 1: 9; Romans 9:23; Romans 2: 4; Luke 18: 13-14; Matthew 18: 26-27
20. The Spirit's main job is to reveal the things of Christ to us and create the life of Christ in us John 16:13-15; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6; Romans 8:1-16
21. The Bible was written so that we might know God and in knowing him, know ourselves as sinners in need of his grace. We should ask "How does God reveal the glory of his person through his works in these verses?" John 16: 8-16; John 17: 3; Galatians 4: 9; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:6
22. We should accept each other's differences in disputable matters rather than judging them by calling their freedoms evil Rom 14:1-16.
23. See # 22 above. Also notice explicit teaching telling us not to judge each other regarding Sabbath/Lord's Day practices Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16-23; Galatians 4:9-10.
24. We should curse them because God curses them, reject their teachings, warn them to repent and teach the true Gospel or excommunicate them if they are part of our church fellowship and they do not repent Galatians 1: 6-9; 2: 16; 4:30; 5:4
25. See #22-23 above. I think all of these are disputable matters, none of which determine whether we are saved or not. See #13, 15, 19, 20 above.
26. See #22-23 above. Especially not that food and drink are not the essence of the kingdom 1 Corinthians 8:8; Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 1:20-21. Eating and drinking with thanksgiving to God and giving him glory are the most important 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 5:23
27. Church work busyness is not the only indicator of maturity in Christ, and is easily mistaken for maturity when it is often hypocrisy or fear-based legalism Galatians 4:19; 5:5-6, 16, 18, 25; 6:1, 7-10;

- Matthew 7: 15-23. See # 13, 15, 19, 20, 26 above for other core themes that identify the spiritually mature.
28. Legalists are merely concerned about the outward flesh Galatians 6:12; Matthew 23. They trust performance but do not know God's righteousness Matthew 7: 15-23; Romans 10:1-3. Good counselors are also concerned about the heart & mind Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Peter 1:8; Proverbs 4:23; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:6, 16; Ephesians 1:3-14. See # 13, 15, 19, 20, 26 above for other core themes that identify the spiritually mature.
 29. Those who are "spiritual" according to the context of Galatians are able to help other caught in a sin Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5: 14; 2 Timothy 2: 24-26. See # 13, 15, 19, 20, 26 above for other core themes that identify the spiritually mature.
 30. Good counselors are gentle with those caught in the Devil's snare or deal with them according to their needs Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Ephesians 4:29.
 31. Luke 6:32; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Peter 1:8; 2 Peter 1:3-8; rejoice in the hope of the glory of God Romans 5:2; Have righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit Romans 14:17. See # 13, 15, 19, 20, 26 above for other core themes that identify those who are converted.
 32. We can use any doctrine as it reveals God's glory 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4-6; Isaiah 6
 33. Through faith in God raising Christ from the dead Galatians 2:16; 3:1-5; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 4:18-25; 10:9-10; 5:1-5; 8:9-11
 34. see # 31, 33 above
 35. By giving the Holy Spirit to you (Acts 15:8-11; Rom 5:5; 8:9; 14:3; 15:7; Galatians 3:1-5, 21; 6:15; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6)

The Way of Wisdom

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We need to study the way of wisdom to correct the tendencies of legalism to legislate morality for everyone and avoid the difficult nuances of weighing complementary Bible teachings. We need to learn to balance complimentary Bible teachings and make informed decisions about right and wrong. The answers are not so obvious and the complexities of situations make it likely that each person's decisions will have an individual uniqueness. Here are some test questions useful for making wise decisions. Use them to process decisions on issues that are not so clear-cut. We will guard against much sinful legalism when we learn the way of wisdom. Elders need to teach their church members, parents need to teach their children, and bosses need to teach their employees the way of wisdom. You may copy this and pass it around.

The Helpful Test: Is _____ helpful to my body & soul and to others' as well? Is _____ the best use of my time in light of all my responsibilities (family, marriage, parenting, work, church) and in light of the help people need around me?
1 Corinthians 6:12 "Everything is permissible for me"--but *not everything is beneficial.*

The Kingdom-Focus Test: Will doing _____ enable me to keep focused on righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit?
Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, 14:18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

The Community Equality Test: Does my abundance of _____ allow me to supply another believer's/church leader's/church's lack in the same area? (money, time, gifts)
2 Corinthians 8:13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but *that there might be equality*. 8:14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. *Then there will be equality*, 8:15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

The Financial Provision Test: Does doing _____ allow me to adequately provide for the economic/physical needs of my own family?
1 Timothy 5:4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these [younger relatives] should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.
1 Timothy 5:8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

The Mastery Test: Does _____ control me or do I control _____ ?
1 Corinthians 6:12 "Everything is permissible for me"--but *I will not be mastered by anything.*

The Stumble Test: Does _____ cause other weaker Christians to stumble?
Romans 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 14:21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine *or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

The Conscience Test: Can I personally do _____ in faith that I am not sinning against God? Will I be able to sleep peacefully at night if I do _____ ?
Romans 14:22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and *everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

Proverbs 3:21 My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; 3:22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. 3:23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; 3:24 *when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.* 3:25 Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked,

The Temptation Test: Does doing _____ cause me to enter into temptation areas where I have failed before or create new surges of attraction/curiosity about sinful things?
2 Timothy 2:22 *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

1 Corinthians 7:5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again *so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

The Culture-Adaptation Test: Does _____ enable me to be the best possible witness in my culture (or to these specific people when I am with them), or will it offend people unnecessarily, thereby causing my Christian influence on others to be weakened? (Is this behavior acceptable in the culture/sub-culture in which I live and want to witness?)

1 Corinthians 9:19 Though I am free and belong to no man, *I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.* 9:20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 9:21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. *I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.*

The Local Law Test: Are there any rules/laws against _____ that would violate my submission to authorities if I did this (God's prohibitions/commands in the Bible, school, parents, government--5th commandment related issue: 'Honor your 'authorities' by submitting to their lawful commands')?

Romans 13:1 *Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.* 13:2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

The Fear Test: Do I want to do _____ primarily because I am afraid of what people will think/say/do to me/about me if I don't do it?

Proverbs 29:25 *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.*

The Likeness Test: Does doing _____ facilitate growth or show evidence that I am becoming more like Jesus in his relation to the Father and Spirit (giving glory to the other, delighting in God), and in his relation to created things? WWJD? WWJDTr? WWJDCr? (Tr= in relation to the Trinity; Cr= in relation to created things)

Ephesians 4:20 You, however, did not come to *know Christ* that way. 4:21 Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 4:22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 4:23 *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;* 4:24 and to *put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

The Glory-Reflection Test: Does doing _____ help me to better see the character of God reflected through _____ and give God glory?

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world *God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.* Romans 11:36 *For from him and through him and to him are all things.* To him be the glory forever! Amen.

The Definition Test: Does this decision to do _____ hinge on a negative, worldly view of other Christians, defining them by their sins, hopeless of their changing, and stereotyping their faults, rather than defining them by their new creation identity?

2 Corinthians 5:16 So from now on *we regard no one from a worldly point of view.* Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 5:17 Therefore, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

The Source Test: Is this decision made in submission to God's mysterious providences, in full recognition that the source of all things (except sin) is God himself, and thus he deserves glory for these providences?

Romans 11:36 *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

The Thankfulness Test: Does doing _____ increase my thankfulness to God for his good gifts he gives me to enjoy?

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they neither *glorified him as God* nor *gave thanks to him*, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. **1 Thessalonians 5:18** *give thanks in all circumstances*, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The Promise Test: Does doing _____ enable me to fulfill my vows and promises to God and to the people I have promised to serve? (baptism vows, marriage vows, church membership vows, ordination vows, citizenship vows, contracts, agreements, promises)

Ecclesiastes 5:4 *When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it.* He has no pleasure in fools; *fulfill your vow.* **5:5** It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. **5:6** Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

Matthew 5:33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' **5:34** But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; **5:35** or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. **5:36** And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. **5:37** Simply *let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No';* anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

The Danger Test: Does doing _____ protect the greatest number of people from (foolish or unnecessary) physical or spiritual danger?

Numbers 25:1 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, **25:2** who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods. **25:3** So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them. **25:4** The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." **25:5** So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your men who have joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor." **25:6** Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. **25:7** When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand **25:8** and followed the Israelite into the tent. *He drove the spear through both of them--through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped;* **25:9** but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000. **25:10** The LORD said to Moses, **25:11** "*Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them.* **25:12** *Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.* **25:13** He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather *expose them*.

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. **5:2** And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and *have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?* **5:3** Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. **5:4** When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, **5:5** *hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.* **5:6** Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? **5:7** *Get rid of the*

old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **5:8** Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, *the bread of sincerity and truth*.

The Privacy Test: Does doing _____ enable me to keep conflict situations (where I was sinned against) between Christians as private as possible in order to resolve the conflict (stages involving more and more people in authority if the most private levels do not resolve the conflict)?

Matthew 18:15 “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. **18:16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” **18:17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

The Timing Test: Is this the best time, or at least a suitable time to deal with a problem, such that my heart is prepared to be calm and gentle, the other person is receptive and the situation is appropriate?

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.***3:11** *He has made everything beautiful in its time.***8:5** . . . *the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.* **8:6** *For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a man’s misery weighs heavily upon him.*

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should *be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*, **1:20** for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Matthew 7:5 You hypocrite, *first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.*

Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, *you who are spiritual should restore him gently*. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

The Build-Up Test: Does doing _____ or saying _____ meet the spiritual and physical needs of this other person?

James 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. **2:16** If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but *does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?* **2:17** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but *only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore *encourage one another and build each other up*, just as in fact you are doing.

Romans 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and *not to please ourselves*. **15:2** Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, *to build him up*. **15:3** For even *Christ did not please himself* but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.”

The Gifts-Use Test: Does doing _____ enable me to better use my God-given gifts in building the kingdom of God?

1 Peter 4:10 *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.* **4:11** If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

The Listener-Attitude Test: Do I understand the attitude of the other person and develop my approach to him/her based on his/her attitude?

Proverbs 9:8 Do not rebuke *a mocker* or he will hate you; rebuke *a wise man* and he will love you.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are *idle*, encourage the *timid*, help the *weak*, be patient with *everyone*.

Preserving Unity by Mutual Acceptance in Non-Essentials

Romans 14:1-15:9 is **an appeal to the church for unity in essentials**, yet accepting our **diversity in non-essentials**. This is not the same as politically correct “*tolerance*.” Rom 14 is not about cursed Jewish legalism= *trying to legislate disputable matters of OT law as required for Gentile salvation*. It is about weak Jews, so acculturated by OT law that they would violate their conscience to change their practices. It is about strong Gentiles who could enjoy their freedom in Christ but were not mature in accepting the weak Jews or loving in limiting their freedoms if weak Jews were led to violate their consciences.

A. Accept other believers the way Christ accepts you.

Grace-based—God initiates and supplies all the resources

Faith-based—in each person and cooperative work of the Triune God, especially the shed blood/death and resurrection of Christ

Evidence: The Holy Spirit given to us Acts 15:8-11; Rom 8:11, 14-16

A closer look at personal acceptance and church membership acceptance

OBJECTION: I don’t need the acceptance of other believers!

B. Use biblical wisdom to form your opinions on disputable matters.

Defining disputable matters: circumcision, days, foods (kosher), not drinking *could* all be practiced as a Christian life conviction of conscience, but *cannot* be viewed as bringing us closer to God/replacing Christ as Savior, or to indulge the sin nature

Traits now: days, foods, drink

PROBLEM: What about the hundreds of other areas where Christians differ? See page 118-19 for a list of disputable matters “*or anything else*” Rom 14:21

C. Apply your acceptance of other believers in these specific ways:

- 1) Let disputable matters be privately observed or abstained from without parading the matter in front of those with weaker faith (Rom 14:22).
- 2) Don’t cause weaker Christians to be distressed by joining with you in your freedoms when their conscience tells them it is wrong (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:9-13).
- 3) Follow your own conscience and do not participate in things that your conscience tells you are wrong regardless of the freedoms others take (Rom 14:22-23).
- 4) Strengthen your conscience on the kingdom basics of your acceptance with God! Participating or abstaining should be matters of faith in God’s Word, while guarding righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17-18, 23).
- 5) Do not allow your freedoms on disputable matters to be called evil by those of weaker faith (Rom 14:16). This may involve persuasive defense of your views.
- 6) Never condemn or judge others for their views on disputable matters (Rom 14:1, 3-4, 10, 13). Christ is the judge and he will save his people (Rom 14:4, 8-12).
- 7) Never separate from others privately or corporately (defrocking a minister or church officer, or forming a new church or new denomination) because of their views on disputable matters. This would destroy the work of God for the sake of a legislating a non-essential matter (Rom 14:20), instead of preserving unity, peace, love, mutual edification as the work of God while patiently accepting differences in disputable matters (Rom 14:19, 1, 8, 15; 15:1-2, 5-12).

Can you do these things by yourself? NO! Jesus fulfilled them for you. If you believe in him his perfect righteousness is credited to you. He gives you his Holy Spirit to enable you to be who you are declared to be.

“Parachute”: Essentials for Salvation

After considering Christ and his relation to the created things and the law, we now need to consider the relation of Christ to the kingdom of God in contrast to his relation to disputable matters, namely, those things which are not essential for salvation and which Christians may differ and still be received into heaven.

Romans 14:1-15:9 is **an appeal to the church for unity in essentials** (‘the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ Rom 14:17), yet **diversity in non-essentials** (don’t judge each others freedoms, accept each other’s differences in *disputable matters*, and don’t cause anyone to stumble by your freedoms Rom 14:1-21).¹

NIV Romans 14:17-18 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.*

If you were to jump from a plane, you would need one essential to be saved from a splattering death: a good parachute. Everything else that a parachutist wears protects other part of his/her body, but are not essential for surviving the jump. The text today gives some comparisons between what we could call parachute issues, and non-parachute issues, core kingdom issues necessary for salvation and helpful or comforting truths, but not necessary for getting to heaven.

The text may reveal that God is more “ecumenical” than some in various denominations will admit. The text may reveal that many denominations have unnecessarily separated over “disputable matters” (Rom 14:1) rather than obeying Paul’s instructions to accept each other in these areas of difference. Obviously all the details of systematic theology cannot be built on one verse. But since Paul has developed his most comprehensive theological treatise in the book of Romans, then we know that Romans 14:17-18 is written in full consciousness of the foundational truths of Christianity. This would make it more likely that the rudiments of essential “parachute” theology for salvation *are* contained in Romans 14:17-18.

Evangelism ought to center on these essential themes
Church membership & discipline ought to be focused on these themes
Church ecumenism ought to center on these themes
Parental expectations ought to center on these themes
Personal Christian life focus ought to center on these themes

Center on the Essential Kingdom Truths and Lifestyle

What are “non-disputable matters”? I searched all the relevant texts dealing with disputable matters and arguments contained in those texts revealed three related themes which are non-disputable, core kingdom truths that are not negotiable nor are they matters for mutual tolerance of differences. Paul & Peter use these arguments to contrast with the disputable matters in the early apostolic church and show that in comparison, disputable matters do not rank as “parachute” issues.

What are “non-disputable matters” that are essential to have unified agreement on to be part of the visible Christian church? Scripture-taught matters that

- 1) **Determine whether we are acceptable to God or ‘pleasing to God’** (Rom 14:3, 18; 15:7; 1 Cor 8:8).

NIV Romans 14:3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for **God has accepted him**.

NIV Romans 14:18 because **anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God** and approved by men.

NIV Romans 15:7 Accept one another, then, **just as Christ accepted you**, in order to bring praise to God.

NIV 1 Corinthians 8:8 But food **does not bring us near to God**; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

NIV Acts 15:9 He made no distinction between us and them, for **he purified their hearts by faith**.

¹ Note this Romans 14 text has a very close parallel in 1 Corinthians 8, where he develops an example of food sacrificed to idols and causing someone with weaker faith to stumble.

- 2) **Determine whether we receive the Holy Spirit and have new life or not** (Acts 15:5-11; Gal 3:1-5, 21; 6:15; 1 John 4:13).

NIV Acts 15:8 God, who knows the heart, **showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them**, just as he did to us. (or could be translated “gave witness by giving them the Holy Spirit”)

NIV Galatians 3:2-3, 5 I would like to learn just one thing from you: **Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?** Are you so foolish? **After beginning with the Spirit**, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? . . . **Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?**

NIV Galatians 3:21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given **that could impart life**, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

NIV Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; **what counts is a new creation**.

NIV Romans 8:9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And **if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ**.

NIV 1 John 4:13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because **he has given us of his Spirit**.

- 3) **Determine whether we are saved or not** (Acts 15:1 in the circumcision controversy)

NIV Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “**Unless you are circumcised**, according to the custom taught by Moses, **you cannot be saved.**”

NIV Acts 15:11 No! We believe it is **through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved**, just as they are.

Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit as the evidence of God’s acceptance of his perfect righteousness (Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:1; 4:18; 10:21; John 3:34; Acts 10:38). The Spirit’s presence in the life of Jesus was the pattern for proving God’s acceptance of Christ, even as it is proof of God’s acceptance of the believer (Acts 15:8; Gal 3:2-5).

If you have God’s Spirit in you, you have his greatest gift! How will he not also with the Spirit give you everything you need (Rom 8:31-34)? Are you filled with joy and peace for this great gift? Joy in the Spirit is also joy for having received the Holy Spirit and the sending command of Christ. Do you love God for this great gift? Are you satisfied in every situation to have the Spirit (who illumines the Word, who brings you Christ, who brings you the Father) alone in fellowship with his indwelt, Bible-studying & obeying people, yet be destitute of all else?

Looking again at Romans 14:17-18, we see core issues essential for salvation in nearly the exact parallels that we just observed in other discussions of disputable matters in the New Testament: righteousness (*salvation*), peace, joy in the Holy Spirit (*receiving the Spirit*), and pleasing God.²

Defining Righteousness

Paul doesn’t list righteousness as a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, so it is likely that he intends Holy Spirit to modify peace and joy rather than all three nouns. (Greek is not clear on this). However, ‘joy in the Holy Spirit’ is a more common term (Acts 13:52; Luke 10:21). More likely is Paul’s reference to earlier uses of righteousness in Romans as the definition of the term righteousness. Let’s look at five categories of use for the term righteousness in Romans. When Paul uses the term here in Romans 14:17, I think he has all five uses in mind.

² These qualifications for a “parachute” issue could also be compared with the *Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms* Question 1: “What is the chief end of man?” Answer: “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” At once we can see that obtaining and demonstrating the righteousness of God would glorify him, peace with God and with man glorifies him and joy in the Holy Spirit is our means of enjoying God forever. There is no contradiction between Romans 14:17-18 and the *Westminster Catechisms*.

1. *A righteousness revealed in the Gospel (showing the authority and sufficiency of the message)*
2. *Credited righteousness through faith*
3. *Repentance from artificial righteousness*
4. *Christ's righteousness incarnate for us*
5. *Man's righteous service to God*

A Righteousness Revealed in the Gospel

NIV Romans 1:17 For **in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith** from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Man's credited righteousness through faith

NIV Romans 3:22 This **righteousness** from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. **There is no difference,**

NIV Romans 4:5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, **his faith is credited as righteousness.**

NIV Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the **righteousness** that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that **righteousness** might be credited to them.

NIV Romans 4:13 It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the **righteousness** that comes by faith.

NIV Romans 4:24 but also for us, to whom God will credit **righteousness**-- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

NIV Romans 9:30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue **righteousness**, have obtained it, a **righteousness** that is by faith;

NIV Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

NIV Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Artificial Righteousness of Man as Sin

NIV Romans 9:31 but Israel, who pursued a law of **righteousness**, has not attained it.

NIV Romans 10:3 Since they did not know the **righteousness** that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's **righteousness.**

NIV Romans 10:4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be **righteousness** for everyone who believes.

NIV Romans 10:5 Moses describes in this way the **righteousness** that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."

Christ's righteousness for us

NIV Romans 5:18 Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of **righteousness** was justification that brings life for all men. (Here I could also translate "one righteousness" since the word "act" is supplied from the translators. The translation "one act of righteousness" may confuse the meaning since the idea is not a single event or behavior that Jesus did, but his whole *righteous*, incarnate life.)

NIV Romans 10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's **righteousness.**

Man's righteous service to God

NIV Romans 6:13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of **righteousness**.

NIV Romans 6:18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to **righteousness**.

NIV Romans 6:19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to **righteousness** leading to holiness.

Defining Peace

Why are these two fruits singled out as core kingdom lifestyles? The background context for Romans 14-15 is the Jerusalem Council dispute over Jewish law and salvation requirements (Acts 15:1, 5-11). The detail of the problem is evident in the Galatian controversy where we see “biting and devouring” and other works of the flesh producing discord and fights, including pride, provoking and envying (Gal 5:15, 20-21, 26). I see a continuation of the Galatians discussion about standing firm in freedoms, where Paul urges the Galatians not to get entangled with a yoke of slavery, but neither should they use their freedoms to indulge the sinful nature (Gal 5:1, 13). The key areas of sinful nature involved here are “biting and devouring one another” (Gal 5:15), or “hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness . . .” (Gal 5:20-21a).

On the other hand “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23a). Paul focuses in on peace and joy in the Holy Spirit because of the corporate dimensions of the contentions, judgmental spirits, and name-calling. The community of faith is marked by peace and joy in the Holy Spirit! ***Believers get along with each other. They accept each other's differences in disputable matters.***

What kind of peace is Paul referring to here? Peace with God or peace with man or both? Both!

Peace with God

NIV Romans 1:7 To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and **peace** to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

NIV Romans 2:10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

NIV Romans 3:17 and the way of **peace** they do not know

*NIV Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

NIV Romans 8:6 The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and **peace**;

NIV Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all **joy** and **peace** as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peace with man

NIV Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at **peace** with everyone.

NIV Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to **peace** and to mutual edification.

God gives peace/God is peace

NIV Romans 15:33 The God of **peace** be with you all. Amen.

NIV Romans 16:20 The God of **peace** will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Here the idea may be crushing the lack of peace, such as divisions, factions and envy created by Satan?)

This peace is “in the Holy Spirit” also confirmed by Romans 15:13. “in the Holy Spirit” means “in/by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

NIV Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

NIV Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

Defining Joy in the Holy Spirit

Joy in the Holy Spirit means a joy that is centered on what God is doing to reveal himself and glorify his own name though the unshakable promises fulfilled in our salvation and in the judgment of his enemies (Luke 10:17-21)—a joy overflowing in all circumstances based on knowing and loving the Triune God, believing the covenant promises, receiving salvation through the work He has accomplished, and hoping for the pleasures of seeing God perfectly glorified in heaven.

NIV John 15:11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

NIV Philippians 1:25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,

NIV Philippians 1:26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

NIV Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

NIV Acts 2:28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.

NIV Luke 10:21 At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

NIV 1 Thessalonians 1:6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

Notice the perseverance necessary in this true joy

NIV Luke 8:13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

Balance the Three Kingdom Themes

Jesus was able to balance these three core kingdom themes. *Jesus demonstrated insistence on real righteousness with the Pharisees, rather than the artificial righteousness they were claiming to have achieved by meticulous observance of traditions built up around the law. Jesus was the King of Righteousness, the Prince of Peace and filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had peace with God and with men. He did it for us so that by our faith in him, his kingdom-centered life of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit are credited to us. Now by the help of the Spirit we can imitate his kingdom-centered life.*

Romans 14:17 argues for balance of emphasis. If you are over-emphasizing one aspect of righteousness or peace or joy in the Holy Spirit, you are missing the kingdom that ‘pleases God and is approved by men’ (Rom 14:18). Some people may emphasize righteous deeds, but disproportional to the peace and joy that ought to accompany righteousness. One may be very concerned for orphans in China, but neglect (the peace and joy that must balance that concern. Peace and joy will enable missionaries for China orphans to have a winsome, patient attitude trying to convince people in other countries to support that kind of work. If your righteous deeds are always producing conflict with men then something stinks about your righteousness. Your example ought to be modeling balanced righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Some people may see real problems with the church in certain areas of weakness or imbalance (unrighteous in certain ways). Your concerns need to be balanced with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. My first year at college brought out a serious imbalance in my own life, emphasizing righteousness (I felt

more students ought to be concerned about and involved in evangelism and told them so publicly with ballistic animosity), to the neglect of a winsome peace with men and joy in the Holy Spirit. You may have a real concern for your financial integrity and go to great lengths to prove your integrity (paying back state taxes on a very minimal summer wage earned years ago, trying to repay any past infractions against anyone, however small), while your family suffers because of your constant worry and depression until you get it resolved. You may feel that Arminian theology comes from the pit of hell and that no Arminian can ever be saved. Who will believe you without a winsome, gracious presentation of the truths of God's sovereign, electing grace that keeps peace (as far as possible from your side) between men and demonstrates the joy in the Holy Spirit. 'Without love, even if we have all knowledge of all mysteries, we are nothing' (1 Cor 13:2). These kinds of things are not balanced kingdom living.

You may feel unsupported by the church. Missionaries, church workers and church leaders especially may feel this way. You feel the church members are all irresponsible to your ministry, and you have a bitter attitude. You may blame the problems with the church on their unrighteousness, while ignoring your lack of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit as being just as significant an issue. Paul didn't lose heart no matter what the response of God's people since he received his ministry by God's mercy (2 Cor 4:1, 16-18; Phil 1:15-26). Your first response should not be to leave the church, unless there is serious immorality that is not being disciplined (1 Cor 5:9, 11): NIV 1 Corinthians 5:11 "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat." NIV 2 Thessalonians 3:14 "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed."

OBJECTION: *THE BIBLE IS MUCH MORE COMPLEX THAN THIS! HOW CAN WE JUST USE THESE THREE THEMES OF "RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE AND JOY IN THE HOLY SPIRIT"? ISN'T THERE MORE ESSENTIAL TRUTH THAN THAT? WHAT ABOUT THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH? IS THAT UNNECESSARY? IS ALL THAT DOCTRINE A NON-ESSENTIAL? Is there a place for detail in doctrine and a standard for upholding ministers in that doctrine? Paul is not discarding or disregarding the complexities of the gospel by writing Romans 14:17. Of course we should grow in unity in the knowledge of our faith and grow into maturity in the measure of Christ (Eph 4:12-13; 2 Pet 3:18). That detail forms the core of the gospel of our salvation. Sloppy preaching or teaching is not acceptable. Christ's ministers must carefully and accurately represent essential kingdom truths. Christ's ministers must demonstrate kingdom lifestyles. Paul does not mean that the kingdom preaching is so simple as to not require careful study. However, Paul's summary of the gospel is 'a righteousness revealed from God that comes by faith' (Rom 1:17) that has produced a peace with God and a new peace between previously alienated culture groups (Jew & Gentile) in the joy of the Holy Spirit—the crowning evidence of the Spirit's work in a person's life and in the life of the body of Christ.*

To the non-Christian: *if you don't know what Christianity is all about, this verse is the place to begin. You need righteousness from God, peace with God and the joy of the Holy Spirit. If you lack these things you under God's wrath and separated from his kingdom life. Your own righteousness isn't good enough. You need a Savior, a real parachute, not a paper parasol! Christianity is not a kingdom of rules or centered on going to church or losing your freedoms. God wants to give you real joy to replace the saccharin substitute you've been settling for. His joys are everlasting, his kingdom is peace and his gift is righteousness. His pleasures are pure. He wants to teach you how to get the most joy out of this world.*

Stay Focused on These Core Kingdom Themes

1. *Study good books on the core themes: John Owen *Communion with God* or Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* or Jonathan Edwards' *Religious Affections* or John Piper's *God's Passion for his Own Glory* or books by J.I. Packer *Concise Theology, Knowing God, Hot Tub Religion*.*
2. *Study the confession of faith in the last chapter of this book.*
3. *Elect pastors and elders who stand firm on these kingdom truths and live them out.*
4. *Model the core kingdom themes for your children.*
5. *Ask someone to disciple you in the gospel.*

6. *Attend a church where the gospel is preached.*
7. Evangelism ought to center on these essential themes *Free will/Arminian vs. God's sovereignty/ Reformed theology is a significant issue that does relate to the ability of man to receive the righteousness of the kingdom of God. Romans 8-9 give some of the clearest exposition of the sovereign grace of God as well as the sovereign hardening of God, revealing his righteousness in the gospel. In this light we could say that this theological controversy is worth separating over. We should not accept differences in essential matters.*
8. *Church membership & discipline ought to be focused on these themes* We should note that joy in the Holy Spirit is impossible to produce by natural means. This would safeguard the gospel from an easy believism and give an evidence of salvation that is less likely to be mimicked by hypocrites.
9. *Church ecumenism ought to center on these themes* (thus we properly reject union the Roman Catholic church since they deny the righteousness that come through faith in Christ and present other mediators in the saints, the Virgin Mary, and the sacraments, but we improperly divide from churches that teach a different method and time of baptism)
10. *Parental expectations ought to center on these themes.* Parents need to keep a balance of the three as models for kids. Some parents view their role as rule makers and rule enforcers. If kids keep the rules, things are OK. If they disobey the rules, you punish disobedience. Rules and punishment will not produce a kingdom core in your kids hearts. It is a big mistake to focus only on actions of righteousness and assume your kids are OK if they perform to your standards. In this case you may be raising kids who are like hollow chocolate bunnies—pretty on the outside, but hollow inside, lacking love for Christ and his righteousness and without the Spirit. You should discipline kids with connections to the righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We should build them up in their acceptance by God by affirming that they are new creatures in Christ because they have received the Spirit (2 Cor 5:16-17). Our discipline process ought to move our kids from any sinful behaviors or attitudes towards making peace with God and peace with each other. We ought to be more concerned about a lack of joy in the Holy Spirit than any particular behavioral sins. We ought to draw them to admire the “one righteousness” of Christ (Rom 5:18). They will image what they love. They need to desire and love righteousness in the heart before it will show up as a sincere character trait.

Married couples ought to spur each other on to growth and centering on these themes. You need to constantly maintain and atmosphere of peace with God and with each other, not letting conflicts go unresolved. Spur each other on to righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit by example and by praying for these to grow in your spouse. You need to affirm the declared righteousness image that Christ credits to your believing spouse and define your spouse not as a sinner but accept on a grace-based, Christ-centered, and gospel centered basis even though you see areas of needed growth (Phil 1:3-11).

Personal Christian life focus ought to center on these themes

Another Theological Perspective on the “Parachute” Issues

Another way we could determine the essential kingdom issues is to look at *judgment* texts in the Bible and see what disqualifies people from entering the kingdom. We would see that people who practice those things that oppose righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and do not repent of their evil ways are disqualified from entering the kingdom of God. Those without faith in the righteousness of God in Christ who have yielded themselves as instruments of unrighteousness, who love wickedness rather than the righteousness of Christ, who divide men against each other and have no peace with God, who have no joy in the Holy Spirit, but only joy in the fruits of selfishness and lustful pleasure, all these will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

NIV Matthew 5:20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the **kingdom** of heaven.

NIV Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the **kingdom** of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (See also Matt 21:31)

NIV Matthew 13:41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his **kingdom** everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

NIV Matthew 18:3-4 And he said: “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the **kingdom** of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the **kingdom** of heaven.

NIV Matthew 18:35 (A kingdom of heaven parable) “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

NIV Matthew 19:23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the **kingdom** of heaven.

NIV Matthew 23:13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the **kingdom** of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

NIV Matthew 25:41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ 44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ 45 “He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ 46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

NIV John 3:3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the **kingdom** of God unless he is born again.”

NIV 1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the **kingdom** of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the **kingdom** of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

NIV Galatians 5:19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the **kingdom** of God.

NIV Ephesians 5:5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the **kingdom** of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

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

NIV Revelation 22:14-15 Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, **those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.**

On the other hand the positive evidence of the new kingdom life is seen in righteousness, faith, love and perseverance.

NIV Matthew 6:33 But seek first his **kingdom** and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

NIV Colossians 1:10-14 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the **kingdom** of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the **kingdom** of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

NIV 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your **faith** is growing more and more, and the **love** every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about **your perseverance and faith** in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result **you will be counted worthy of the kingdom** of God, for which you are suffering.

NIV Hebrews 1:8-9 But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and **righteousness** will be the scepter of your **kingdom**. 9 You have **loved righteousness and hated wickedness**; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by **anointing you with the oil of joy.**”

Preserve Unity by Accepting Each Other's Differences in Non-essentials

Tolerance is the popular term in our culture for not judging anyone's views as wrong. We should just accept everyone's differences without questioning, critiquing or challenging. **Relativism** is part of this way of thinking: what's right for you may not be right for me but we can respect each other. This type of tolerance and relativism is not Paul's view here in Romans 14. *Paul is speaking about Christians tolerating each other's differences*, not about non-Christian and Christian tolerating anything that the other wants to believe or think. This text is not proof that Christians should just tolerate everything in the world as a non-essential, disputable matter.

Christ did not (and will not) accept differences in matters that involved a "detour to God" that alienates from Christ and makes him of no value (Matt 15, 23; Gal 5:2, 4). Christ did not tolerate the works-righteousness views of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Christ was not patient with those who took a detour around righteousness by faith in him as Messiah to pursue righteousness by works of the law. Christ did not tolerate those who did not repent and believe that he was the Christ (Matt 4:17; 11:20; 21:32). Neither was Paul patient with a cursed legalism that tried to be "justified by law" (Gal 5:4; see also Gal 1:6-9; 2:4-5, 14; 3:1-5; 4:17-18; 5:7-12; 6:12-13).

Like Christ, the strong should be patient with the weak. Christ accepted differences in disputable matters. **Weak faith in Romans 14** is close adherence to matters of ceremonial law that were intended to lead people to Christ for salvation as types and symbols and had been fulfilled by and abolished by Christ. These brothers with weak faith do not believe they have freedom to eat and drink in the Lord. Weak faith is a type of indictment in that these believers cannot appreciate the fullness of what Christ has accomplished.

NON-PARACHUTE ISSUES—like socks, helmet, shoes—you'll be more comfortable but they won't save your life like a parachute will. What are "disputable matters" in Romans 14? Scripture-taught OT ceremonial laws that are made obsolete because of the freedoms purchased by Christ. Doing or not doing these things do not

- 1) *Make us more or less acceptable to God or 'pleasing to God'* (Rom 14:3, 18; 15:7; 1 Cor 8:8).
- 2) *Determine whether we receive the Holy Spirit or not* (Acts 15:5-11). If we see people who have received the Holy Spirit, yet have differences with us on various doctrinal points or on matters of Christian practice, we should say with Paul, that "God has accepted him" (Rom 14:3, 18; Acts 15:8) so we should also accept him (Rom 15:7; 14:1).
- 3) *Determine whether we will be saved or not* (Acts 15:1).

Defining Non-Essentials in the New Testament

Foods (vegetarian, Kosher vs. unclean foods, food offered to idols Rom 14:2-3, 6, 14-21; Gal 2:12; 1 Cor 8),

Jesus taught that uncleanness was from the heart, not from eating certain foods or eating with unwashed hands (Matt 15:11, 17-20).

The Jerusalem Council decided to recommend that people should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from eating blood and from the meat of strangled animals (Acts 15:29; 21:25), but Paul saw the larger picture that idols were really nothing and food sacrificed to idol could be eaten in certain cases (1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:18-22): NIV 1 Corinthians 8:8 **But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.** Here the key is the purpose and effect of food. Food does not *make us acceptable* to God as a mediator of righteousness. **Food cannot substitute for Christ. Food cannot be made to function as a detour around Christ to God the Father.**

Drinks (drinking wine is acceptable Rom 14:21, but not if used as a "deed of the darkness" for drunkenness Rom 13:12-13)

Jesus drank wine, turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana and was accused of being a drunkard (John 2:1-11; Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34)

Paul encouraged Timothy to drink a little wine for medicinal purposes to help his stomach (1 Tim 5:23).

Circumcision (when done for cultural reasons, this was acceptable, but was a disputable matter conceding to the weak faith of Christian Jews who wouldn't accept uncircumcised ministers (Acts 16:3). Paul circumcised Timothy so as not to cause them to stumble over that issue and miss the gospel/kingdom central themes that Timothy would be teaching with Paul (1 Cor 9:19-23; Acts 21:20-24).

However, recall that God nearly killed Moses for his failure to circumcise his son, showing how seriously God took this command and how the Jews would have viewed it as well (Exod 4:25-26). The command to circumcise the slaves and aliens who wanted to take the Passover meal (Exod 12:44, 48) would also have given great weight to the Judaizer's argument that circumcision was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1; Gal 3:1-5; 5:2-4, 12).

Jesus was circumcised (Luke 2:21) but taught very little on the subject according to what has been written in the gospels (See John 7:22-24). Jesus was aware of the OT command to 'circumcise the heart' to love God and the promise of God to circumcise the hearts of his people (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4).

The apostles had to decide what to do on this crucial matter in the Jerusalem Council. **The proof that circumcision was optional was that the Gentiles received the Spirit by faith, showing that God had accepted them as uncircumcised Gentiles, in the grace of Christ Jesus** (Acts 15:1-11). **Since circumcision was not necessary to receive the Holy Spirit, then it was not necessary to the core values of the kingdom or the Christian life** (So also Paul's defense to the Galatians against circumcision as making them acceptable to God –Gal 3:1-5; 5:2-4; see Acts 15:1).

NIV Romans 4:11 And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the **righteousness** that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that **righteousness** might be credited to them.

Here is clear evidence developed by Paul that God's acceptance of the Gentiles is not based on circumcision, but on faith.

Observance of holy days, months, seasons and years (Gal 4:10-11; Rom 14:5-6)

Jesus taught and practiced a looser view of the Sabbath than the Pharisaic culture of his day. He let his disciples gather food and he healed (Mark 2:17-3:6).

NIV John 7:22 Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you **circumcise** a child on the Sabbath. NIV John 7:23 Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? NIV John 7:24 Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."

Purification rites

Paul participated in these rites to try to prove his adherence to the Jewish ceremonial law in order not to offend the Messiah-believing Jews. (Acts 21:23-27).

Forbidding marriage

Some legalists were forbidding marriage, perhaps based on a mistaken view of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 that it was better to remain unmarried to serve the Lord (1 Cor 7:7-8, 20, 24; 1 Tim 4:3).

"Or anything else that will cause your brother to fall" Rom 14:21-23

Christian freedoms that I allow without guilt or condemnation, that I do in faith, but which cause others to be distressed or tempted to violate their consciences by joining with me.

Typical Disputable Matters Today

Of the five specific "disputable matters" that seem to be the major issues in the apostolic church, three are still issues today. Circumcision and purification rites do not seem to be an issue in the European or American churches today. The other three have formed core doctrines that define separate denominations.

The problem of *foods* still exists in some churches that teach vegetarian diet is God's best for all people (Seventh Day Adventist) or that certain times of the religious calendar year believers should abstain from certain types of meat (Roman Catholics during Lent).

Drink is still a contentious issue as some churches ban the use of all alcoholic drinks and refuse membership to those who will not sign statements of voluntary abstinence (one C&MA church in Washington PA, all Southern Baptist missionaries).

Observance of holy days, months, seasons and years is still an issue as some churches follow a religious calendar marking seasons like Lent, Passover, Ash Wednesday, Epiphany, Pentecost, Christmas, Annunciation, (Episcopal, Lutheran, Orthodox, Roman Catholic). Other churches have a list of rules for what can or can't be done on Sundays, some stricter than others (Churches of Christ in Christian Union, PCA, OPC, any that adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms). Some accept only a Saturday rest, forming a denomination around the disputable issue (Seventh Day Adventists). Some deny that any days are spiritually significant, but that all days are alike, including Sunday. In any case, Paul argues for mutual acceptance over various views of the Sabbath or Lord's Day practices. Paul further warns against the DETOUR around Christ to try to earn God's approval by Sabbath keeping (Col 2:16-23; Gal 4:9-10; Rom 14:5-6; Heb 4:1-11).

Romans 14:17 argues for a balance of emphasis on the kingdom. If you are over-emphasizing non-essentials, you are missing the kingdom that 'pleases God and is approved by men' (Rom 14:18). Some of you may view yourselves as theological police who view dozens of non-essential issues as essential for salvation. If the church or an individual leader in the church fails to uphold all these distinctives, you may get mad and accuse the church of turning liberal, leaving for a more conservative church or starting your own new denomination. Some of you may go on a reformation rampage to try to brand people who hold different non-essential views as liberals or heretics and get everyone else to agree with you. You will create many needless divisions in the church over non-parachute issues that Paul exhorts you to accept others differences in these areas as Christ accepted you (Rom 14:1; 15:7)!

Many other things divide us that Christians have strong cultural biases for or against that have nothing to do with God's acceptance of us or have nothing to do with qualifying us to receive the Holy Spirit. We would be saved no matter what we did on these issues. Some of these issues are disputed matters, but many believe they are not disputable matters such that we should mutually accept each other's differences in these areas!

1. DRINKS: wine or alcoholic drinks, drinking coffee or tea
2. FOODS: eating chocolate, eating junk food, natural vs. genetically modified foods
3. SMOKING: smoking cigarettes or marijuana
4. MEDICINES: drug use, including psychiatric drugs, pain killers, beetle nut, vitamins, medicines, modern medicine vs. faith healing or traditional medicine
5. MEDICAL ETHICS: cloning, in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination, birth control, sterilization, brain stem cell research, abortion acceptable in which cases?
6. DEFENSE: guns or weapons ownership, civil or international wars
7. ENTERTAINMENT: use of free time, card playing, gambling, watching certain movies or TV shows, reading Harry Potter books, reading other books with questionable moral content like horror stories, ghost stories, murder mysteries, romance novels, books with sexual content, computer games, music styles and lyrics
8. WEALTH: stock market, banking, use of discretionary money, tithing, credit cards, home & land ownership, car ownership, simple lifestyle
9. ECONOMICS: capitalism vs. other economic systems
10. GOVERNMENT: democracy vs. other governments, social security, political party
11. APPEARANCE: **men** wearing earrings, jewelry, long hair or wearing hats in church, **women:** skirt length, spaghetti strap tops or dresses, tube tops, pants, tops that show a bra underneath, nylons, heel sizes, open toed shoes, open heel shoes, colors of clothing, earrings, jewelry or make-up, hair length, covered head
12. RELATIONSHIPS: dating, divorce, remarriage, polygamy in some African cultures
13. EDUCATION: home school, public school, Christian school

14. WORLD RESOURCES: animal rights, animals used in experiments, endangered species vs. use of land, sea and natural resources, air pollution, global warming
15. CHURCH GOVERNMENT: (congregational, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Roman Catholic [but their teaching on *essentials* is wrong]), the role of women in the church
16. BAPTISM: (adult or infant, immersion, sprinkling)
17. HOLY DAYS: Sabbath or Lord's Day practices, observing a religious calendar (Christmas, Easter, Lent, Passover, Epiphany, etc)
18. OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: circumcision, foods, drinks, food offered to idols, theonomists (for the OT law), antinomians (against the OT today), creation in 6 literal days vs. scientific views of very old earth
19. WORSHIP: singing of psalms, worship without musical accompaniment, types of instruments allowed in a worship service, types of music allowed in a worship service
20. GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT: charismatic views, cessationist views
21. END TIMES PROPHECY: pre-millennial, post millennial, amillennial, pan-millennial, the number 666 in society, the beast, interpreting the book of Revelation

This is not a list of freedoms or a list of prohibitions. You cannot use these matters to promote false teaching, rebel against legitimate authority, indulge the sinful nature or to boast about your own standards, which could all be grounds for church discipline and separation (Jude 1:3-19; Gal 1:6-9; 2 John 1:7-11; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 3:17; Rev 2:13-25; 1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:9-10, 18; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Gal 5:19-21; Rev 21:8). Denominational or local church views held on these issues should not be required for church membership. *Use the sample wisdom tests at the end of Chapter 14 for making decisions on some of these disputable matters.*

Some of these topics are very difficult to resolve even after careful Bible research. These are all topics that the Bible speaks to, but which Christians differ in regard to their interpretation of the Bible's teaching. None of them seem to be core issues related to our acceptance with God and our salvation, yet we do not accept each other's differences of opinion on these issues. We should study the issues and come to conclusions based on biblical wisdom and informed biblical research. We can try to persuade others of our views, even as Paul continued to do. Yet many of us will not agree on the conclusions. We ought to accept each other's differences of opinion on some of the disputable matters without calling someone else's freedom evil. Missionary service in a country like Taiwan, where Christianity is a clear minority, helps us to mutually accept each other on a lot more of these "disputable matters." We should not be corporately, denominationally or individually divided over non-essentials. We should not try to enshrine particular non-essential, disputable views in our church statement of faith if that statement of faith is used to determine church membership or leadership qualifications.

A Test For Imbalance

How do you know if you are making a disputable matter into an essential one? If you boast in something other than the person and work of Christ as the evidence of your salvation and acceptance with God, you have made that thing you boast about as your crowning mark of identity; you are alienated from Christ (Gal 5:4; 6:13-14; Phil 3:3; 1 Cor 1:31).

Separating Over Essential Issues

When should we separate from people over essential issues? The Bible does speak about separation from certain types of people doing certain things. These could be considered non-disputable matters in terms of the holiness of God and the holiness he requires of his church. Here it seems that anything that offends God's holiness should also offend the church and the church should take disciplinary steps to purify the church (Num 25; Matt 18:15-18; Gal 6:1).

1. Behavioral sins of such a serious nature that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 5:9-13; 6:9-10, 18; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Gal 5:19-21; Rev 21:8). Any denomination that condones such immoral or sinful behavior should be separated from.

2. False teachers who teach immorality or deny the core elements of the faith (Jude 1:3-19; Gal 1:6-9; 2 John 1:7-11; 2 Pet 2:1-22; 3:17; Rev 2:13-25). Any denomination that condones such false teachers or teachings should be separated from.

Christ's Acceptance is Our Pattern for Mutual Acceptance

What seems to be key in the mind of the Spirit revealed by Paul is the pattern for Christ's acceptance of us as his children by giving us the Spirit ought to be the pattern we use to determine who we should accept as fellow children of God (Rom 14:3; 15:7). Christ gives evidence of his acceptance by imparting the Holy Spirit to dwell in believers (Acts 15:8; Rom 8:11, 14-16), testifying with our spirits that we are his children. **Christ accepts us on a grace-based (he initiates and supplies all the resources), faith-based (we believe the whole Word of truth) gospel-centered (Christ's death and resurrection) acceptance. We should accept others because they believe in a grace-filled gospel. Those who deny this grace-based, faith-based, Christ-centered gospel should not be accepted.**

This should be studied more carefully in the context of Romans to understand what Paul means when he writes that God and Christ accept us (Rom 14:3, 18; 15:7). *One pattern for God's acceptance and Christ's acceptance of us is found in the theme of being "pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1; 14:18).*

*Another pattern for God's acceptance and Christ's acceptance of us is found in the theme of righteousness in Romans. **God's acceptance is demonstrated by whom he credits righteousness to, whom he justifies.***

Another pattern for Christ's acceptance of us is found in the theology of who will be saved (Rom 10:9-13). *Who will be saved? How are we saved? By this we know how we should accept one another as Christ accepted us.*

Faith in Christ's death and propitiating blood—NIV Romans 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, **through faith in his blood**. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. NIV Romans 5:9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved** from God's wrath through him!

Faith in Christ's resurrection—NIV Romans 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be **saved** through his life!

Hope in the redemption of our bodies because we have the pledge of the Spirit—NIV Romans 8:24 For in this hope we were **saved**. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?

Faith—NIV Romans 11:20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and ***you stand by faith***. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

NIV 1 Corinthians 15:2-4 **By this gospel you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have **believed** in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

NIV Ephesians 2:8 **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--** and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

NIV 2 Thessalonians 2:13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because **from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.**

NIV Titus 3:5 he **saved** us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He **saved** us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

NIV Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are **saved**.

A Basic Overview of the Gospel

The Most Important Questions You Will Ever Need Answers For

- ◆ ***What was God doing before time began?***

- ◆ *What did God do in the beginning?*
- ◆ *What's wrong with the human race?*
- ◆ *How is God saving his people and judging his enemies?*
- ◆ *What must you do to be saved?*
- ◆ *What does God give you in salvation?*
- ◆ *How can you increase in strength after you are saved?*

1. What was God doing before time began?

God existed in joyful relationship, perfectly content, needing nothing before this world began from eternity past.

We can prove this by showing that one of God's gifts to believers is joy in himself and joy in his presence. *God only gives a joy that he already has, namely, a joy in himself.* Further, Jesus showed us this joy during his earthly ministry, and fulfilled all of these commands to rejoice in the Lord. If Jesus did it during his earthly ministry filled with the Holy Spirit, then Jesus and the Spirit did it from all eternity. Since God is everlasting and unchanging, we can conclude that God had perfect joy in himself before creating anything.

Psalm 5:11 But let all who take refuge in you be glad; *let them ever sing for joy.* Spread your protection over them, that *those who love your name may rejoice in you.*

Psalm 16:9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, **10** because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. **11** You have made known to me the path of life; *you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

Psalm 21:6 Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and *made him glad with the joy of your presence.*

Psalm 43:4 Then will I go to the altar of God, *to God, my joy and my delight.* I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God.

Isaiah 12:6 *Shout aloud and sing for joy,* people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.

Isaiah 24:14 They raise their voices, *they shout for joy,* from the west they acclaim the LORD's majesty. **15** Therefore in the east give glory to the LORD; *exalt the name of the LORD,* the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. **16** From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One."

2. What did God do in the beginning?

The Triune God created time. "In the beginning . . ." God created space, matter, light, stars, all the elements of chemistry, living things (both spiritual and physical) and man in order to

1. show his glory by visible and invisible things, bringing praise to his own name
2. as a cooperative work of each person of the Trinity
3. as a display of his love and joy in the other persons of the Trinity and
4. to invite man to share in that glory with other holy creatures (like angels, cherubim seraphim).

At the creation the glory image of the Triune God was perfectly reflected in everything he did, on everything he did and through everything he did. "God saw that it was very good." When Adam and Eve saw what God had done, they also were able to see God's glory and share in the joyful relationship God had between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 48:9 *For my own name's sake* I delay my wrath; *for the sake of my praise* I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off. **10** See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. **11** *For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this.* How can I let myself be defamed? *I will not yield my glory to another.*

Proverbs 8:12 “I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion. 30 Then I [wisdom] was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, **rejoicing always in his presence,** 31 **rejoicing in his whole world** and delighting in mankind.

Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? 6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone-- 7 while the morning stars sang together and **all the angels shouted for joy?**

Psalm 92:4 For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for **joy** at the works of your hands.

Psalm 100:1 **Shout for joy to the LORD,** all the earth. 2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Isaiah 44:23 Sing for **joy,** O heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, O earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, **he displays his glory in Israel.**

3. What’s wrong with the human race?

Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thinking it would make them wise like God, believing Satan’s lies. God warned them they would die if they ate from this tree, and they brought sin’s curses upon themselves and on all of us: sorrow, sickness, deprivation, wasted effort, pain, confusion about how to plan for the future, physical death, and the threat of eternal separation from God in a place of torment called hell. God’s greatest curse is giving men up to their own desires without restraining them or changing their hearts. This is the beginning phase of eternal damnation to hell. This curse came upon all men by the representative disobedience of Adam, the head of the human race. Now we have inherited his sinful nature and his curse. As sinners we love self-centered pleasures, we boast about ourselves and we live in fear of many things except God. We create religions and we make idols of created things to satisfy us, exalts us, or protect us. We are blind to the glory of God revealed in created things and we do not use created things as a means to enjoying, loving, praising or glorifying the Triune God. We are without hope of being rescued from our sinful nature or this curse by our own strength, wisdom, education, technology, science or moral will power. We are dead in our sins, not even searching for the true God. The history of man demonstrates this.

The Sin of Man:

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but **you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.**”

Genesis 3:1 Now **the serpent** was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” 4 “**You will not surely die,**” the serpent said to the woman. 5 “**For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.**” 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was **good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.** 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they **realized they were naked,** so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and **they hid from the LORD God** among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

The Curse on Man that we Inherit:

Genesis 3:15 “And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” 16 To the woman he said, “**I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;** with pain you will give birth to children. **Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.**” 17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “**Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.** 18 **It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.** 19 **By the sweat of**

your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Ecclesiastes: Note the chaos factors of life that cause us to cry “*Meaningless!*” *Sin* (our own and other’s sins against us), *death*, *time* (we don’t know the best time to act) and *chance* (being at the right place at the right time is impossible to predict) (Ecc 1:3; 9:1-11) are all part of the curse.

Romans 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven* against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who *suppress the truth by their wickedness*, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they *neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him*, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images* made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity* for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and *worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator*-- who is forever praised. Amen.

Romans 5:19 For just as *through the disobedience of the one man* [Adam] *the many were made sinners*, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous.

Romans 3:10 As it is written: “There is *no one righteous*, not even one; 11 there is *no one who understands, no one who seeks God*. 12 *All have turned away*, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” 13 “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” 14 “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood; 16 ruin and misery mark their ways, 17 and the way of peace they do not know.” 18 “*There is no fear of God before their eyes.*”

Ephesians 2:1 As for you, *you were dead in your transgressions and sins*.

John 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God--13 *children born* not of natural descent, *nor of human decision or a husband’s will*, but born of God.

4. How is God saving his people and judging his enemies?

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God gave them a promise of a Savior who would come and represent man and live a sinless life. The Old Testament of the Bible progressively revealed who this Savior would be and what he would do by many signs, symbols, miracles and ceremonies. God prepared the world for the Savior by working in the tiny nation of ancient Israel. After about 2,000 years God sent Jesus, the eternal Son (he already existed as God before creation), to take a human soul and body, born by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary. Jesus is fully God and fully man: As God he is qualified to save us; As man he is qualified to represent the human race. In Jesus God’s glory is made in human likeness. Jesus perfectly reveals God’s glory to us. In Jesus we see the holy character of God and the joyful relationship that shows Jesus is perfectly satisfied in God. When the Father looks at Jesus, and at all Jesus did/does, he says, “He is very good,” “It is very good.” Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit without limit during his earthly ministry. Jesus was crucified on a cross according to the predetermined plan of God. On the cross Jesus represented his chosen people by receiving the curse and the punishment due for their sin. He was raised from death three days later as proof that he represented chosen sinners but was not a sinner himself. Now he is exalted to the right hand of God. “Jesus is Lord,” ruling until the total plan of salvation and judgment of man is complete. He now sends his Holy Spirit to carry out his Bible promises through angels and humans. He now prays for his chosen people and represents them before God the Father in heaven.

Salvation Promises:

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel.

Hebrews 1:1 In the past *God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways*, 2 but *in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son*, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Luke 1:30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name *Jesus*. 32 *He will be great*

and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” 34 “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since *I am a virgin?*” 35 The angel answered, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*”

Jesus is the Savior & Lord, the God-man

Hebrews 1:3 *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.* After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. **Hebrews 2:14** Since the children have flesh and blood, *he too shared in their humanity* so that *by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death* - that is, the devil-- 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. 16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. 17 For this reason *he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*

Matthew 3:16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw *the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him.* 17 *And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”*

John 3:34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for *God gives [him] the Spirit without limit.*

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you *by God's set purpose and foreknowledge,* and you, with the help of wicked men, *put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead,* freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:32 *God has raised this Jesus to life,* and we are all witnesses of the fact. 33 *Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.* 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, “The Lord said to my Lord: “*Sit at my right hand* 35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” 36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

Galatians 3:13 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,* for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” 14 He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, *so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

Hebrews 1:14 Are not *all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*

Matthew 28:19 Therefore *go and make disciples of all nations,* baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

5. What must you do to be saved?

Repent: Tell God you hate the curse and its effects, you hate the way you make idols of created things, you hate your blindness to his glory in the created world and you hate your blindness to Jesus and what he has done. Tell him you hate your attempts to please God apart from Christ. Confess the specific ways you have sinned in your motives, words and behaviors. Ask God to forgive you because of Jesus' death on a cross.

Believe: Tell God the Father you believe what he has done for the salvation of sinners. He raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit and exalted him to his right hand of power and authority as Lord. Tell Jesus the Son you believe what he has done for the salvation of sinners. He lived a sinless life, died on a cross in your place and was raised from the dead, and declared Lord of all. He now rules until every enemy is crushed and every chosen believer is saved. Tell the Holy Spirit you believe what he has done for the salvation of sinners. He opens our eyes to see the beauty of the glory of Christ and changes our desires to loving God and seeking after him. Receive the Holy Spirit and believe what he will do to apply salvation to your life and change you into likeness of the incarnate Jesus.

Hope: Tell God you hope for the return of Christ, for complete freedom from sin, for the perfect glorification of God in heaven and for the judgment of all his and your enemies.

Love: Tell God you love him. Love him for the beauty of his holiness. Love him because he deserves to be loved. Love the people he has created. Love the church – the body of Christ; speak God’s truth to each other. Love the non-Christians, God’s enemies, by witnessing about God to them by words and deeds of kindness.

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now these three remain: *faith, hope and love*. But the greatest of these is love.
1 Thessalonians 1:3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by *faith*, your labor prompted by *love*, and your endurance inspired by *hope* in our Lord Jesus Christ.
Galatians 5:5 But by *faith* we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we *hope*.
6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is *faith* expressing itself through *love*.
(see also next section for related Bible verses and *The FPC Confession of Faith* chapter 11, pp. 25-26.)

6. What does God give you in salvation?

Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. God recreates you into the likeness of Jesus by sending the Spirit to live in you. These qualities of repentance, faith, hope and love are all gifts of God’s grace. You cannot do these things unless God sends his Spirit to work in you and enables you to do these things. If these qualities are yours and are increasing in strength, you should have assurance that you are God’s child, prepared to meet him when he returns. By his grace you can now enter into the joyful relationship that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share. God gives you new eyes to see the world as a means to know God. God enables you to see images of His glory reflected in created things, including the people around you. God gives you new eyes to interpret daily experiences as evidences of his love in changing you into the likeness of Jesus.

God gives faith, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit:

Isaiah 61:7 Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace *they will rejoice in their inheritance*; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and *everlasting joy will be theirs*.

Isaiah 65: 18 *But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.*

Luke 10: 21 At that time *Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit*, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”

John 15:11 I have told you this so that *my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete*.

John 17:13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, *so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them*.”

Acts 2:28 You have made known to me the paths of life; *you will fill me with joy in your presence*.

Acts 13:52 And the disciples were *filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of *righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope *fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him*, so that you may overflow with hope *by the power of the Holy Spirit*.

Faith, hope, love and repentance are God’s gifts:

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through *faith*-- and this not from yourselves, *it is the gift of God*--

9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Romans 2:4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that *God’s kindness leads you toward repentance*?

Ephesians 1: 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the *hope* to which he has called you, *the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*, 19 and *his incomparably great power for us who believe*. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Assurance of salvation:

2 Peter 1:4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world* caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to *add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.* 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to *make your calling and election sure.* For *if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

7. How can you increase in strength?

Receive baptism (you cannot improve your life to earn baptism—it is a water-sprinkled *promise of what God does for you* in salvation). Join the church by public profession of your faith. Take the Lord Supper frequently (also called “breaking bread” together in Acts). Read the Bible and receive instruction in the Bible (preaching, teaching, read good Christian books) as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Pray regularly using the words and phrases of the Bible to ask God for what he promises to give you. Praise him in regular attendance at Sunday worship. Continue to confess your sins. Study the confession of faith written by Tim Yates (on-line at <http://crts.edu/english/emt.english.ysof.htm>) Grow in your understanding of the mystery of God’s love and grace so that you will always be filled with a thankful, joyful heart for who he is, what he has done, and what he will do.

Baptism & Discipleship:

Acts 2:37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and *be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* 39 *The promise is for you and your children* and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call.” 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 *Those who accepted his message were baptized,* and about three thousand were added to their number that day. 42 *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, *they gave to anyone as he had need.* 46 *Every day they continued to meet together* in the temple courts. *They broke bread* in their homes and *ate together* with glad and sincere hearts, 47 *praising God* and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and *make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* 20 and *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.* And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Grow in the Grace and knowledge of Christ’s love:

2 Peter 3:18 But *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* And I pray that you, being *rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Hebrews 10:24 And let us *consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.* 25 *Let us not give up meeting together,* as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 John 1:9 If we *confess our sins*, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

***Proving that Faith in the Trinity is Required for Salvation:
A Detailed Study of Saving Faith in John's Gospel***

“Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God”

20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

“Believe” is used over 100 times as a verb in John's Gospel. Faith is never used as a noun.

This faith is not simply a faith that Jesus died on a cross to forgive my sins. True saving faith involves a deep faith connected to all that Jesus reveals about himself and his relationships in the Trinity. Believing “in” or “into” Jesus unites us with the Trinity. By faith we share in the fellowship that Jesus has with the Father and the Spirit. Faith is trinitarian or it is not true saving faith. The Jews already believed in God as the Spirit, or God and His Spirit. *What the Jews have not yet believed is the Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is why John writes this Gospel for them.* Now they need to understand the relation of the Father and the Spirit to Jesus the Son. Thus his reader's faith in the Father and Spirit are assumed throughout the Gospel of John, and thus not emphasized as the contention with the Jews over what kind of faith will save them. In our day, no such assumptions can be made. We call for a faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the only faith that saves in much the same way that Paul preached to the Gentiles (see Acts 17:21-31; 14:17; Eph 1:3-14; and especially Romans 1:4; 10:9-10; 8:9-13). We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but this includes faith in the One who sent Christ (the Father) and faith in the One who is sent by the Father and Christ (the Holy Spirit). Our faith is put on each person of the Trinity because the glory of God is revealed by each person (each person shares the same attributes and has active communion in the Trinity) and because we trust each person of the Godhead to fulfill his respective role in our salvation. *In John's Gospel, the Father draws people to faith in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit* (John 6:44, 63-65).

1. Whoever testifies about the Christ must be believed:

Believe what John the Baptist, Moses and the Scriptures say about the Son (1:6-8, 29-34; 2:22; 5:39-40),

Believe what the disciples say about the Son (1:49; 6:68-9; 16:30)

Believe what the people say about the Son (4:42; 6:14; 7:31, 40-41; 9:35-8; 11:27; 12:13; 19:19)

Believe what the Son says about himself (8:24, 58 and “I am” statements),

Believe what the Father and Spirit say about the Son (mutual glorification, mutual testimony; necessity & authority of Scripture)

The Son is . . .

the “I am” (8:24, 58; see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10; 46:4; 48:12)

the unique Son (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18)

the pre-existent one (1:1-2; 17:4-5; 20:17)

the one entrusted with all things, including the “cup” of suffering

the revealer of the glory of the Triune God (1:14; 2:11; 11:40; 12:28-29;

the glorifier of the Father and the Spirit (17:4; 3:34-35)

the Christ (11:27)

the King of Israel (1:49)

Savior of the World (4:42)

the Holy One of God (6:69)

sent by the Father (1:12; 3:34; 5:36, 38, 43-44; 6:46; 7:29; 8:19; 10:15; 11:29; 14:8-9, 24; 15:15; 16:27; 17:8)

glorified by the Father and Spirit (17:1, 5; 16:14)

loved by the Father (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24)

co-working with the Father (4:34; 14:10, 20)

submissive to the Father (5:19, 30; 14:10-11, 20, 31; 15:10; in prayer 11:41; 12:28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24-5)

indwelt by the Father (14:10)
returning to the Father (14:12, 28; 16:10, 28; 20:17)

filled with the Spirit without limit (3:34-5)

to be worshiped by men in Spirit and truth (9:38; 4:23-4)

2. Whoever testifies about the true identity and work of the Father must be believed:

Believe what John the Baptist says about the Father (3:34-36)

Believe what the Son says about the Father

The Father glorifies is the Son and Spirit (17:1, 5; 16:14)

The Father loves the Son (3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24)

The Father co-works with the Son (4:34; 14:10, 20)

The Father's will controls the Son (5:19, 30; 14:10-11, 20, 31; 15:10; in prayer 11:41; 12:28; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24-5)

The Father indwells the Son (14:10)

The Father receives the Son into glory (14:12, 28; 16:10, 28; 20:17)

Saving faith includes believing in the One who sent Christ (5:24; 12:44-45; 13:20; 14:1; 17:3) The one who sent Christ is the Father (5:23, 36-37; 6:44, 57; 8:16; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21)

5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and *believes him who sent me* has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

12:44-45 Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, *he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.*"

13:20 "I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; *and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.*"

14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. *Trust in God ; trust also in me.*"

17:3 "Now this is eternal life: *that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*"³

3. Whoever testifies about the true identity and work of the Holy Spirit must be believed:

Believe what John the Baptist says about the Holy Spirit (1:32-33; 3:34)

Believe what Scripture says about the Holy Spirit (7:38-39)

Believe what the Son says about the Spirit (16:8-15) He is the "Comforter" "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16-17).

Believe what the Spirit now says about himself through the Word of the New Testament Gospel

Consider the theme of **resurrecting to eternal life** in the gospel of John:

5:21 For just as *the Father raises the dead and gives them life*, even so *the Son gives life* to whom he is pleased to give it.

5:26 For as *the Father has life in himself*, so he has granted *the Son to have life in himself*.

6:32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is *my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven*. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and *gives life to the world.*"

6:39-40 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, *but raise them up at the last day*. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and *I will raise him up at the last day.*"

6:44 "No one can *come to me* unless the Father who sent me draws him, and *I will raise him up at the last day*.

6:54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and *I will raise him up at the last day*.

6:63 "*The Spirit gives life.*"

Here we see the cooperation of the Father, Son and Spirit in giving eternal life to all who come to the Son and believe in the Son. The Father and the Son draw believers by sending to life giving Spirit to believe the words of Christ.

³ Romans emphasizes this same theme: God credits righteousness to those who believe that He raised Christ from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:4; 4:5, 24; 8:9-11; 10:9-10; cf Mark 11:22; 1 Peter 1:21, 2-3)

Saving faith includes believing in the work of the Holy Spirit to bring life through the words of Christ:

6:63-5 “*The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.*” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, “This is why I told you that *no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.*”

16:13-5 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, *he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.* (Thus the Holy Spirit now bears witness to himself by revealing the things of Christ)

Faith in the Holy Spirit in the New Testament

Must we *believe in the Holy Spirit* to have eternal life? The Bible never explicitly commands us to believe in the Holy Spirit for eternal life. This is because Jesus is the mediator of the covenant whose work as the sin-bearer merits our entitlement to the gift of the Spirit. We must come to the Spirit through Jesus the Lamb of God (Eph 2:18; John 14:6). We must *receive/accept the Holy Spirit as believers in Jesus Christ* (John 7:39; Gal 3:2). This is Christ’s command “***Receive the Holy Spirit,***” (John 20:22). Christ promises that we will receive anything we ask for in his name, primarily referring to asking for the Holy Spirit to be given so the presence of Christ can remain with them (John 16:24).

John says that the disciples *know* the Holy Spirit because he is with them and in them (John 14:17). They have *received/accepted* the Holy Spirit (John 7:39), though the world cannot accept the Spirit (John 14:17). These verbs are used of saving faith towards the Father and the Son in John’s gospel. If we *know* the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, this is eternal life (John 17:3). *Receiving* the Son and his words is life and salvation (John 1:12; 13:20; 17:8). Not receiving the Son or his words brings damnation to those who reject him (John 5:43; 12:48). Thus we could conclude that knowing and receiving the Spirit in Jesus’ name is parallel with knowing and receiving the Son in the Father’s name. John **13:20 says**, “I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.” Jesus sends the Spirit. Accepting the Spirit is accepting Christ. The Father sends the Son. Accepting the Son is accepting the Father.

1. The Spirit reveals the things of God and Christ (John 16:13-15; 1 Cor 2:11-14)
2. By the will the Father drawing sinners, the Spirit gives new life to them so they can come to Christ (John 6:63-5, 44; 3:6-8).
3. We are told to ask the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in Jesus name (Luke 11:13; John 14:12-14, 26; 15:26; Acts 2:38-39; Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-19).
4. The Spirit will bring the joy of communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ in his love promises and power (1 John 1:3; Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-19).
5. Believers have communion with the Holy Spirit by faith (2 Cor 13:14). This is a faith communion in the comforts of the new covenant (God’s love and hope of glory) confirmed in our hearts by the person of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14-16; 28-39; 5:2-11; 15:9-13; Heb 10:15-17).
6. Through faith in Jesus Christ we accept/receive the promised Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:2, 13-14, 22; 4:6, 29; 5:5), a guarantee or pledge of our inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).
7. The testimony given by Scripture is the voice of the Holy Spirit and must be believed (Heb 3:7-19; 1 John 5:6, 9-10).
8. The Spirit speaks to the churches and must be believed and obeyed (Acts 13:2; 15:28; 16:7; Rev 2:7; 14:13).
9. The Word of Christ is the Word of the Spirit (John 6:63; Rev 2:1 and vs. 7; 2:8 and vs. 11; 2:12 and vs. 17; 2:18 and vs. 29; 3:1 and vs. 6; 3:7 and vs. 13; 3:14 and vs. 22).
10. Faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:9; Eph 2:8-9).
11. Believers know that the Holy Spirit exists and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb 11:6).
12. Paul preached in a way that people might put their faith in the power of God, a demonstration of the Holy Spirit’s power, rather than the wisdom of man (1 Cor 2:4).

13. Believers are commanded to live by the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, sow to please the Spirit, worship by the Spirit, and by the Spirit to put to death selfish lusts (Gal 5:16, 18, 24; 6:8; Rom 8:13-14; John 4:24; Phil 3:3)

Concluding Observations on Receiving the Holy Spirit

Without believing the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the Son and Father there can be no salvation.

Without receiving the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, there can be no salvation.

Without knowing the ministry of the Holy Spirit and communing with the person of the Holy Spirit, there can be no proper worship of God, no proper use of the means of grace, nor any proper use of the gifts of the Spirit.

We believe in the Holy Spirit in regard to his works for our salvation, though the initial faith we are called to profess is more centered on Christ and the Father.⁴ Following profession of faith in God and in Christ (or simultaneous with profession of faith), we receive the Spirit consciously from the Father and the Son. Though the Spirit would already be working to bring this initial faith to confess Christ, it seems this is more what Jesus means when he speaks about the Spirit-birth being like the wind blowing—not knowing where came from and where it is going (John 3:8). The Spirit works mysteriously in bringing new life. But the Spirit must not remain anonymous for long.

Immediately the new believer must begin to grow and knowledge of this Triune God and respective roles of each person of the Trinity in order to have communion with each person of the Trinity and his blessings and benefits. Right from the start of the new believers discipleship in the Christian life and included in the message presented in evangelism MUST be a clear presentation of the need to receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith in Christ and pursue communion with the Spirit from the very beginning of the Christian life. Baptism is one of the first outward signs of the beginning of a lifetime and an eternity of communion with the Triune God, receiving baptism in the name the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Ephesians 2:18 sums it up well: “For through him [Christ] we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access to the Father by one Spirit.” We must know the work of each person of the Godhead in order to glorify God for his greatness in our salvation (see Eph 1:6, 12, 14 and context connected with the repeated theme: ‘to the praise of his glory’)

The Nine Questions Asked for Church Membership

(2nd person plural in the questions assumes at least two or more are answering the vows simultaneously. If only one person answers, then change the pronouns and nouns to reflect this)

1. *Do you believe in the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, existing from eternity past in a joyful, self-sufficient relationship, but who, desiring to reveal the full riches of his glory, created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain, purposing further to show his glory by permitting sin, then by conquering sin and death through cursing and judging his enemies and through saving you, his people, and bringing you into that joyful trinitarian relationship?*
2. *Do you confess yourselves to have inherited the sinful nature of Adam and to be idolaters in the sight of God, foolishly distorting God’s revealed truth and using created things to satisfy selfish desires, exalt yourselves and protect yourselves from fears of things other than God, and do you confess that you justly deserve God’s wrath, condemnation and judgment, and that you are without hope of being saved unless you repent and humble yourselves before the sovereign mercy of God?*
3. *Do you believe that God is one God in three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, sharing all the same glorious character, and do you believe that he is holy, jealous, good, everywhere present, all-powerful, all knowing, sovereign, righteous, just, wrathful, everlasting, loving, unchanging, self-existent, all wise, self-controlled, compassionate, forgiving, patient, gentle, kind, peaceful, faithful, truthful and joyful?*

⁴ See John Owen, *Communion with God, Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 and abridged version edited by R.J.K. Law, *Communion with God* (Puritan Paperback series, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1991) p. 172-3. See also Sinclair B. Ferguson *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1987) p. 93.

4. *Do you believe in God the Father as the one who sent Jesus to this earth to fulfill the righteousness of the law in your place, who sent Jesus to suffer the law's curses for you, who raised Jesus from the dead and exalted the Lord Jesus Christ to the highest place, and who in Jesus' name sends the Holy Spirit into your lives?*
5. *Do you believe in God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless Savior of sinners, the "I AM" who existed from all eternity past, who was incarnate in your humanity as the revealer of the Father's glory, and do you trust in his shed blood on the cross to forgive your sins and look to him as the resurrected High Priest to represent you before God the Father, sending his Holy Spirit into your lives, and returning in glory to bring you to heaven?*
6. *Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, Life-giver and Sanctifier, and do you receive him as the Spirit of truth who reveals Christ's glory, and do you submit to him as the one who brings you into joyful communion with God and changes you into Christ's image through the Word, prayer, the sacraments and the fellowship of believers?*
7. *Do you believe in the Triune God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, as the only true God, and do you promise to leave all other religions, idols, superstitions, or ancestor-worship, and love the Triune God alone as he reveals himself in the Bible and serve the Triune God as he enables you by his grace for the rest of your earthly lives?*
8. *Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work by attending regular worship services, giving your offerings, using your spiritual gifts, and participating in Christian fellowship within this body and Christian witness to the community to the best of your ability?*
9. *Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church as she faithfully teaches God's Word, both as her leaders seek to instruct and disciple you, and if needed, to correct you, and do you promise to protect and promote the doctrinal and moral purity and relational peace of this congregation?*

We believe the Bible teachings presupposed in these nine questions are required of all true Christians. These questions are developed based on the *Apostles & Nicene Creeds*, Gospel presentations in the New Testament (Eph 4:4-6; 1 Cor 15:1-4; Phil 2:5-11; John 8:24; Rom 10:9-10) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) as the NT standards for church membership.

DIRECTIONS FOR TESTING PROFESSIONS OF FAITH & RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

by Jonathan Edwards (edited and abridged by Dr. Tim Yates)

Test them to see if the operation of their religious experience be centered in the will or heart, not in the imagination or in the guesswork of the mind (even though they may have great emotional displays because of their imagination).

Test people to see if their minds are troubled about those things that they have reason to be troubled about, namely, a solid sense and conviction of truth.

If they have fears, test that their fears are not based on irrational things, but that they fear God and the eternal justice he can repay in hell.

If they have a conviction of sin, test to see if they are really sins according to Scripture. Test to see if they define their sins against God and that they are convinced of their guilt, in offending and affronting so great a God: A God that so hates sin that he will certainly punish it.

If they have a conviction of sin, test to see if they are convinced both of inner heart sins and outward behavior sins.

If they have conviction of spiritual sins, test to see if they are convinced of sins of not loving God, not confessing Christ, lack of gratitude to Him.

If they feel like their service is inadequate, test to see if their conviction discerns sinful motives in the work.

If they have true conviction of sin, they will accept that God would be just to damn them to hell, reject their prayers, and ignore all their efforts to seek salvation. They will not excuse themselves because of habits of thinking or weakness in resisting sin or loving God. They will not assume that they have above average convictions of sin or interpret these convictions as evidence that they are truly humble.

Test to see if people have affections based on the truth of divine Scripture and sight of the glories of the Triune God. We need not insist that they first have some kind of conviction of sin through the Ten Commandments only

Proclaiming the Kingdom in a Culture of Legalism: Galatians & Romans 14

without hearing about the holiness of God and his mercy to sinners. If people have these kind of evangelical convictions, these convictions will control their thinking and behavior.

Test to see if they have a proper mourning for sin. And also, test that sin is burdensome to them, and that their hearts are tender and sensible with respect to it...the object of their care and dread.

Test to see if God and Divine things are admirable on account of the beauty of their moral perfection.

Test to see if they have a real sense of the sufficiency of Christ, a sense of that Divine, supreme, and spiritual excellency of Christ, wherein this sufficiency fundamentally consists; and that the sight of this excellency is really the foundation of their satisfaction as to His sufficiency.

Test to see if their conviction of the truth of Divine things be discerned to be truly some way or other primarily built on a sense of their Divine excellency.

Test to see if they long after HOLINESS, and that all their experiences increase their longing.

Ask them if they are willing and disposed to bear the Cross, sell all for Christ, choosing their portion in heaven.

Test whether their experience has a respect to PRACTICE in these ways. Ask if their behavior at present seems to be agreeable to such experiences.

Test whether it inclines them much to think of Practice, and more and more to remember past ill practice.

Test whether their thoughts find sinful practices to be repulsive.

See if they long after perfect freedom from sin, and after those things wherein Holiness consists; and pursue this freedom by fixed and strong resolutions against sin, attended with fear and jealousy of their own hearts.

Observe whether, when they tell of their experiences, it is not with such an air that you feel that they expect to be admired and applauded, and [whether they] won't be disappointed if they fail of discerning in you something of that nature; and shocked and displeased if they discover that you question or criticize their experiences.

Ask whether their joy be truly and properly joy in God and in Christ; joy in Divine Good; or whether it be not simply a false joy in themselves, a false joy in their own excellencies or privileges, or a false joy in their experiences or based only on what God has done for them, or what He has promised He will do for them (without a joy based on God himself); and test whether they are simply affected with their own new discoveries and affections.