

Vol. 3, No. 3 • May/June 2016

DISCERN

A Magazine of *Life Hope & Truth*

Bible

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I'm Feeling Lost

When Google Doesn't Know: Finding Answers to the Questions That Matter

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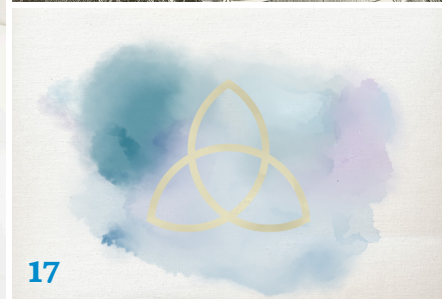
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FOUR BIG QUESTIONS

Articles in this issue can give you a good start in answering these simple but profoundly important questions.

We didn't plan it this way, but when I saw the article lineup for this edition of *Discern* I immediately thought, This is interesting—all of the four big questions are being addressed in one issue.

The four big questions? Well, that goes back to an intriguing conversation I had some years ago with the mother of two older children. "I've always taught my kids there are four big questions in life they have to answer," she said. "Is there a God? Is the Bible His Word? What does it say? And what are you going to do about it?"

These aren't just questions for kids. Adults' answers to these questions have significantly shaped the course of world history. And *your* answers will determine the course of your life as well!

The simplicity of these questions belies the challenge of answering them. But we humans have never lacked for opinions, and the amazing variety of conflicting answers people have put forward is staggering! Rather than simplifying things, the clamoring debate has complicated them more than ever.

The need for clarity remains, though, so our quest with every issue is to help you take steps to unravel the mystery and confusion. For example:

What about God?

Here's where it all starts—does God exist? If He doesn't, this whole discussion is moot. If He does, that changes everything. Beginning on page 20, you can pick up the last in a series of articles introducing you to some of the fundamental, irrefutable reasons to believe He exists. Check out the previous three issues for the complete series. You *can* know!

What about the Bible?

Is the Bible truly God's communication to us, or is it merely a random collection of human ideas? "The Bible Owner's Manual"—this edition's special feature—follows on the heels of a series we ran last year on proving the Bible is truly God's inspired Word. You *can* know!



What does it *really* say?

Has anyone ever misquoted you or, worse, twisted something you said? Irritating, isn't it! Well, if anyone has ever been victimized by having words put in His mouth, it's God. Most irritating of all has been when that's been done by people presuming to speak for Him—religious types especially. "I am against the prophets," God once said, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says'" (Jeremiah 23:31).

Things haven't changed much since. In 2008 Joe Kovacs published his book *Shocked by the Bible*. "My goal is to educate people about the solid truth of Scripture and to stop the spread of erroneous information," Kovacs explained. "I want people to crack open their Bibles and see with their own eyes what's actually printed on the pages, and what's not. It's shocking!"

Yes, much of what you have been told the Bible says is totally fabricated. Isn't it time to find out what it *really* says? Some things may be comparatively minor, but other issues are "litmus test doctrines." The Trinity is a great example, as you'll see in the article beginning on page 17.

We promise we'll steer you to Scripture, not our own words. But don't believe us—open your Bible, and believe what you see!

What about you?

This is where it gets personal. If God exists, if the Bible is His Word, and if you prove what it says—what will you do about it? Are you willing to conform your life to God's way and His purpose for you? "The Problem With 'Just as I Am' Christianity" on page 29 gets to the core of this question.

These four big questions? They're not just for kids. The questions won't change your life—but the answers will! We're never too old for that!

Clyde Kilough
Editor
@CKilough

Which of These Statements Is Found in the Bible?

Here are the choices, followed by the percentage of Americans who said each phrase was from the Bible:

"God works in mysterious ways"
(36 percent).

"The truth will set you free"
(24 percent).

"To thine own self be true"
(17 percent).

"God helps those who help themselves"
(13 percent).

Answer: the 24 percent who picked the second phrase were the only correct ones

25%

Percentage of American adults who incorrectly believe *Mary* is the name of a book of the Bible.

80%

Adults who believe American values and morals are declining. Of these, about a third believe a lack of Bible reading is the main cause.

58%

Percentage of weekly Bible readers who have given *a lot* of thought to how the Bible might apply to them. Another 35 percent gave it *some* thought.

61%

American adults who wish they read the Bible more often. This is a decrease from the 67 percent who said that in 2011.

AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY
STATE OF THE BIBLE 2015

Read about how to gain more from the Bible in our cover section about the Bible starting on PAGE 6.

Learn more about how the "Brexit" may affect the U.K. and all of Europe in "A New Battle of Britain" on PAGE 26.

Should They Stay or Should They Go?

The United Kingdom will hold a referendum on June 23, 2016, to decide whether to leave the European Union. Recent polls show that the British public is split fairly evenly on the decision.



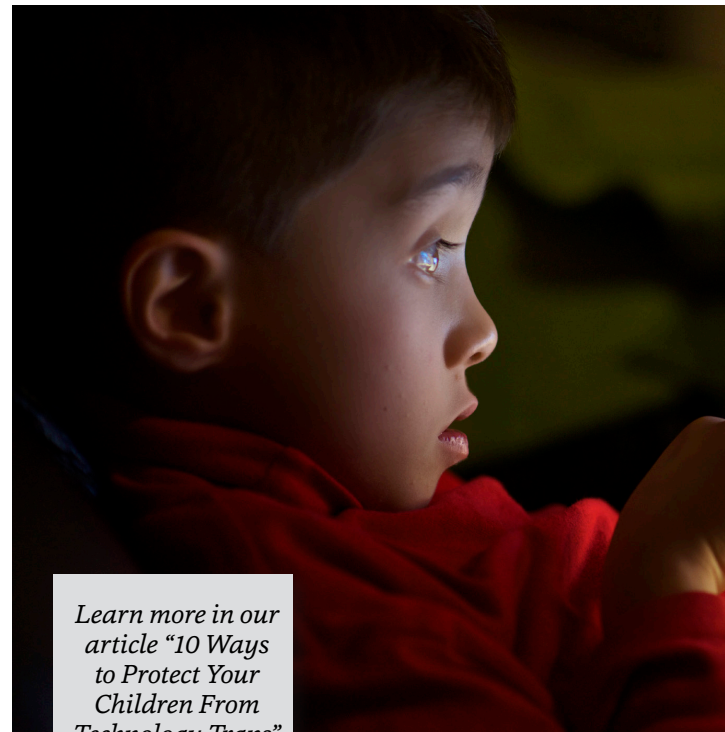
FINANCIAL TIMES, MARCH 29, 2016



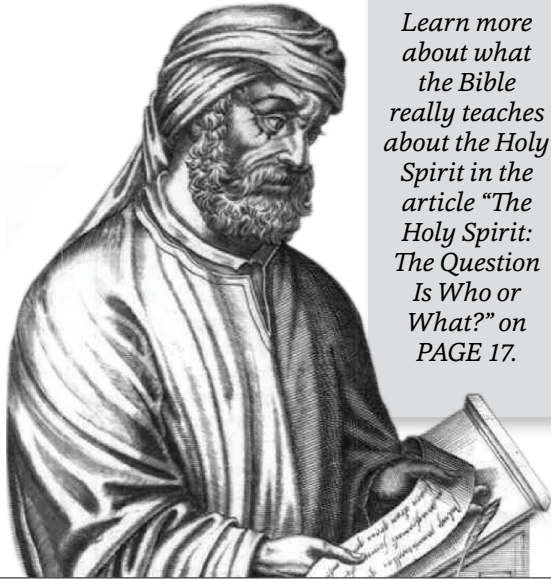
"A vote to leave is the gamble of the century."

—DAVID CAMERON,
British prime minister.

THE TELEGRAPH



Learn more in our article "10 Ways to Protect Your Children From Technology Traps" on PAGE 23.



Learn more about what the Bible really teaches about the Holy Spirit in the article “The Holy Spirit: The Question Is Who or What?” on PAGE 17.

An Absurd Doctrine?

Millard J. Erickson writes in his book *Christian Theology*:

“It appears that Tertullian was right in affirming that the doctrine of the Trinity must be divinely revealed, not humanly constructed. It is so absurd from a human standpoint that no one would have invented it. We do not hold the doctrine of the Trinity because it is self-evident or logically cogent. We hold it because God has revealed that this is what he is like. As someone has said of this doctrine:

“Try to explain it, and you’ll lose your mind; but try to deny it, and you’ll lose your soul” (p. 342).

But does the Bible *really* teach the Trinity? It wasn’t formulated or formally accepted until hundreds of years after the New Testament was written.

“Look, I don’t think there *are* any substantial downsides [to Brexit]. I think the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. And even fear isn’t particularly scary at the moment!”

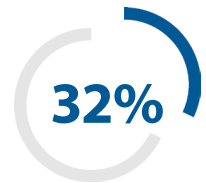
—BORIS JOHNSON, mayor of London and Brexit supporter.



Unchurched?

Over recent decades a shift has taken place: fewer Americans are regularly going to church. The unchurched (those who have not attended a Christian church in the past six months) now make up about four in 10.

BARNA



The number of Christians in the world has nearly quadrupled in the last 100 years, but they comprise about the same share (32 percent) of the population.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Keeping Kids Safe Online?

“Unfortunately, prohibiting access to technology or sole reliance upon blocking or filtering software are often not enough to prevent electronic aggression.”

—MARCI HERTZ, a health scientist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). “Kids are savvy and can get around filters and blocking software. Just like putting a seatbelt on before starting the car, there are some fundamental strategies parents should observe to make sure use of electronic technology is a safe experience.”

CDC.GOV

But attendance figures don’t tell the whole story. How many of those sitting in the pews are truly committed Christians? See more in our article “Learning From the First Christians” on PAGE 14.



1990



2050

If trends continue, the percentage of Americans who attend church in 2050 is estimated to be at almost half of attendance in 1990—dropping from 20.4 percent to 11.7 percent.

CHURCHLEADERS.COM

Bible

Where do I start?

Search

ole



I'm Feeling Lost

WHEN Google DOESN'T KNOW:

FINDING ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER

When you need answers, where do you turn? Search engines like Google can't tell you everything you need to know—but God can.

By Jeremy Lallier

When Google arrived on the scene nearly 20 years ago, it was just a search engine—a powerful tool anyone could use to trawl the vast expanse of the World Wide Web for answers, but a tool all the same.

Today, it's something else entirely. Google's quest to organize information and provide answers has led it to integrate itself into nearly every nook and cranny of day-to-day life. It's still a search engine, yes, but it's also expanded into the worlds of music, e-books, Web browsers, navigation, restaurant reviews, operating systems, video platforms and more—gathering data, analyzing trends, detecting patterns, extrapolating metrics and then handing you the information you need before you've even asked for it.

This morning, Google told me to expect a six-minute drive to work with light traffic. It was right. Right now, it's letting me know where I parked, what the weather is outside and what bills I have due tomorrow. It's also reminding me to work on this article, because Google knows *everything*.

Well ... almost.

Powered by the people

For all of Google's algorithms and data-crunching ability, it still has one serious flaw:

It only knows what we know.

For the clear-cut, black-and-white, self-evident answers, that's not much of an issue. If you're wondering how many *Land Before Time* movies they made, Google can tell you

that. (Answer: So far, 14 and one short-lived TV series.)

If you're wondering how many U.S. tablespoons are in one metric ton of water, Google can tell you that. (Answer: A little more than 67,628.)

If you're wondering about the proper way to replace that hard-to-reach doodad under the roof of your car, Google can tell you how to do *that* too. (Answer: It's possible, but it requires a specialized tool not yet invented by any known civilization.)

But Google only knows those things because *we* know those things. Those answers are courtesy of the individuals who took the time to type them out and post them online. All Google can do is point us toward them.

Opinions, not answers

The problem comes when we leave the realm of black and white and stray into the realm of highly polarized world-views. Try typing "what is love" into Google and you'll see what I mean. You'll find Wikipedia's somewhat waffly definition ("Love is a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes that ranges from interpersonal affection to pleasure"), a handful of spectacularly nonsensical typography projects ("Love means never having to say you're sorry") and, of course, the terrible, terrible music video for Haddaway's 1993 hit single.

You're going to run into the same problem with any of life's great philosophical inquiries. Try searching for "the best way to live my life," "how to find happiness" and "what makes something wrong," and you won't find a single,

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uncontested answer. You'll find pages and pages of *opinions*.

And that's really what it comes down to: When the human race can't settle on an answer to a question, neither can Google.

The source for answers

That doesn't mean the answer isn't out there. Impressive as they may be, Google and its many competitors remain man-made constructs. There are things they don't know, things they can't *possibly* know—but we do ourselves a disservice if we take that as proof that *no one* knows.

Last year we ran a five-part series exploring [how you can be sure that the Bible is true](#). At present, we're running another series exploring [how you can be sure that God exists](#). Those are two of the most important questions anyone could ever ask. Here's why:

If the Bible is true, then its authors wrote their respective contributions under the inspiration of the God who created the universe and set the whole thing in motion (2 Timothy 3:16). And if that God exists, then *He has the answers we're looking for* (1 John 3:20).

As explained by our aforementioned series ("Does God Exist?" and "Is the Bible True?"), the available evidence points us toward an all-powerful Creator who preserved His Word for us through the vehicle of the Bible.

The Bible, then, is not some ancient historical document with little to no relevance in our modern age. On

the contrary: "The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

The sands of time have utterly failed to dull that sharpness. Civilizations rose and fell in the time it took to complete the many books of the Bible, but their divinely inspired contents remain as important today as they were thousands of years ago.

A guide to the guide

With that in mind, we created this edition of *Discern* to serve as a sort of guide to the ultimate guide. Because it was written thousands of years ago by a diverse group of authors who lived in a wide range of cultures spanning multiple epochs of human history, the Bible can be an intimidating book—but don't worry; we've got you covered.

In this issue, you'll find all manner of helpful resources for getting the most use out of your Bible. We're going to fill you in on the things you need to know before you read the Bible if you want it to make sense. We're going to look at why the Bible is so hard to understand and what to do about it. We'll show you how to do a basic Bible study and even explore the ways you can take a deeper dive into its pages.

But before we do all that, let's take a quick look at three important things you can expect to find in those pages, starting with:

1. Morality

Philosophers have enjoyed blurring the lines between right and wrong for hundreds of years, but the fact is, things really aren't so fuzzy after all.

When we become our own moral standards—when our every judgment of right and wrong is based on *our* opinions and *our* thoughts and *our* feelings—then yes, things are going to get very subjective, very quick. But when we step back and let God make those distinctions according to fixed, unchanging standards, we'll quickly discover that the lines are a lot clearer than some people make them look.

God's standards aren't arbitrary. He expects us to live by His commandments for our own good (Deuteronomy 10:13) and for the good of those around us. And the more we're willing to do that, the more we'll increase in:

2. Wisdom and understanding

Thinking like God is hard. We aren't naturally equipped to operate on the same mental playing field as God, which is why He reminds us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

To us, the way God does things doesn't always make immediate sense. But the more we strive to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4), the more we'll begin to understand *why* God does what He does. And with that, we can't help but gain:

3. Perspective

God doesn't expect us to keep viewing the world through our limited human perspective. The more we dedicate ourselves to living His way of life, the more we'll come to see things as He does. And the more we do that, the better framework we'll have for comprehending the world around us. A forest looks completely different depending on whether we're standing in it or flying over it, and life looks different the more we learn to view it from God's perspective.

And that's the beautiful truth of it all. There is a bigger picture—and within that picture, your life and the life of everyone who has ever lived makes complete and total sense. You are here for a reason, your life has a purpose, and spending time with the Word of God will give you the perspective you need to understand it.

Finding the answers

Here's the question you need to ask yourself: Do you want *answers*, or do you want the *right* answers? Google, serving as the nearly inexhaustible portal of all human knowledge, has answers. It has *lots* of answers. But on the questions that matter, how can you be sure it's right?

You can't. Not on your own. But you have access to a far more important, far more reliable guide than Google. The Bible has the answers to the questions that really matter, all provided by the Creator of the universe Himself.

What would you like to know? **D**

HOW TO DO A TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY

There are many ways to study the Bible. Here is one way to consider.

Prerequisites:

- A Bible (print, electronic or online).
- A place and time you can concentrate. (It's best to find a regular time and place.)
- A concordance or searchable electronic or online Bible (for example, BlueLetterBible.org). For more on this, see our articles on "[Bible Study Tools](#)" and "[Bible Software](#)."

Basic study steps:

1. Pray for guidance.
2. Pick a topic (see our article "[Bible Study Topics](#)").
3. Search for related scriptures. Let's say you picked the topic "Communication," with a desire to make your

conversations better and more pleasing to God. Brainstorm words and phrases to search for in the Bible on this topic: speaking, talking, listening, hearing. Don't forget words like *tongue*, *mouth*, *lips*—all of which are biblical terms for communication.

Tip: You might find it useful to do a search on Life, Hope & Truth for helpful articles that contain many of the key scriptures.

4. Take notes:

- On what you have looked at (so you can come back to where you were).
- Key action points—what you will put into practice.
- Questions for future study.

5. Next time, quickly review your notes and repeat.

Find additional ideas in our articles "[How to Study the Bible](#)" and "[Where to Start Reading the Bible](#)," as well as our free study guide [7 Keys to Better Bible Study](#).

7 THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE READING THE BIBLE

By Erik Jones

For those unfamiliar with the Bible, its many books, characters and pages can be daunting! Here are some things to know to make sense of the world's most important book.

According to the American Bible Society, only one in seven Americans reads the Bible on a daily basis. About half say they read it less than three times a year, and 28 percent say they never read it. Still 61 percent wish they read it more.

If you have very little knowledge about the Bible, what do you need to know to make any sense of it?

Here are seven things to know before reading the Bible.

1. THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN BY ABOUT 40 DIFFERENT AUTHORS.

The Bible is not a traditional book—written by a single author and divided into chapters. The Bible could be described as a compilation of books written by different men over about 1,500 years. The Bible is made up of 66 individual books—which, in turn, are divided into chapters and verses. (Note that chapter and verse divisions were added years later by men in an attempt to organize the Bible and make it easier to explore.)

Although about 40 men wrote the 66 books of the Bible, in another sense, there is only one author. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.”

2. THE BIBLE WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN IN ANCIENT LANGUAGES.

The Bible was originally written in ancient languages.

The majority of the Old Testament (the first 39 books of the Bible) was written in ancient Hebrew. There are a few parts of the Old Testament (portions of Daniel and Ezra) that were written in Aramaic. These portions were written while the Jews were

dominated by Babylon and later by Persia. Aramaic was a sort of “lingua franca” of the ancient world—a language that multiple cultures knew and understood.

The New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek, which had spread around the Mediterranean world as a result of Alexander the Great’s conquests. This Greek dialect allowed the New Testament to be read throughout the Roman Empire.

Since none of the original manuscripts (or autographs) exists today, every text we have is either a copy or a translation. However, the oldest manuscripts known today are quite ancient. The [Dead Sea Scrolls](#), for example, are dated from around 200 B.C. to A.D. 68. Often times confusing passages or apparent contradictions can be cleared up by studying the words used in the original languages.

3. THE BIBLE IS DIVIDED INTO TWO TESTAMENTS WITH SEVEN MAJOR DIVISIONS.

The most widely accepted way to organize the Bible is into Old and New Testaments (or covenants). The Old Testament is made up of the oldest books of the Bible and largely chronicles God’s interaction with the nations of Israel and Judah. The New Testament focuses on the New Covenant between God and the Church through Jesus Christ. To learn more about the two covenants, read “[Biblical Covenants](#).”

Scholars further divide the books of the Bible into seven major groupings based on the general purpose and style of the books:

1. The Law.
2. The Prophets.
3. The Writings.
4. The Gospels and Acts.
5. The Epistles of Paul.
6. The General Epistles.
7. The Book of Revelation.

WHY IS THE BIBLE SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND?

- **It is long and varied.** Getting an overview can help. (See the articles under the Life, Hope & Truth “[Holy Bible](#)” section.)
- **It was written long ago by people of different cultures and backgrounds.** Studying Bible history, time lines and cultures can make it seem less foreign.
- **It was written in different languages and with unfamiliar idioms.** Try comparing good modern translations.
- **It can be hard to find things in the Bible.** Knowing how to search it and becoming more familiar with it will give you a head start (see “[How to Find Answers to Your Bible Questions](#)”).
- **It was written from God’s perspective.** For example, Jesus Christ said His parables were given so only His followers—called by the Father—could understand (Matthew 13:10-17). Praying for understanding and following God’s process of conversion to receive the Holy Spirit can help. Our free booklet *Change Your Life!* shows how.

4.

THE BIBLE IS A FAMILY EPIC.

The Bible mentions hundreds of people. But in some ways the Bible can be viewed primarily as the story of *one family*. The story begins in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 11:26 we are introduced to a man named Abraham (originally Abram). The book goes on to describe God developing a relationship with Abraham and promising to make his descendants “a great nation” (Genesis 12:2)—a nation that would have an impact on the entire world!

But Abraham and Sarah were old and had no children. Through a miracle, God eventually made it possible for them to conceive a son named Isaac. Isaac then had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons who collectively became the nation of Israel. The rest of the Old Testament chronicles the trials, triumphs, rise and fall of Abraham’s descendants.

The New Testament continues this family epic in the life of Jesus Christ, who came to earth as a descendant of Abraham and made it possible for people outside of Abraham’s physical descendants to have a relationship with God—by becoming Abraham’s *spiritual* descendants (Galatians 3:28).

5.

THE BIBLE DOESN’T “WHITEWASH” ITS CHARACTERS.

For example, Abraham is referred to as the father of the faithful (Galatians 3:7), but in his story we see some serious moments of weakness, such as telling lies or half-truths on certain occasions.

Only one individual is shown to be perfect—Jesus Christ, who was God in the flesh.

When we read the Bible, we should pay close attention to the mistakes and weaknesses of its characters—because the Bible intends us to learn lessons so we don’t make the same mistakes (1 Corinthians 10:6).

6.

THE BIBLE HAS HISTORY, BUT IS NOT A HISTORY TEXTBOOK.

The Bible is filled with history, but it is not primarily a work of history. It does not attempt to present a comprehensive survey of Israel’s history.

Instead, you could say the Bible presents history on a *need-to-know* basis. In other words, history is included as the context to understand what and why God did what He did.

For example, the Gospels provide us very little detail about the events of Jesus’ life between His birth and the beginning of His public ministry, but they cover the last week of His physical life in great detail.

The Bible admits that it simply ignores much of history—for the reason that if *everything* that happened were recorded “even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

What is important is that the history recorded in the Bible, time and time again, has been proven to be accurate and reliable. To learn more, read “[Is the Bible True? Proof 3: What History Tells Us](#)” and “[Is the Bible True? Archaeology](#).”

7.

THE BIBLE SHOULD BE READ TO BE APPLIED

This is the most important point. You cannot read the Bible like any other book. It shouldn't be read as you would read a novel or how you would read a history textbook. The Bible was designed to be read as a *living* book with laws, principles, truths and examples that are to be applied to your life today.

Notice how Hebrews 4:12 puts it: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Even though the Bible was written thousands of years ago, its contents are timeless. You can pick it up today, in the 21st century, read it, apply it and reap the benefits.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read that the Bible was written to give us doctrine, correction and instruction on how to be righteous. We study the biblical laws and instructions to learn how to apply them in our life (Proverbs 6:23). We study the historical accounts to learn lessons about how to live (and how not to live) based on the examples of others (1 Corinthians 10:6). We study the life of Christ to learn how to model our lives on His example (1 Peter 2:21). We study the doctrines of the Bible to learn what we should believe—and how those beliefs should be applied to our lives (1 Timothy 4:6).

We hope these principles will be helpful if you are just starting to read God's Word. You may also want to read some related articles: "[Where to Start Reading the Bible](#)" and "[Bible Study Tools: Where to Start.](#)" **D**

HOW TO DO A DEEPER DIVE INTO THE BIBLE

When you want to go beyond the basics, how can you gain deeper knowledge and understanding of a passage in the Bible?

- Read the context. Get an overview—where does it fit into this chapter, this book and the overall message of the Bible?
- Read an overview of the book or section. Check a study Bible, Bible handbook, Bible dictionary or the many articles under the Life, Hope & Truth "[Holy Bible](#)" section.
- Look up specific words in different translations and in the original Hebrew and Greek, noting the shades of meanings.
- Ask questions: Who, what, when, where, why and how?
- Is it quoting another passage (or is it quoted elsewhere)? Dive into that passage too.
- Ask, Why is this in the Bible? Also ask, What does God want me to do with this?
- There will always be more questions. Give priority to the ones that will be most helpful to your spiritual growth.
- Learn more about resources you can use in digging deeper into the Bible in our articles "[How to Find Answers to Your Bible Questions](#)," "[Bible Study Tools](#)" and "[Bible Software](#)."

DEEPER DIVE EXAMPLE

(condensed from the article "[Christ Is the End of the Law? How?](#)"):

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). What does "end of the law" mean?

Check a concordance: "End" is from the Greek word *telos*.

Check Bible dictionaries and study Bibles: The word *telos* can be translated differently depending on the context. It can mean "end result or ultimate fate" (*Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 2006, "End"). It can also mean "'the aim or purpose' of a thing" (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, "End, Ending"). *The NKJV Study Bible* says, "End can mean 'fulfillment'; that is, Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the law. It can also mean 'goal,' to say that Christ was the object to which the law led" (2007, comments on Romans 10:4).

Check the use of the word in other scriptures and translations: *Telos* is also used in 1 Timothy 1:5: "Now the *purpose* [*telos*] of the commandment is love" (emphasis added). Other translations render it as "aim" (New Revised Standard Version) and "goal" (New International Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible).

If you write down your conclusions and other questions that come up in your research, you will have an inexhaustible supply of ideas for deeper study!



Life

LEARNING FROM THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

For many professing Christians today, religion is just a few-hours-a-week thing. Many are passive, even apathetic. But from the beginning it was not so.

By David Treybig



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People-watching is a popular pastime. We humans are intrigued by the actions of other people. And sometimes our interest in and reflection upon the actions of others can lead us to some important observations.

What if we could people-watch during one of the most important events in history? Consider the variety of reactions by the principal characters involved in the crucifixion of Christ. These stories, and the stories of those who witnessed what occurred in the following days, are recorded for us in the Bible.

Jewish leaders

First, there were the Jewish leaders who were pleased to see this man named Jesus, who was a threat to their power and prestige, put to death. Denying that Jesus was the prophesied Christ, the Son of God, and wanting to put an end to the growing respect and interest the common people had in His ministry, these religious leaders falsely accused Jesus. They used their influence to incite the people to demand His crucifixion (Luke 23:1-10).

In this incident, the Jewish religious leaders and those who assisted them could be called the unethically triumphant.

Pontius Pilate

Then there was Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea. Appointed by the Roman Emperor Tiberius, Pilate had civil, military and criminal jurisdiction over the Judean province. While the Jews were allowed a degree of self-government, the official religious body of the Jews—the Sanhedrin—could not put anyone to death. If they desired to put someone to death, the procurator had to confirm the sentence.

What is intriguing to the story is that Pilate gave in to the demands of the religious leaders and the people. Secular history and the Bible record Pilate as being quite insensitive and even hostile to the Jews (Luke 13:1). He didn't seem to care

what the Jews thought or desired.

Amazingly, on this occasion he relented to the desires of the crowd. Even though he found no fault in Jesus (Luke 23:4), he allowed Jesus to be crucified.

In this matter, Pilate could be described as indifferent. He “washed his hands before the multitude, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it’” (Matthew 27:24).

The crowd

Even though some of the people who assembled before Pilate may have wanted Jesus to be freed, others in the crowd, along with the chief priests, demanded “with loud voices that He be crucified.” It was this group that prevailed (Luke 23:23).

Some of the people who had been involved in the clamorous exchange were probably among those watching Jesus experience His final torturous hours. At Jesus’ death, a number of miraculous events occurred.

“Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:51-54).

“And the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts” (Luke 23:48).

Adam Clarke in his commentary on the Bible wrote: “All were deeply affected except the priests, and those whom they had employed to serve their base purposes. The darkness, earthquake, etc., had brought terror and consternation into every heart.”

Those so affected could be described as people whose hearts had been reached, people whose consciences had been

stirred. What should they do about these stirred emotions? Some of them would soon find out.

The convicted

After Jesus' death and resurrection, He appeared to His disciples during a period of 40 days, telling them that they would soon receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:3-8). Just a few days later, on the Day of Pentecost, when Jerusalem was filled with "devout men, from every nation" (Acts 2:5) observing this annual holy day, the promised gift was poured out upon Jesus' followers.

The arrival of the Holy Spirit came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and it appeared as tongues of fire on each of them. The Spirit then inspired them to begin speaking; and as they did, people from various nations each heard them speaking his own native language. It was clearly a miraculous event, but the people witnessing it didn't understand what it meant.

Peter, who had denied Christ three times but who was now empowered with the Holy Spirit, stood up with his fellow apostles and explained what had occurred (verse 14). Peter told the crowd that this was the fulfillment of a prophecy by Joel and that Jesus, the One whom "you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" was resurrected from the grave. In fact, it was He who had poured out this miracle (verses 15-33).

Furthermore, Peter said: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36). Peter emphasized again that they all had responsibility for the unjust death of Christ.

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" (verse 37).

Peter told those whose consciences had been pricked to repent of their sins and be baptized (verse 38). "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thou-

sand souls were added to them" (verse 41).

This special day, on which the Holy Spirit was given and the New Testament Church was launched, provides a snapshot of what real Christians do. Times change, but the reaction of these early converts remains as a crystal-clear example of how convicted Christians respond to the gospel—the good news regarding Jesus Christ and the coming Kingdom of God.

Convicted of sin

Becoming a Christian begins when our consciences tell us that we have done something wrong—that we, like all other people, have sinned (Romans 3:23). Sin is the breaking of God's 10 Commandments and His other instructions given to us because of His love for us. God the Father determines when to call people to His way of life (John 6:44, 65) and then issues this invitation to become His child.

Through this miraculous invitation from God, we become aware of our sinful condition, our inability to live as God desires and our need for a Savior. In the case of the people in the first century who were called by God to become Christians, the process began with their realization that they were guilty of the unjust death of Jesus, the Son of God.

Acknowledging our sins against God is difficult to do. We do not like to admit we are wrong, and the natural tendency is to justify ourselves. While we did not call for Christ's crucifixion as those in the first century did, our sins also made His death necessary.

We, too, need to have our sins forgiven. If we do not receive forgiveness of our sins, we have no hope to live forever as members of God's eternal family.

Understanding this and becoming convicted of our sins is how our relationship with God begins.

Convicted to repent and be baptized

After we understand our sinful condition, we can't be indifferent to what we have been given to comprehend. When the earliest Christians understood and acknowledged their guilt, they followed through with Peter's instruction to repent and be baptized. That very day about 3,000 people made this life-altering commitment through baptism and received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41).

We must do the same.

Convicted to live a life that pleases God

After we are baptized, we receive the Holy Spirit so we can develop righteous character as we prepare to reign on earth with Christ when He returns. We are called to be lights to the world; God expects us to be examples to others as we go through the various trials of life that test our faith.

Being a Christian is a full-time commitment. There are no days off. We're on the job 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is the hardest job we'll ever have; but as Paul wrote, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). **D**



To learn more about what it means to be a convicted Christian, download our free booklets *Change Your Life!* and *The Mystery of the Kingdom*.

God



THE HOLY SPIRIT

| THE QUESTION IS WHO OR WHAT? |

The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery to many Christians, but still most consider it a litmus test for orthodoxy. What does the Bible really say?

By Jim Franks

HISTORY CONFIRMS THAT IT WASN'T UNTIL THE FOURTH CENTURY THAT THE TRINITY WAS ACCEPTED AS THE OFFICIAL TEACHING OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

In 1996 I was part of a group of ministers invited to the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. Our group was invited because we represented a new seventh-day Sabbath-keeping church, and they wanted to discuss our fundamental beliefs.

Our host for this visit was their director of interchurch relations. Before we arrived at their headquarters, he took us aside privately to discuss a sensitive doctrinal matter.

He had read our fundamental beliefs and concluded that we were not Trinitarians. He mentioned that this would be a problem in the Christian community. He told us the story of how the Adventists struggled over the doctrine of the Trinity for many years. It wasn't until well into the 20th century that they adopted the Trinity.

Today their official belief is Trinitarian: "There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three coeternal Persons."

I remember that visit very clearly, now some 20 years later. We were aware of what the Christian community would think. But the real question we had to answer was, What does the Bible say about the Holy Spirit?

Is the Holy Spirit a person and coequal with the Father and the Son? Or is the Holy Spirit the power that comes from God? Put a different way, is the Holy Spirit a "who" or a "what"?

Importance of the Trinity doctrine

If you had any doubt about the importance of the Trinity in modern Christianity, consider the following quotes from scholars and religious writers:

- "We hang a person's very salvation upon the acceptance of the doctrine. ... No one dares question the Trinity for fear of being branded a 'heretic.' ... We must know, under-

stand, and love the Trinity to be fully and completely Christian" (James R. White, *The Forgotten Trinity*, 1998, pp. 14-15).

- "The dogma of the Trinity is the central dogma of Catholic faith. Only with belief in it can one grasp and explicitly believe other central Christian teachings. 'It is impossible to believe explicitly in the mystery of Christ without faith in the Trinity.' ... Nor could one grasp the meaning of eternal life, or of the grace that leads to it, without believing in the Trinity, for grace and eternal life are sharing in the Trinitarian life" (Donald Wuerl, Ronald Lawler, Thomas Lawler and Kris Stubna, *The Teaching of Christ, a Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 2005, p. 150).
- "The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man. The Trinity is a mystery, not merely in the Biblical sense that it is a truth, which was formerly hidden but is now revealed; but in the sense that man cannot comprehend it and make it intelligible" (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 1996, p. 89, emphasis added throughout).

Let's be clear: The doctrine of the Trinity relies on one premise and one premise alone—the Holy Spirit is a person and therefore must be God. If you cannot prove from Scripture the personhood of the Holy Spirit, you have no Trinity.

Arius and the Catholic Church

History confirms that it wasn't until the fourth century that the Trinity was accepted as the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. This was more than 300 years after Jesus Christ and long after the death of the last apostle.

It was in A.D. 321 that a priest from Alexandria, Egypt, by the name of Arius disputed the divinity of Jesus Christ.

From this dispute and the subsequent argument with another priest, Athanasius, came a debate over the nature of Christ that led to the adoption of the Trinity. Through the work of Athanasius and the subsequent additions to his work by the three "Cappadocian fathers" (Basil, bishop of Caesarea; Gregory of Nyssa; and Gregory of Nazianzus), the Trinity was made the official teaching of the Roman Church in A.D. 381 at the Council of Constantinople.

The fourth-century debate became political and divided the Catholic Church into two camps: those who followed Arius and those who believed in the Trinity. The Catholic Church's final decision to accept the Trinity was not based in Scripture but in politics.

Rather than depending on church politics and ecumenical councils, we must ask, What does the Bible say? The Bible does clearly tell us Christ was divine. But most theologians agree that there is no real evidence to sup-

port the idea of a triune godhead in the Old Testament. And some scholars will acknowledge that there simply isn't enough evidence in the New Testament to establish the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Of course, others disagree, but the Bible must be our guide.

Acts 5: lying to God?

Acts 5 is often used as a proof that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead.

In this chapter we find the story of a husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, two members of the New Testament Church. Many early Church members were very generous and sold some of their possessions to support the gospel message. Ananias and Sapphira did too, but they held back part of the price of the sale of their property. This would have been perfectly fine, according to the apostle Peter, but there was just one problem. They lied and said they had given it all!

God inspired Peter through the Holy Spirit to perceive what was going on, and he challenged them. "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to *lie to the Holy Spirit* and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have *not lied to men but to God*'" (verses 3-4).

What did Peter mean when he said, "You have not lied to men but to God"? Was he equating the Holy Spirit to God? Or was he equating himself to God? Clearly Ananias and Sapphira lied to the man Peter. But Peter informed them that to lie to him as a representative of God (one who possessed God's Holy Spirit) was to lie to God.

If you argue that to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God, thereby confirming that the Holy Spirit is God, you could use the same logic to conclude that Peter was also God, since they lied

to him! This is faulty logic and simply not true. The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is the power of God and not a third person called God.

There is no clear statement in the Bible identifying the Holy Spirit as a person. You would think that something of this magnitude would be easy to prove.

Is the Holy Spirit a person?

In Matthew 1:18 we are told that after "Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

But wait a minute! Isn't God the Father the One who begot Jesus Christ? After all, Christ is called the "only begotten Son" of the Father (John 3:16). Therefore, the Holy Spirit cannot be a person and a coequal member of the Godhead or else the Holy Spirit would be the true father of Jesus Christ. Of course, no one believes or teaches that.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:7, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Why is the Holy Spirit not mentioned in this greeting? Maybe Paul simply overlooked the Holy Spirit in Romans 1.

One omission may be understandable, but he did the same thing in 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; and Philippians 1:2. In fact, Paul never refers to the Holy Spirit in any of his greetings. That would be hard to believe if the Holy Spirit were coequal with the Father and the Son.

In Luke 1:17 we read that John the Baptist "will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah." The "spirit" of Elijah is not a person, separate from Elijah. Nor is the Spirit of God a separate person that is coequal with God.

The Holy Spirit is a gift (Acts 2:38) that comes after repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). This is not another person that enters you, but it is the power of God that comes upon you.

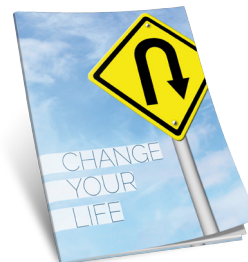
The idea of the Trinity was developed in the Roman Church as an argument against Arius in the fourth century. The Protestants simply kept it after the Reformation. Of course the idea of a triune God actually predates Christianity and can be found in a number of ancient pagan cultures.

Who or what?

So, is the [Holy Spirit](#) a "who" or a "what"? According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is the power of God (2 Timothy 1:7). It is the operational presence of the mind and influence of God, as well as His character. It is what makes each of us a Christian; for if we don't have the Holy Spirit, we are "not His" (Romans 8:9).

The lesson I learned 20 years ago while visiting with the Seventh-day Adventists is that you should never be embarrassed to believe what the Bible teaches, no matter what others may think. If we let the Bible be our guide, we don't see three gods in one God, all coequal and coeternal. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit emanates from God as the greatest power available to human beings. It is a gift from God that will transform your life!

Read more in our articles "[Is the Holy Spirit a Person?](#)" and "[The Trinity: What Is It?](#)" **D**



Learn more about how the Holy Spirit can transform you in our free booklet [Change Your Life!](#)



God

DOES GOD EXIST?

Proof 4: Fulfilled Prophecy

While a great many biblical prophecies point to a future time, a number have already come to pass. Fulfilled prophecy is another proof that God exists.

By Rick Avent



Upwards of a third of the Bible is prophetic. Many of these prophecies relate to Jesus Christ's second coming to establish the Kingdom of God. However, some prophecies focus on the current era and a number have already been fulfilled.

In this series of articles we have been looking at the question of God's existence from the perspective of scientific evidence. In this article we turn to prophecy and history for proof.

In previous issues of *Discern* we outlined five proofs of the Bible. One proof is [fulfilled prophecy](#) (see the July/August 2015 issue). Among the fulfilled prophecies discussed were several related to Jerusalem and Babylon. These prophecies not only verify the Bible but also the existence of God. Babylon and Jerusalem have been linked in prophecies since the rise of the Babylonian Empire in the seventh century B.C.

Let's look at some additional prophecies that help present a conclusive case for the existence of God.

A tale of two cities

Isaiah prophesied during the reign of four kings of Judah (Isaiah 1:1), beginning around 740 B.C.

Here is what God inspired Isaiah to prophesy about Babylon:

"Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not regard silver; and as for gold, they will not delight in it. Also their bows will dash the young men to pieces, and they will have no pity on the fruit of the womb; their eye will not spare children.

"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It will never be inhabited, nor will it be settled from generation to generation; nor will the Arabian pitch tents there, nor will shepherds make their sheepfolds there" (Isaiah 13:17-20).

Note the four aspects of this prophecy:

1. The Medes would attack.
2. There would be a bloody conflict.
3. Babylon would become desolate.
4. Babylon would not be rebuilt (see also Jeremiah 25:12).

Here is how the history of Babylon unfolded.

Babylon had previously been destroyed by the Assyrian Empire. As the Assyrian Empire declined, Babylon was rebuilt as part of the Neo-Babylonian Empire that came to dominate the Middle East. The empire reached its height under Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.).

Babylon, the capital, was located in what is now southern Iraq about 50 miles south of Baghdad. The city was a marvel of the ancient world. It was a walled city with magnificent structures and the famous hanging gardens, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was also known as a center for learning. The ancient writers who referred to the city raved about its glory. When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah and eventually destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., many of the captive Jews were resettled in Babylon.

Then in 539 B.C. the Babylonian Empire, along with Babylon itself, fell to an emerging empire consisting of Medes and Persians. But due to Persian dominance, it is often referred to as the Persian Empire. Babylon was conquered—fulfilling the first part of Isaiah's prophecy—but it was not destroyed at that time.

The city continued to prosper for a while during the Persian rule. Around 482 B.C. the city rebelled against the Persians. King Xerxes recaptured the city, destroyed its temples and killed many. This bloody uprising seems to have fulfilled the second part of Isaiah's prophecy.

The city began a long decline, culminating in its capture by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. Alexander's empire broke up into four parts at his death. His successors fought over the city, driving out many of the residents. The Seleucid Empire took control and built a new city, Seleucia, nearby; and Babylon was essentially abandoned.

By the time the Parthian Empire ruled the region in 141 B.C., Babylon was in a state of ruin, although there were still people living in and around the vicinity of the original city. By the time of the Muslim conquest in A.D. 650, evidence of Babylon was lost under the sands, fulfilling the third part of Isaiah's prophecy. It was not until the 19th century that archaeologists even located the ruins.

In the early 1980s, while archaeologists were excavating the ruins, Saddam Hussein began to rebuild Babylon. To the despair of archaeologists, Saddam razed the ruins and began to build a few walled structures. At this time he also decided to build a majestic palace at the edge of the ruins, completing it shortly before the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Saddam never moved into his palace. It was stripped



The ruins of Babylon are still desolate. After 2,500 years, the fourth part of the prophecy has continued to be fulfilled.

and looted during and after the war and is now an empty shell.

Saddam was later hunted down and executed. Iraq remains in turmoil. The ruins of Babylon are still desolate. After 2,500 years, the fourth part of the prophecy has continued to be fulfilled.

The Bible does refer to an end-time Babylonian system that will be destroyed at Christ's return, but this will be based in Europe, not in the ancient city in the Middle East. Read more about this in our online article "[What Is Babylon?](#)"

Prophecy is being fulfilled just as God said: "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:11).

Babylon, Jerusalem and the Messiah

While Babylon was to become desolate forever, Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, signaling a countdown to the Messiah. There is a detailed and complex messianic prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27 (see the Life, Hope & Truth article "[70 Weeks of Daniel: What Does the Prophecy Mean?](#)").

Verse 25 reveals when to expect the Messiah. "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to *restore and build Jerusalem* until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [for a total of 69 weeks]; the street shall be built again and the wall, even in troublesome times" (emphasis added throughout).

Obviously, the prophecy was not referring to actual weeks. However, God has used prophetic days to represent actual years (Ezekiel 4:4-6). Using the day-for-a-year representation, 69 weeks would equal 483 years. According to historical records, Persian King Artaxerxes I began his rule in 464 B.C. Ezra received permission to return to Jerusalem to complete the efforts to rebuild the city in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:6-10; 9:9). Advancing 483 years (with the understanding that there was no year zero) would take us to A.D. 27—the year Christ was baptized and began His ministry!

These are only a few of the many fulfilled prophecies that confirm the existence of God. For more, see our articles "[Fulfilled Prophecy](#)," "[Fulfilled Prophecy Is Evidence of God's Existence](#)," "[Daniel's Prophecies: Proof of God's Existence](#)" and "[Daniel 11: The Most Detailed Prophecy in the Bible](#)."

Can you personally validate a prophecy?

The discussion so far has related to unconditional prophecies that God guarantees. However, there are also

conditional prophecies. These prophecies are in the form of "if—then." The message is: If you obey God, then you will receive blessings.

For the ancient Israelites He promised: If "you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. *Then* it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you" (Deuteronomy 7:11-13).

The first Psalm begins by expressing the prophecy this way. If one not only obeys the law but delights in it, "he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalm 1:3; see also 1 Chronicles 22:13).

This theme is expressed by most of the prophets. For example, Malachi emphasized one specific aspect: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it'" (Malachi 3:10).

Jesus summed up the message in [Matthew 6:33](#): "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

You can personally validate this conditional prophecy. In fact, the Bible challenges you to do just that! But it must be a true commitment to understanding and obeying not just the letter of the law, but its spiritual application. Not just following what you think the Bible teaches, but reading and studying to see for yourself.

Notice how David phrases the concept. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. ... Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler" (Psalm 91:1, 3-4).

If you commit to the truth as outlined in the Bible, your life will change and you will be blessed. Our free booklet [Change Your Life!](#) can help. Download it from our Learning Center today.

Can there be any greater proof of God?

Try it! **D**

10 WAYS

TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM TECHNOLOGY TRAPS

Technology isn't necessarily bad, but excessive screen time can produce a host of digital dangers. How can you guide your children toward safe and wise choices?

By Becky Sweat

Like it or not, today's children are growing up in a digital and increasingly wireless world. Smartphones, laptops, tablet computers, e-book readers, MP3 players, video game consoles and other electronic devices have become an integral part of their lives—and ours. That's in addition to “old technology,” such as television, which young and old alike still gravitate to.

And that's not necessarily bad. The Internet, computer apps, interactive video games and TV programs can all be excellent sources of education and entertainment for children. Communications technology like Skype, webcams, email, Instagram and Facebook can actually augment relationships and help children stay connected to people who care about them—for instance, when grandparents or other relatives live far away.

In balance, technology is certainly useful. The problem is, many children today have strayed beyond a moderate use of electronic devices.

Digital dangers

A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that, on average, kids aged 8 to 18 spend practically

every waking moment when they're not in school engaged in entertainment media of some kind—a staggering 7½ hours a day. Somehow in the midst of all this, teens find time for texting. According to Nielsen statistics, teenagers send and receive around 3,700 texts a month, or around 125 each day.

To be fair, parents are often just as absorbed in technology as their children, which only makes matters worse.

“There’s not a lot of time for family members to talk with each other anymore because it’s consumed by all our entertainment devices,” observes Arizona psychologist Lisa Strohmman, J.D., Ph.D., director of the Technology Wellness Center and author of *Unplug: Raising Kids in a Technology Addicted World* (2015). “Even when family members are in the same room together, they’re often all on their own screens, so they’re not really ‘present’ for each other.”

There are other casualties as well. Many believe communication devices can hinder relationships when used too much. “When kids spend more time on social media and texting, rather than talking with others face-to-face, their verbal and interpersonal skills tend to suffer,” warns Wisconsin psychologist Melissa Westendorf, J.D., Ph.D., cofounder of the Technology Wellness Center.

If that wasn’t enough to be concerned about, excessive media use has been associated with physical and behavioral disorders like obesity, myopia, depression, anxiety, insomnia and attention deficit disorder (ADD), all of which are increasing in children.

Of course, the problem isn’t only too much screen time, but also what kids are being exposed to. Much of popular media bombards kids with messages promoting sexual promiscuity and violence, scarring young minds.

The Internet is full of pornographic websites and X-rated videos that can easily be accessed by anyone. Too often it’s kids who visit these sites. The Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography reports that youths between the ages of 12 and 17 form

the largest group of viewers of Internet porn.

Having a Web presence can also expose children to dangers like cyberbullying (bullying that occurs online) and sexual predators. And then there’s “sexting” (sending sexually explicit text messages or photos). A 2014 report by Drexel University found that 54 percent of American teens have sent or received “sext” messages.

Parental guidance

Ultimately, it’s up to parents to teach their children to use technology wisely. The Bible states, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Living in the 21st century, this would have to include how we use our digital devices.

Here are 10 strategies for guiding your children to use technology in a way that not only keeps them safe, but also pleases God. You can adjust these based on the age and trustworthiness of your child.



ESTABLISH FAMILY RULES FOR TECHNOLOGY USE.

The Bible instructs parents to teach and train their children (Deuteronomy 6:7), which includes setting boundaries. Your family’s technology rules should spell out how much “tech time” is allowed for your kids each day; when during the day or week technology is off-limits; and what media programming, games, apps and websites your kids may and may not use.

Some sample rules to consider: No TV, iPods, iPads or cell phones are permitted during homework time. Gaming systems are not to be used for more than one hour a day. Do not download anything without permission. Only one hour of television a day is allowed. No digital devices are allowed during mealtimes.

Ideally, Dr. Strohmman says, “set these rules when your kids are young

and they’ll be less likely to try and buck the system. But if you have teenagers already, it’s not too late to establish these kinds of guidelines. You just need to sit down with them and tell them you’re going to implement a new family program. They might get upset, but you’re still the parent.”



TALK WITH YOUR KIDS ABOUT THE POTENTIALLY HARMFUL EFFECTS OF VARIOUS TECHNOLOGIES.

Tell them why it’s not healthy to watch too much television or to be constantly plugged in to technology. Teach them biblical principles to help them understand why particular computer games, websites or movies are not appropriate.

Discuss the potential dangers of online predators and cyberbullying. Impress upon them that they’re leaving behind a digital footprint, so they shouldn’t say anything on electronic media that they don’t want on public record for a long time. This includes an explanation of why it’s not okay to send or receive sexually oriented text messages.



DON’T ALLOW ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN BEDROOMS OR OTHER SECLUDED AREAS.

Keep televisions and devices that have Internet access in common living areas in your home (such as the family room) so you can see what your children are viewing and doing and keep tabs on how much time they’re spending.

Before bedtime each night, “your kids’ portable devices—iPads, iPods and smartphones—should be deposited in your bedroom, perhaps plugged into a charging station,” advises Dr. Strohmman. “This way your kids will not be tempted to use these devices when they should be sleeping.”



USE PARENTAL CONTROLS.

Install filtering software on your computers, smartphones and gaming systems. Or set up parental controls through your Internet service, cable TV or satellite provider, or Web browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Google Chrome, etc.). These filters allow you to restrict your children's access to particular TV shows, movies, games and websites, and prevent them from using these media at certain times of the day or for longer than you allow.



WATCH TV AND MOVIES WITH YOUR KIDS.

Don't let them watch television by themselves just to keep them occupied. If they have an hour of TV time coming, if at all possible, watch it with them. At the end of the program, talk with your children about what they just saw: Were there any moral lessons to be gleaned? What kind of strengths or weaknesses did the characters have? Did their actions reflect good values?

If something questionable comes up during a program, don't be shy about offering your comments right then. "Co-viewing," as this is often referred to, can be an effective way of filtering what kinds of ideas come into your home and being aware of what your children are exposed to.



MONITOR YOUR CHILDREN'S MOBILE PHONE AND ONLINE ACTIVITY.

Familiarize yourself with their favorite apps and websites. If your kids have

social media accounts, get your own profile and "friend" them so you can see their posts. Some experts suggest installing monitoring software to track your children's Internet activity.

Some of these steps may sound drastic today, but you don't have to sneak around. You can be open about it. You need to know what your children are communicating and viewing online so you can protect them.



ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO BUILD REAL FRIENDSHIPS, NOT JUST SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS.

Don't allow your children's digital contact to become a substitute for in-person contact. This is important, Dr. Westendorf says, because "our emotional attachments and empathy building to others is better formed in face-to-face encounters than on a computer screen. Children need to experience real physical touches, hear real voices and see real people's faces."



GET YOUR KIDS INVOLVED IN NONDIGITAL ACTIVITIES.

Set time aside each week to do something as a family without mobile phones or other electronic devices. Plan a game night with interactive board games, play a game of soccer or go bike riding together, take up some hobbies as a family (crafts, cooking, bowling, etc.), or plan a family outing (to the zoo, museum, playing field, park, hiking trails, community recreation center, etc.). Encourage your children to participate in sports, clubs, church activities or volunteer programs to direct their attention toward something other than electronics.



MODEL GODLY USE OF TECHNOLOGY.

Your children are going to note your example. So if you don't want them to watch violent movies, spend hours every night aimlessly surfing the Web or use their phones at the dinner table, you shouldn't do these things either.

"If you say one thing and do something else, you'll never win," Dr. Westendorf says. "But if you do the same things you tell your kids to do, they're more likely to go along with it."



KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS.

Your children are likely to be misusing technology if they:

- Quickly turn off the computer when you enter the room.
- Become agitated or angry when you limit online time.
- Prefer to spend time online rather than with family or friends.
- "Sneak" computer time when alone.
- Lose interest in activities that don't involve technology or are preoccupied with getting back to the computer when away from it.

If you notice any of these behaviors, you may need to remove all technology and get help from your minister, a family counselor or other professional.



To sum up, digital media, like so many things in life, is not something that's inherently good or bad, but it can be misused and overused. It's the job of parents to help their children make the right choices so they can enjoy the benefits technology has to offer, while avoiding the traps of technology that can harm their relationships and health. **D**

A New Battle of Britain

As the United Kingdom votes to decide whether to stay in the European Union, the outcome may have profound consequences for the U.K. and all of Europe.

By Neal Hogberg

"Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"

On June 23, how will voters answer this question? Polls suggest that the referendum outcome is too close to call, but the large, early lead for staying has evaporated, and a British exit—or "Brexit"—is a distinct possibility.

The "sceptred isle" has long had a checkered relationship with the Continent. Five centuries ago Henry VIII's version of a "Brexit" was to renounce Roman Catholicism and divorce Catherine of Aragon. Sheltering in "splendid isolation" behind the protection of the English Channel, Britain has always resisted continental threats, from the Spanish Armada to the German Luftwaffe.

At other key moments in history the British intervened in continental affairs

by landing armies across the channel and paying a dear price in lives and resources to tip the scales against Philip II, Louis XIV, Napoleon, the kaiser and Hitler.

Britain joined, but not right away

French foreign minister Robert Schuman promoted the idea of a European community as a means to make war between France and Germany "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible."

Britain was not among the six Western European nations that formed the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, and in the 1960s French President Charles De Gaulle vetoed its membership, accusing Britain of a "lack of interest" and "deep-seated hostility" toward European construction.

With its post-war economy in shambles and its empire shriveled, Britain was widely perceived as "the sick man of Europe." But in 1973 the United Kingdom



was allowed to join the expanding union, then called the European Economic Community (EEC), and, in a referendum two years later, approved staying in the EEC by a two-to-one margin.

The bloc has since ballooned in scale and ambition, morphing from 12 member states in the EEC to a 28-nation bureaucratic behemoth (now called the European Union or EU) with its own currency, constitution, law, court and parliament. Though Britain wisely opted out of the single European currency, or euro, the EU's regulatory machinery is tightly woven into just about every aspect of national life in Britain.

A different vision for Europe

"Eurosceptics" mourn the loss of freedoms and the imposition of burdensome EU economic rulings, but this has all been by design toward an "ever closer union."

The architects and visionaries of the European Union, according to Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The European Dream*, had a strategy "to move incrementally with technical and economic measures designed to increasingly bring member states together in a seamless, interdependent, commercial web of relationships. Each small step of economic integration would result in a slight, sometimes imperceptible erosion of their national sovereignty. None of the steps alone, they figured, would be enough to arouse the ire of member states and threaten the furtherance of the Union. The upshot of this piecemeal strategy would be that 'one day the national governments would awaken to find themselves enmeshed in a "spreading web of international activities and agencies," from which they would find it almost impossible to extricate themselves'" (pp. 203-204).

Echoes and warnings from the past

As Britain grapples with its yes/no decision, many are referring back to the haunting words of its two greatest 20th-century political figures, Margaret Thatcher and Winston Churchill.

Churchill, who coined the term "United States of Europe," envisioned the common market as the only way to prevent a repetition of war. But as early as 1930, writing in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Churchill declared that "we have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe but not of it. We are linked, but not comprised. We are interested and associated, but not absorbed."

Margaret Thatcher was also gifted with a keen understanding of the unchanging character of human nature and geopolitics. Though a pragmatic proponent of European trade, she predicted that the European Union would end in tears.

In her final book, *Statecraft*, she wrote: "That such an unnecessary and irrational project as building a European superstate was ever embarked upon will seem in

future years to be perhaps the greatest folly of the modern era. And that Britain, with her traditional strengths and global destiny, should ever have been part of it will appear a political error of historic magnitude" (p. 410).

The crisis behind the referendum question

Even following the terror attacks in Paris and Brussels, European togetherness is a chimera, a fair-weather construction, unable to cope when the storms strike. The twin issues of soaring immigration and security have replaced finance and sovereignty concerns as paramount.

"The flood of migrants," according to a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, has "reinforced British perceptions of a Continent that has lost control of its borders, lost sight of its European identity, and allowed itself to be overrun by dangerous foreigners. Add decades of European economic mismanagement and a broad sense that the euro has been a costly failure, and it makes for a potent political case for the U.K. to leave."

While the U.K. is not a member of the 26-country, border-free Schengen Area, the mishandling of the migrant crisis leaves Britain exposed to immigration orders from Brussels.

Is Britain better off outside the EU?

It is difficult to work out a balance sheet of losses and gains to Britain's membership in the world's largest trading bloc. Britain hands over a net contribution of £9.8 billion annually to the EU—a small fraction of its gross domestic product (GDP)—and in turn receives zero-tariff access to a market of 500 million people.

Current chancellor George Osborne's Brexit forecast of "an economic shock" is underpinned by a Confederation of British Industry (CBI) analysis that leaving the European Union could blow a £100 billion (\$144 billion) hole in the U.K. economy and cost up to 950,000 jobs by 2020.

Brexit proponents say the choice is either subjugation or sovereignty, predicting virtually no economic consequences other than what former chancellor Nigel Lawson dismissed as "some short-term hassle."

Would Brexit be an escape from jail?

The greater fervor and determination is certainly being shown by those wanting out. Six cabinet ministers and more than 100 Conservative Party parliamentarians are supporting the "leave" campaign. The charismatic London mayor, Boris Johnson, has become the galvanizing standard bearer, mocking the "merchants of gloom" for drip feeding a diet of apocalyptic horror stories of Britain's future outside the union.

Johnson trumpets the message of a "fantastic new future" outside the EU—one removed from haggling with 27 different capitals, from Paris to Prague—where Britain could be the hub of new trading arrangements around the world.

He stresses that Britain's continued presence in the dysfunctional EU would lead to an erosion of sovereignty and has compared an exit from the EU to a prison escape.

London's mayor is not the only one with a rosy perspective of a Brexit. "Within a few years," according to a business editorial in *The Telegraph*, "Britain could be at the head of a network of at least six or seven self-governing but closely integrated countries; these would surely include Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, but others would join in too, including perhaps some non-euro nations such as Denmark and even the Netherlands, an increasing anti-EU country."

A giant "leap in the dark"?

Prime Minister David Cameron is spearheading the "remain" campaign, declaring "a vote to leave is the gamble of the century" and a giant "leap in the dark."

If it leaves, Britain would need to cobble together more than 100 new trade agreements while still being enmeshed in European rules. As reported in *The Telegraph*, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble warned that Britain would have to pay for the privilege of accessing the single market. "It would be extremely hard or even impossible to negotiate a special deal in a post-Brexit atmosphere."

Voting to stay, according to Cameron, would give Britain more leverage and rulemaking authority from the inside, rather than leaving Britain shut out of key European markets that accounted for 45 percent of U.K. exports and 53 percent of imports in 2014.

Another risk that has business leaders panicked is London's status as a global financial capital. The city of London accounts for 10 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, 12 percent of the treasury's tax receipts, and is the largest exporter of wholesale financial services in the world. Any loss to the financial sector—home to over 250 foreign banks, all of whom use London as a springboard to the single market via Britain's EU member-

ship—would send tremors throughout the U.K.

In addition to strong business backing, Cameron is counting on voters in their 20s and 30s—the so-called EasyJet generation—who are more pro-EU because they take much greater advantage of cheap flights, easy communication and the ability to live and work across Europe. A recent YouGov poll shows 75 percent of under-25s would vote to remain. By contrast, almost 70 percent of over-65s wanted to leave the EU.

First Brexit, then breakup?

What would Brexit do to the EU? According to *The Guardian*, "The Italian finance minister, Pier Carlo Padoan, said that Britain's departure could cause a domino effect in which Eurosceptic parties and electorates feel emboldened, while the German finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, claimed an out vote would be 'poison' to the British, EU and world economies."

The referendum could lead to endless other referendums. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair says it "would completely change the dynamic around Scottish independence" since the Scots are more supportive of EU membership than the English. The peace process in Northern Ireland and the status of Gibraltar might also be imperiled in a Brexit chain of events.

The future of Europe

Whatever the result of the referendum, it will not be the end of the story. British departure would shave the GDP of every nation in the bloc for years to come. Even with a vote to stay, tensions inherent in Britain's membership will remain and leave scars that may never heal.

Britain has long been a counterweight to Germany, with London the seat of the European financial system and Berlin the economic capital of Europe. The U.K. is the second largest contributor to the EU after Germany, and it is a magnet for foreign direct investment. Following a Brexit, German dominance of the EU would further intensify, shifting the center of

Europe farther east, perhaps to include the newer markets and the military might of Russia.

"Whatever happens," observed Timothy Ash in *The Guardian*, "the result is likely to be a triumph of fear over fear. The question is: which fear will prevail? The fear of being dragged further into a nascent European superstate, with the attendant loss of sovereignty, democracy, identity and control of national borders? Or that of being left out in the cold, like Norway or Switzerland, with the rules set by an EU in which you have no voice?"

While the upcoming vote is uncertain, the sure words of the Bible—concerning both history and prophecy—give insight into where all this is headed.

Bible prophecy shows an end-time economic and military colossus composed of 10 core nations (Revelation 17:12-15; 18:9-19) that will be of one mind (Revelation 17:13). Other prophecies show this will not include Britain. This power will actually take many Israelite-descended nations (see "[12 Tribes of Israel Today: Who Are They?](#)") into captivity during a time known as "Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:3-9, 14-15; see "[Jacob's Trouble: What Is It?](#)") just prior to the end of this age.

Watching sobering world events unfold should motivate each of us to examine our spiritual condition in the light of God's Word. **D**



Learn more about end-time events and how we should respond in our free booklet [The Book of Revelation: The Storm Before the Calm](#).



By Erik Jones

THE PROBLEM WITH “JUST AS I AM” CHRISTIANITY

A famous hymn has become shorthand for a type of easy, feel-good religion. But what does the Bible really teach about what it takes to be a Christian?

“Just as I Am” is one of the most recognizable hymns in Protestant Christianity. Charlotte Elliott wrote it in 1835.

As the story goes, she was once visited by a Swiss preacher who asked her if she really was a Christian. This made her uncomfortable. She later admitted to him that the question greatly troubled her, and she told him, “I want to come to Jesus; but I don’t know how.”

The preacher answered simply, “Why not come *just as you are*? You have only to come to Him *just as you are*.”

Years later, Miss Elliott thought back on this conversation and penned the hymn “Just as I Am”—which eventually became a standard in Protestant hymnbooks. The hymn has seven stanzas, each beginning with the phrase *just as I am* and then describing aspects of Miss Elliott’s understanding of what it meant to come to Christ.

Nearly 99 years later, a young Billy Graham converted to Christianity after hearing this hymn at a revival meeting. He later became one of the most prominent evangelists of the 20th century.

Billy Graham would rent large venues for his crusades, work with the local pastors of many denominations and give powerful sermons centered on “coming to Christ.” The crusades would end with a stirring altar call where Mr. Graham would urge attendees to come forward to publicly accept Jesus as their Savior.

As hundreds filed down to make this profession, “Just as I Am” would play in the background. Some estimate that almost 3 million people have responded to these altar calls—but how many of those people remained committed churchgoers is debatable.

FEEL-GOOD RELIGION

The “just as I am” approach has come to imply that there is no need to change, and it is just a symptom of a major trend in today’s Christianity. Many churches teach and practice a *feel-good religion*. Instead of focusing on commitment, struggle and character growth, many churches teach an easy form of Christianity. All one has to do is *accept* Jesus. Jesus loves you *just as you are* and just wants you to *feel better* about yourself. Becoming a Christian is portrayed as being as easy as coming forward for an

altar call or repeating a prayer for Christ to “come into your heart.”

Tanya Luhrmann, a psychological anthropologist, researched evangelical Christianity for years and authored the 2012 book *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship With God*. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, she summed up modern evangelicalism this way: “What people want from faith is to feel better than they did without faith.”

In simple terms, it’s all about feelings and experiences.

JESUS’ MESSAGE WAS VERY DIFFERENT

If Jesus was walking the earth as a man today, would His ministry be anything like the modern evangelical approach? Would He preach a “just as I am” message that focuses primarily on positive feelings and asks people to just believe on Him without making any changes in their lives?

A central theme of this column is that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). We evaluate modern beliefs and practices by His words and example. We genuinely hope that our readers will reevaluate their beliefs and practices to make sure they align with Jesus Christ’s.

Sadly, the modern approach neglects many elements of the *calls to action* Jesus actually taught. Jesus interacted with and taught people who were looked down on in society for their moral failings—tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 9:10). But, as we will see, His purpose was not for them to stay *just as they were*—but to help them become entirely new people.

Consider these elements of Jesus’ message that are often missing in the modern approach.

1. A STRONG CALL TO REAL REPENTANCE

Modern evangelical Christianity emphasizes belief and profession.

Believe on Jesus. Just accept Jesus. Give your heart to Jesus.

Of course, believing Jesus in faith is a crucial part of Christianity—but belief cannot stand alone. What is often less emphasized is believing and acting upon what Jesus actually taught. There is an immense difference between



His purpose was not for them to stay *just as they were*—but to help them become entirely new people.

just believing *in* Jesus—and actually *believing Jesus*!

Jesus Himself lamented that many people believed in Him (calling Him “Lord”), but did not believe or do the things He said (Luke 6:46).

We mentioned above that Jesus at times would associate with sinners and was even harshly attacked for doing so! But when you read the account, you learn that He likened Himself to a physician (Matthew 9:12). He wanted to make them better—to raise them to a higher standard—to call sinners “to repentance” (verse 13).

Jesus’ message was all about a call to repentance from sin (Mark 1:15; 2:17). That requires identifying exactly what sin is—“the breaking of law” (1 John 3:4, Holman Christian Standard Bible). That is why the 10 Commandments must be regularly taught. If churches don’t teach about God’s law, people won’t even know what to repent of! Teaching about God’s law and sin should produce guilt. Not the kind of guilt that debilitates and festers in our lives; it should produce the kind of guilt—or “godly sorrow”—that motivates us to repent and change (2 Corinthians 7:10).

The apostle Paul strongly taught that we must change: “Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19). Unfortunately, in an effort to get away from the “fire and brimstone” messages of past preaching, many preachers today focus entirely on a feel-good, “just as I am” message. God does love you, but He doesn’t want you to stay just as you are. He wants you to fundamentally change your life through true repentance.

To learn more about this often neglected message, study the articles on “[Repentance](#)” at [LifeHopeandTruth.com](#).

2. THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

Many churches do practice baptism in various forms. Some practice full immersion; others, sprinkling or pouring. Others bypass any form of baptism altogether and encourage new converts to simply make a verbal confession of Jesus Christ as their Savior.

But if we accept the premise that Christianity should be based on following the example of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:21), then we can easily cut through the confusing melee of modern practices. In Matthew 3 we read that Jesus came to John the Baptist and was baptized. That baptism was clearly by *full immersion* because Matthew describes Jesus coming up *out of the water* (verse 16).

Technically, Jesus had no reason to be baptized. Baptism is a symbol of repentance (verse 11)—and Jesus had no sins to repent of. But He did it to set an example. Just as His ministry began with His own baptism, His work on earth ended by giving His followers the command to make disciples and baptize them (Matthew 28:19). The rest of the New Testament shows many examples of the early Church following this command closely (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12; 18:8).

It is to modern Christianity’s shame that true repentance and baptism have been replaced by many churches with a shallow, spur-of-the-moment verbal confession of belief. To learn more about biblical baptism, read “[What Is Baptism?](#)” To learn more about the kind of belief Jesus desires, see “[Believe in the Gospel](#).”

3. CHRISTIANITY IS A STRUGGLE

The acceptance of a feel-good, “just as I am” Christianity has also veiled another important part of Jesus’ message. Jesus did not describe Christianity as just feeling better about ourselves because we have been forgiven. He did not portray His Church as a place where Christians go to feel good and be entertained.

Jesus described Christianity as a struggle—a lifelong battle against sin!

Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross daily [an analogy of self-sacrifice], and follow Me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added).

When Jesus talked about self-denial, He wasn’t talking about penance—punishing or denying the self in an attempt to achieve forgiveness. He was talking about a life of battling against sin.

In one of His most shocking teachings, Jesus said that if our eye or hand causes us to sin, we are to “pluck it out” or “cut it off” (Matthew 5:29-30). This was a powerful word picture to show the importance of fighting sin. Our eyes and hands don’t literally cause us to sin; sin begins in the mind. If our mind is dwelling on sin, we have to remove those sins from our mind. If we are practicing sin through our body, we have to make drastic changes to stop.

The Christian life isn’t built around just feeling good about ourselves and avoiding guilt. It is a continual, disciplined struggle against sin and a proactive effort to develop the character of Jesus Christ with the help of God’s Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 9:27; Romans 13:14).

FROM “JUST AS I AM” TO “JUST AS HE IS”

The whole premise of today’s “just as I am” approach misses the mark of Jesus’ teachings. Christ’s message was not that God wants you to stay *just as you are*—but instead that God wants us to become *just as He is*. This means struggling, day by day and year by year, to inch closer and closer to becoming “perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)! Jesus set the ultimate standard for Christians very high.

Will you embrace His standard or stay *just as you are*?

We have prepared two booklets that explain how to begin the process of becoming just as He is. Download and study [Change Your Life!](#) and [God’s 10 Commandments: Still Relevant Today](#) to learn more about how to fulfill God’s high standard for you. **D**

The Refugees Will Go Home

Millions are being displaced, and millions more are affected by today's burgeoning refugee crises. When will the outcasts be able to go home in peace?

■ I RECENTLY DROVE BY *THE JUNGLE* OUTSIDE Calais in France. The Jungle is a makeshift camp created by undocumented migrants and refugees trying to make their way to the United Kingdom, where they hope to find a better life. How many are truly refugees and how many are simply seeking better economic prospects are open questions. But many have come from Eritrea, Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa—areas where the presence of war is keenly felt.

About 4,000 people were in the camp when I saw it. More come constantly, able to walk no further because of the English Channel.

Authorities are having difficulty managing the camp, unable to control frustrated people who attempt to break into the Channel Tunnel or board ferries or trucks by subterfuge or by force. Several desperate migrants have died in accidents or drowned trying to swim the 33 kilometers (20 miles) to England.

Tensions are high, leading to numerous clashes with police attempting to maintain order.

A worldwide dilemma

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are 14 million refugees worldwide in precarious situations. This is not counting the over 5 million registered refugees living in permanent UN camps.

Many of the people with whom I work in Africa were refugees for extended periods. Where the borders of Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo meet, almost everyone knows the life. Millions of Rwandans fled to Burundi, the Congo or Tanzania during the genocide of 1994. Untold thousands of Burundians have now taken refuge in Rwanda due to the ongoing political violence shaking their country. Thousands of Congolese flee to either Rwanda or Burundi when the region's warlords unleash their private armies.

At the Bukavu border crossing point between Rwanda and the Congo, I've seen UN shelters standing vacant, purposely left in place for the next refugee crisis, which is sure to come.

Today's news is full of refugees fleeing their homelands and arriving in countries that are growing tired of their swelling numbers and not always respectful behavior.

The problem is currently insoluble; the toll of human misery, immense.

A historic problem

The Bible recounts many stories of refugees who were forced from their countries, displaced by war or famine. Such people are often called *outcasts*—people literally *cast out* of their lands. The 10 tribes of Israel were driven from their homes by their Assyrian overlords. Later many in the kingdom of Judah faced a similar fate: deportation to Babylon. Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and many other men of God knew personally the fate of outcasts.

Beyond the bad news

Bible prophecy foresees intensifying refugee problems in the years ahead, as the [four horsemen of the Apocalypse](#) ride ever harder. But there is hope. The displacement of harassed populations will finally end with the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Under God's protection, all people will be safe and flourish in their own homes and nations.

“In that day,” says the LORD, “I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast. ... I will make the lame a remnant, and the outcast a strong nation; so the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever” (Micah 4:6-7).

Then everyone will be able to go home—for good.

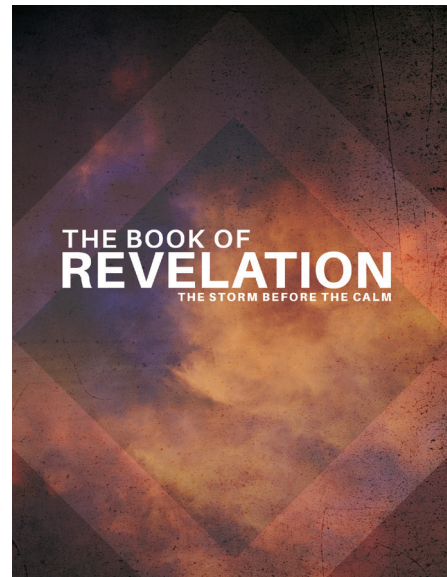
—Joel Meeker
@JoelMeeker

The Jungle, a makeshift camp outside of Calais, France, attracts undocumented migrants and refugees trying to get to Britain.



From vivid images of carnage to sublime visions of beauty, the book of Revelation explains what will happen before and after Jesus Christ's return to earth.

Download our free e-book!



What does it mean for your life—now and in the future? Download the free booklet from the **Learning Center on LifeHopeandTruth.com**