



# **Christian Basics Handbook**

**Paula Fether**



# Christian Basics Handbook

Paula Fether

©*January 2018 Edition*



# Contents

Introduction	1
The Bible	5
Jesus	13
The Gift of Salvation	25
Our Walk of Life	29
The Church	33
Conclusion	37



# Introduction

## The focus of this handbook

### What is this handbook about?

The question, “Who am I and why am I here?”, is one that has been asked for a very long time. Is there more to life than just being alive, learning, working, and playing? Is there life beyond this one? If the world was created by God, which religion has the right God, and what does God want from us? Though people disagree on the answers, this handbook offers the Christian perspective.

The Christian faith teaches that the world was created by God, and that God told us in the Bible what we need to know about life. It teaches that Jesus came from heaven and took on human nature in order to show us how to relate to God. It also teaches that this Jesus gave up his life and then rose again, to make it possible for everyone who trusts him to be reconciled to their Creator and be adopted as spiritual children. So our purpose is to please God and care about people, and we look forward to the day when we will live in happiness forever with God and others who accepted spiritual adoption.

Becoming a Christian is like being reborn, and that’s not the end of spiritual life, but the beginning. So how do we grow spiritually? God has chosen to give us the Bible and other Christians to help each other walk the path, and this handbook is designed to help make that path clear and simple. Not only can we learn how to grow in our personal relationship with God, but also in our relationships with other believers. By focusing on the essential teachings and the simple rule to love God and people, we can all reach spiritual maturity and spread the good news about Jesus to more people.

This may be a simple task, but not always an easy one. People have differences of opinion and personality, and such differences can often lead to division. Unity depends ultimately on the people and their willingness to remember what is central and what is secondary, to respect other people’s opinions even if we don’t agree with them, as long as they don’t clash with the central facts about Jesus, love, and the teachings of the Bible.

This handbook is not a complicated analysis or exhaustive reference. Instead, it is meant to serve as a “class” for group study, as a personal study, or as a reference on the basics for experienced believers. There are many pressures being applied to the Christian faith, the Bible, and Jesus Himself, so we as Jesus’ followers need to know where the anchor of our faith is set.

### **What’s so special about the Christian faith?**

Among all the world’s religious or spiritual writings, none has had greater impact on especially the western world than the Bible. It is perhaps the most copied, translated, and quoted book of all time. Its content is written in the most natural, ordinary ways, such as history, poetry, moral lessons, social rules, and prophecy. Yet it presents God not as aloof and uncaring but involved and loving. Prophecy is a very large part of the Bible, much more so than other religious writings of old. And the Bible’s historical accuracy has withstood many assaults by critics. So the Bible certainly is a unique and influential book, to say the least.

Of course, the most unique teaching of the Bible is that Jesus rose from the dead, which is the central belief of the Christian faith. No other major religion or belief system claims a founder who died and rose again three days later, and there were many reliable witnesses of the event. No other major belief system even predicted such a thing for their founder or god, and there is no evidence that this was simply a newer version of older, made-up stories.

Another special thing about the Christian faith is that we are in good standing with our Creator by accepting a gift, not by performing some task or ritual. Only the Christian faith teaches that we can be reconciled to our Creator and adopted as God’s children by trusting Jesus instead of ourselves. To trust Jesus means to accept as a fact that he died for our sins and then came back to life again, so that whoever has this trust or faith is adopted as a child of God.

When we accept this gift of salvation (being saved or rescued from being separated from God), we are given God’s own Holy Spirit as what the Bible calls “a deposit that guarantees our inheritance”. There is no need to meditate or work for this, while other belief systems require much effort to achieve some kind of unity with “the divine”. This Holy Spirit helps us go through the troubles of life and gives us insight into the teachings of the Bible.



Such a generous gift from our Creator is well worth our attention and study. May the student be blessed through this handbook.

### **Who wrote this handbook?**

This material was written by Paula Fether, whose other work is listed below:

- [The Gift New Testament](#)
- [book list](#)
- [main website](#)
- [second website](#)
- [YouTube channel](#)



# The Bible

## The Word of God

The Bible is probably the most famous and scrutinized writing of all time. It is no stranger to criticism and has been blamed for many things and attacked from many angles. As **one person** said,

No other book has been so chopped, knived, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology or belles lettres of classical or modern times has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet?

It seems that many (if not most) colleges and universities have a keen interest in demoting, debunking, denouncing, and dethroning the Bible, and thousands of people are now spread out over the world pronouncing it fake, mythical, adulterated, plagiarizing, outdated, and even dangerous. Even professing Christians sometimes accuse us of “Bibleolatry” if we quote it as the authoritative Word of God. Young people are forced to attend public schools where the Bible is mocked, and we owe it to them to give them confidence in this Book of wisdom, truth, and life.

We need to step back, consider the criticisms, and refute them, so that we can move on from this constant self-doubt and get on with spiritual growth. But most of the debate is at a level that many have neither the time nor the expertise to deal with, not because they aren't capable, but because it just isn't everybody's cup of tea. However, everyone who has chosen to accept Jesus as Savior needs to know basic things about the Bible, so that we are always prepared to tell people the reason for our hope (see **1 Peter 3:15**). After all, the Bible is the final authority on who Jesus is, what he did, and what he and his disciples taught. References to back up any claims made in the following sections can be found at [this link](#).

## What evidence backs up the Bible?

There are well-established ways to figure out whether an ancient text is accurate and authentic. One of these ways is to examine the material

the text is written on, another is to study the writing style, and another is to cross-check any references to historical people or events with other writings of the era. We have copies of the Old Testament from before the time of Christ (first century a.d.) in various languages, and many more of the New Testament from as early as a generation after the time of Christ. No other ancient writing, including other religious texts, can claim better quality evidence than we have for the Bible. And in every case where its content can be checked against other historical records, the Bible has been accurate or at least can't be debunked. The Bible's content and teaching is at least as reliable as anything that might challenge it.

### **Who decided what would be in the Bible?**

The content of the Old Testament as we know it today was mainly determined by the scholars and elders of the people of Israel in ancient times. They based their decisions on the quality of each prophet or writer as a righteous person according to those who knew them, and on whether any claims of words from God actually proved to be true. The order of the books isn't particularly important, though the Israelites tended to group them according to the influence or volume of writing of each person. The original paleo-Hebrew writings were lost, but in the centuries before Christ a Greek translation was made to replace them, and there were also translations in other languages. This Greek translation (the Septuagint or LXX) was what Jesus and the New Testament writers used.

The content of the New Testament was likewise determined by the original apostles and their students or associates, as well as elders who were recognized for their character and knowledge of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. These books and letters were widely circulated among the churches of the first two centuries a.d.

There were other writings, called the Apocrypha, whose inclusion in the Bible has always been disputed. Those writings were done in the centuries between the latest book of the Old Testament and the time of Christ. Some disputes arose about other parts of the Bible that were later approved as divinely inspired, and it was because of these disputes that "official" lists of Bible books were eventually made. Critics may contend that there was a conspiracy to hide certain books or add fake ones, but such claims rarely turn out to have good evidence to back them.

Can we be confident that the Bible we have in our hands is really the Word of God? Absolutely, as surely as we can know anything about

ancient writings. We should also ask why it is that only the Bible seems to be attacked by other religions and atheists.

### **Did the Bible borrow from other ancient texts?**

No, the Bible did not borrow from other ancient texts. Does anyone ask this question of other religious writings? Certainly every writing is done in an environment where many factors have an influence, such as time, culture, language, and experiences. Many words are swapped between languages and can change meaning over time. That is the only sense in which the Bible can be said to borrow anything from outside sources. Its teachings and content are its own.

For example, today in English the word “god” is a generic reference to deity or the creator. When we say “the God of the Bible” we narrow the meaning to a particular deity of a particular religious text and faith. So use of the word “God” hardly means that the Bible adapted a story from an earlier religion; it only means that “God” is a common word. The same goes for the “sacred numbers” such as 3, 7, or 12; the Bible was not written in a vacuum without language or culture or history.

The Bible’s central message of creation, ruin, and restoration is certainly a common theme in many religions, but again, this isn’t proof of borrowing. If, for example, there was a worldwide flood, wouldn’t all cultures have a story about it? This is evidence that a worldwide flood really happened, not that the Bible is the only book that borrowed the idea. It is just as likely that the Bible’s purpose was to set the record straight because of all the inaccurate flood stories that had been told up to that time. Keep in mind also that the order in which stories were written down isn’t necessarily the order in which they were told. Spoken stories predate written ones, and no one can say which of those stories were spoken first.

### **Is the Bible historically accurate?**

To test any text’s historical accuracy we ask a variety of questions: Can the places it mentions be identified? Do the names and dates fit reasonably well with other accounts? Are there artifacts, carvings, tools, and other materials that seem to match the accounts in the text? Do the writers seem to be honest and rational people? All of this helps to increase the likelihood that the facts are accurate, but of course we know that even today’s news is often disputed and depends more on the

credibility of the witnesses than anything else.

In Old Testament times, a person could be executed for lying about God or people, and the four Gospel accounts of the New Testament have been cross-examined by more than one lawyer over the years and found to be credible witnesses. All historical records can be labeled as biased or faulty, so the Bible can't be brushed aside as historical record just because it's the Bible. At the very least, we can say with confidence that nothing in the Bible has been proved inaccurate.

## **How should the Bible be understood?**

When anything is written down, it's done for a reason. It may be poetry, or history, or business, or education, or debate, or prediction. If we read poetry as a science textbook, we'll certainly misunderstand the writer's intent. So when we ask how to understand the Bible, we're asking about its context, which includes language, culture, situation, genre, era, topic, and even the writer's personal habits.

Though the Bible has one overarching theme about the Creator and creation, it was written down by about 40 people from different times, locations, situations, and walks of life. Some of it is history; some is law; some is moral instruction; some is prophecy; some is poetry; some is philosophy and advice; some is business. We have to consider all of those elements when we read a given part of the Bible.

In contrast, some consider the Bible more a book of codes, mysteries, and allegories, so they interpret the Bible in whatever way seems best to them. Such an approach can't be defended with evidence or logic, which may not matter to those who use it. But while the Bible certainly is a book about our spirituality, it is also a book about practicality and reason, since the Christian faith hinges on a witnessed fact of history: Jesus rising from the dead. Without that anchor in objective evidence, the Bible could mean just about anything. And if that's the case, then there would be no way to know if Jesus really did rise from the dead. . . which, as the Bible itself says, means that our faith is pointless and we are still alienated from God (1 Corinthians 15:17).

This handbook approaches the Bible in a straightforward, practical way, rather than as all allegory or code.

## **What about different translations?**

The process of translating words and thoughts from one language to another has always been as much art as science, and something is always “lost in the translation”. A good translation strives, however imperfectly, to find a balance between the accuracy of the words and the accuracy of their meaning as a whole. If that were not true, then anyone could be a translator with just a couple of dictionaries. And a “translation” like that would probably make no sense to people it was translated for.

Sometimes, an idea in one language and culture is so foreign to another that completely different expressions must be used. For example, the Bible contains many references to lambs, yet some isolated people groups have no idea what a lamb is. How should such scriptures be translated? Should the reader be left to wonder what lambs are, or should a different animal name be used instead? For another example, in the modern western world dogs are highly valued, while in the Bible they represented disgusting and unclean animals. Should the translator slavishly follow the literal animal names, or instead convey the idea of something disgusting or vulgar?

The most important purpose of translation is to convey meaning, not follow iron-clad rules. This is why Jesus was willing to cite the Greek translation of the Old Testament as the very Word of God; it was still considered inspired by God even though it was a translation. Certainly God is able to preserve what he wants to preserve, and if something is indeed lost in a translation, then God allowed it to be lost. But it is very important for translators to do the best job they can, and even moreso when it's the Bible that's being translated.

There are many, many translations of the Bible, in many languages and with different approaches. Most are of good quality and done with the utmost respect. Be wary of any charges of ulterior motives on the part of any particular translation; this could be considered gossip or slander. With all the difficulties inherent in the translation process, it's best to give translators the benefit of a doubt. Pick one you like best for memorization, but keep several others for study.

## **How do we know that the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God?**

Two important points must be made about the Bible: that it reports without endorsing, and that New Testament quotes of the Old Testament

are not necessarily word-for-word. So while the Bible as a whole has evidence of divine authorship due to a consistent message about how the world came to be and how it will be restored, this includes the reporting of things God never endorsed and words he never uttered. The actions and teachings of even the most righteous people in the Bible cannot be expected to be micromanaged by God at all times, but we can consider their closeness to God as a good reason to consider their teachings authoritative.

That last sentence has direct bearing on questions about teachings in the New Testament letters. Was Paul always under direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit when writing? The text itself tells us “no”, as in **1 Cor. 7:10-12** for example. It seems that Paul is telling us exactly when he has a direct command from God and when he does not. Yet when he does not, can we then dismiss his words as uninspired? Remembering the principle about authoritative teaching, we can still attribute authority to them as we would to any prophet or priest in the Old Testament. But Paul himself defined exactly what degree or kind of authority this was: to build up the community of believers (**2 Cor. 10:8, 12:19, 13:10**). Though in very rare cases he did “pull rank” (**1 Cor. 5:3,11, Gal. 2:14**), the overall character of his ministry was to serve and nurture with humility and meekness (**1 Cor. 2:1-5, chap. 9**).

So God certainly oversaw the preservation of those words he deemed important and valuable in both Testaments, but without micromanagement or operating people like puppets. There is leeway for human fallibility without sacrificing divine authority, and if Jesus could quote a mere translation as the very authoritative words of God, then quite obviously the exact details of words and punctuation are not what matters most. Some may at this point quote **Mat. 5:17-18**, but the context is of prophecy and law, not a blanket endorsement of an accountant’s approach to the text. An **analysis** of this is as follows:

Do not think that I have come to dismantle the superstructure of promises, demands, and predictions recorded in the writings of Moses and the Prophets, leaving them unfulfilled. On the contrary, I have come to fulfill every single prophecy and obey every single requirement therein.

All scholars agree that we do not have the original “strokes of a pen” from either Testament, so to quote this passage as justification for a



wooden literalism is questionable at best.

But then the questions come, “Where does it stop? Is this not a slippery slope to throwing out the whole Bible? By what criteria do we say ‘this carries authority but that does not’?” The answer is in knowing the difference between the “letter” of the law and the “spirit” of the law. Communication is rarely so precise that it cannot be misunderstood, even when the words are from God, because the limitations lie with us as imperfect beings. Certainly all can agree that no amount of leeway with the details can ever overthrow core principles such as that Jesus is God in the flesh who died for us and rose again, that the overall theme of the New Testament is freedom from the rule of sin and Satan, that believers are to live in humility and love but also truth and justice, and that we are “all one in Christ Jesus” (**Gal. 3:28**) and all heirs of the Promise (**Acts 3:25, Rom. 4:14, Gal. 3:29, Eph. 3:6, Heb. 6:17, 11:9**).

There is a critical difference between lack of precision in the text itself and lack of precision in interpretation. From any reasonable understanding of the text, God’s concern is more with the message than the medium, and with character more than mere outward performance. God “remembers that we are dust” (**Psalms 103:14**) and will judge us by our hearts and intents, not our honest mistakes. *How* we handle differences of opinion is probably as important to God as *whether* we have them.

Such principles (see also **Rom. 13:10**) are in no danger of erosion from a realistic yet respectful approach to the Bible, which was never meant to be a book of incantations or formulas, but a message and a basis for hope. We are told in its pages about the character of God so we can know how to please him and how to avoid displeasing him. So sin is still sin, honor is still honor, mercy is still mercy, and Jesus is still the only Way, Truth, and Life (**John 14:6**). We have no fear of critical examination but must guard against fallacious or ill-informed attacks that “make shipwreck of the faith” (**1 Tim. 1:19**). We must not respond to such attacks with fear and anger, but with knowledge and the confidence that comes from it. God’s Word will indeed accomplish its purpose, per **Isaiah 55:6-11**.



# Jesus

## God With Us

Jesus is the central figure of the entire Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the focus of the Bible is on what God made, what and how it went wrong, how it would be restored, and who would restore it. *The Messiah* (Hebrew) and *the Christ* (Greek) both mean “the anointed one”, which describes someone who is set apart for some spiritual purpose. This was done to priests and kings for example, and it was typically signified by putting a fragrant oil on the person’s head. The Old Testament predicts the coming of one who would redeem the world, and the New Testament identifies Jesus as that individual.

## Is Jesus God, or just a higher created being?

Let’s consider all these passages of scripture and see what conclusion we can reach:

- **Isaiah 9:6** calls the Son the Everlasting Father and the Mighty God
- **Matthew 22:44** quotes Jesus citing Psalm 110:1 about the Messiah being called “Lord” though he was David’s descendant
- **Matthew 28:19** quotes Jesus telling people to baptize in the name (not “names”) of the Father, Son, and Spirit, showing that they are one entity
- **John 1:1–3** says that Jesus, the Word, was always God, and that he created all things
- **John 14:9–10** quotes Jesus telling Philip that whoever has seen Jesus has seen the Father, and that both of them are one
- **John 17:5** quotes Jesus talking to the Father and saying that he shared glory with him before the world was created
- **Philippians 2:5–11** says that Jesus shared the form of God
- **Colossians 1:15–20** says that Jesus is the image of God, the Creator, and that the entirety of God lives in him

- **Titus 2:13** calls Jesus our God and Savior
- **Hebrews 1:2** (Son created everything), **3** (Son represents the completeness of God), **6** (“let all God’s angels worship him”), **8** (“your throne, O God, will last forever”), **10** (“In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth”)
- **1 John 2:23** says that the Father and Son cannot be separated

While some passages in the New Testament address the humanity of Jesus, others address his divinity; Jesus alone is two types of beings in one. So when we see Jesus speaking of obeying the Father, he is being our role model as a human. When we see Jesus speaking of unity with the Father, he is showing that he is God. We have to be careful to include *all* that the scriptures say about him, rather than only some.

### **Was Jesus always the Son in eternity past?**

The **first chapter of Hebrews**, along with **Philippians 2:5–11**, make it quite clear that Jesus took on human form at a point in time, rather than having always been in a Father–Son relationship. It should go without saying that a Father must precede his son in time, so it’s impossible for Jesus to have been the Son in eternity past. Jesus certainly existed as a distinct entity or “person” of the Trinity, as also did the Father and Spirit, but he did not take on human nature until he was conceived in Mary.

Even if we think about this purely in terms of sound reasoning (logic), to be eternally lower in rank is a statement of inferior essence, not merely an inferior role being played by one who is equal in essence. It is a contradiction to claim that Jesus is the same essence as the Father but has always been lower in rank. Either Jesus was always a lesser god, or he was not always the Son; there are no other possible choices.

Consider also the fact that even human sons do not remain under the authority of their fathers for life; an adult son still retains the relationship but the authority structure is gone.

### **Did Jesus really fulfill all the prophecies of the Messiah?**

The original Christians were such because they believed Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Messiah, and surely people closest to the events, and to the scriptures Jesus quoted, would be better qualified to make

that assessment than people living thousands of years later. Below is a brief list of prophecies that Jesus fulfilled:

- **Genesis 3:15** predicts a “seed of the woman” who would crush the head of the serpent
- **Psalms 22:16–18** predicts Jesus’ death by crucifixion
- **Psalms 41:9** predicts Jesus being betrayed by a close friend
- **Isaiah 7:14** predicts a virgin-born son called Immanuel
- **Isaiah 9:6** predicts a son/child to be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
- **Isaiah 40:3** predicts the Messiah’s forerunner, who turned out to be John the Baptist
- **Isaiah 53** predicts the Messiah being despised, suffering, giving his life as a sacrifice
- **Micah 5:2** predicts an ancient one coming out of Bethlehem to rule over Israel
- **Zechariah 9:9** predicts the Messiah riding into Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt
- **Zechariah 11:12** predicts the price of 30 pieces of silver for Jesus to be betrayed
- **Zechariah 12:10** predicts Israel mourning over the one they pierced

As Jesus walked with two people on their way to Emmaus after his resurrection, he explained from the scriptures that the Messiah first had to die (**Luke 24:27**). He used the Greek translation known as LXX or The Septuagint, not the original Hebrew text. The Hebrew text used in most translations today is called the Masoretic text, which was done centuries after the time of Christ. That text deliberately obscured some Messianic passages, because early Christians had been proving Jesus to be the Christ from the LXX (ref. [The Phantom Pharisee](#)).

### **When was Jesus born, and when did he die?**

The material for this section is taken from the author’s document, [A Chronology of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus](#).

## What year was Jesus born?

### Clues from scripture

- During the reign of Herod the Great (not to be confused with Herod Antipas [Mat. 14:1], who was to be involved in Jesus' trial and whose rule would partially coincide with that of Pontius Pilate) and his brother Philip (Mat. 2:1, Luke 1:5, 3:1)
- During the reign of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1)
- During the 15th year of the governorship of Tiberias Caesar (Luke 3:1)
- During the rule of Pontius Pilate (Luke 3:1)
- During the rule of Lysanias (Luke 3:1)
- During the census of the governorship of Quirinius over Syria (Luke 2:2)

### Clues from secular history

- Historian Josephus ( 37–100 a.d.) gives details putting Herod the Great's death in 1 b.c., and since Herod lived at least two years after Jesus was born (Mat. 2:16), the latest year for his birth would be 3 b.c.
- The times of all the others are also verified and thus support the Biblical narrative. (Augustus: lived 63 b.c.–14 a.d.; Tiberius: lived 42 b.c.–37 a.d.; Pontius Pilate: ruled 26 a.d.–36 a.d.; Herod Antipas: lived 20 a.d.–39 a.d.; Lysanias: precise years unknown, but referenced by various sources including Josephus as during that general time; Quirinius ordered the census during that general time)

### Clues from astronomy

- Josephus puts Herod's death shortly after a lunar eclipse. There was a full lunar eclipse on Jan. 10, 1 b.c., a partial one on March 13, 4 b.c., and another full eclipse on March 23, 5 b.c.

## What time of year was Jesus born?

### With reference to John the Baptist

- John was conceived shortly after his father Zacharias was told he would have a son, when an angel appeared to him during his service as High Priest in the Abija order, which always served in late spring.
- John's mother Elizabeth was in her sixth month when Jesus was conceived (**Luke 1:36**).
- John was likely born in March, and if so, Jesus was born in September.
- The apostle John used the term "the Word . . . tabernacled among us" (**John 1:14**), and the Feast of Tabernacles was in late Sept./early Oct.

### With reference to the shepherds and secular rulers

- Shepherds only watched their flocks out in the fields by night (**Luke 2:7–8**) during birthing season, which was in the fall.
- The census would not have been ordered so as to require travel in the cold of winter.

## What did Jesus do (or not do) while growing up?

### Explicit scriptural statements

- Grew up in Nazareth (**Mat. 2:23, Luke 2:39**)
- Became strong and wise and advanced in maturity (**Luke 2:40,52**)
- Attended the Passover each year in Jerusalem (**Luke 2:41**)
- At age twelve he challenged the rabbis and impressed them with his intelligence and wisdom (**Luke 2:46–47**)

### Implicit scriptural statements

- Lived under the laws of Moses
- Never broke any of the laws (ref. **2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5**)
- Likely worked with his father as a carpenter/builder (**Mat. 13:55, Mark 6:3**)

## Conclusions regarding theories of activities outside of Judea

- Theories alleging that Jesus traveled to Europe or India only arose in the late medieval period and supply no evidence of his presence there.
- Theories alleging that Jesus studied with the Essenes only arose after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and likewise supply no evidence of his presence there.
- The people of his hometown took offense at his teaching on the grounds that he was unstudied and untraveled (**Mat. 13:55, Mark 6:3**).

## How long was Jesus' public ministry?

### When did it begin?

- When he was about the age of 30 (**Luke 3:23**)
- After his baptism and temptation (**Mark 1:10–14, John 1:32**)
- About a week or so before a Passover (**John 2:13**; references to days are in vs. **1:29,35,43, 2:1,12**)

### When did it end?

- During a Passover (all four Gospel accounts)
- After one Passover (remotely possible, two, though it is unlikely that an entire year transpired between the feasts mentioned in these two references) apart from the one at the beginning (**John 5:1,6:4**)

## When was Jesus crucified?

### Determining the year

- Jesus was about 32 years old, given the length and starting age of his ministry. So if he was born in 3 b.c., then the year would be 30 a.d.



## Determining the season

- The first month of the Hebrew calendar was called Nisan or Abib/Aviv, when the crescent moon was first sighted at the time the barley harvest was ripe in the spring, as specified in Exodus 12.
- Passover was always in this first month, so the season was spring.

## Determining the day

- Exodus 12 specifies the 10th of Nisan as when a flawless year-old male lamb (or goat) was to be selected for each family. The animal was to be kept under observation for any defects until the 14th, when at twilight all the acceptable lambs were to be slaughtered and then eaten. This marked the start of a 7-day period beginning and ending with a “sacred assembly” (a.k.a. a Sabbath), and all yeast had to be purged from every house for the entire 7 days. The 14th became known as Preparation Day, and the 15th was the actual Passover, though the whole festival was also called the Passover. So regardless of the Gregorian calendar dates, the Preparation was the 14th and the Passover was the 15th.
- Jesus visited Bethany six days before the Passover (**John 12:1**), which as explained next would have been Nisan 9.
- His Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem was the next day (**John 12:12**), marking the beginning of his being “kept under observation” during the same days as the lambs for the Passover. As stated in Exodus 12, this day was Nisan 10. Toward the end of that day (**Mark 11:10ff**), Jesus briefly visited the temple and then went to Bethany for the night.
- The next day, Nisan 11, Jesus drove the merchants from the temple.
- The next day, Nisan 12, the religious leaders began to strongly challenge Jesus, and **Mark 14:1** states that the Passover feast was two days away; note that the feast began with the Preparation on the 14th.
- The Preparation Day, Nisan 14, began at sundown with the Last Supper (**John 13:1**).

- The next daylight, still part of the Preparation (**John 19:14,31,42**), was the time of Jesus' trials; see the following point.
- A 24-hour day in Israel began at sundown and was divided into segments called "hours" or "watches" (as relates to guard duty). Each "hour" was really a three-hour span, but it was known by its beginning; that is, the "third hour" lasted from 9 o'clock to 12 o'clock, counting from either 6 a.m. or 6 p.m. Going by the position of the sun or moon in the sky made greater precision impractical. But more importantly, the expressions "the third hour" and "almost/about the sixth hour" refer to the same three-hour span, with the latter meaning it was close to the end of that span. [see David Lipscomb (1831–1917), *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, p. 295–296].
- As just explained, Jesus was condemned at about 11 a.m. (**John 19:14**) and crucified at about noon (Mark 15:25).
- Jesus died after three hours of darkness from about noon until 3 p.m. (**Mark 15:33**), after which his body was taken down by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who wrapped and buried it (**John 19:38–42**). This was at sundown on Nisan 14, just before the Passover itself began on the 15th.
- There were two Sabbaths that week, since **Mark 16:1** has women buying burial spices after the Sabbath, while **Luke 23:56** has them buying the spices before the Sabbath. The first on Nisan 15 was the "special Sabbath" or Passover, and the second on Nisan 17 was the normal weekly Sabbath.
- Since the Preparation that year was three days before the normal Sabbath, and since the normal Sabbath was always from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, then Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday. Further, since the Triumphal Entry was on Nisan 10 and the 15th was a Thursday, then the Triumphal Entry was on a Sabbath, meaning Saturday.

### Extra-Biblical corroboration

- Tacitus, a Roman historian antagonistic to Christianity, referred to the execution of "Christus" by Pilate in his *Annals* (book 15, chap.

44), written about 116 a.d.

- Josephus, a Jewish historian, referred to Jesus twice in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (books 18 and 20), written about 93–94 a.d.
- There is nearly universal acknowledgement of the facts of Jesus' baptism by John and his crucifixion by Pilate.

## When did Jesus rise from the dead?

### Considering the Jewish feasts

- The Passover was when the Pharisees demanded that the tomb be sealed (**Mat. 27:62–66**), which may serve as the time from which “the third day” would be determined (**Mat. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19**). This would be the only way to reconcile that phrase with Jesus' statement about being three days and three nights “in the belly of the earth” (**Mat. 12:40**).
- While it is true that “Sabbath” by itself could be simply another name for an ordinary week rather than just the Sabbath day itself, the plural was not, except as in the phrase “Sabbath of Sabbaths” meaning a special Sabbath (the Passover itself). Context may also indicate a week, such as “I fast twice every Sabbath”, which wouldn't make sense if it meant a literal Sabbath day. So if we see “first/one of Sabbaths” in the Greek, we know it refers to the annual Feast of Firstfruits rather than an ordinary week or weekly Sabbath.
- **Mark 16:1–2** states that the women took the spices to the tomb “after the Sabbath. . . extremely early on the First of Sabbaths, just as the sun was beginning to rise”. We know that Jesus had already arisen before dawn, and that this was on the first day of the week which had begun at sundown Saturday (Nisan 18). And since verse 9 says that Jesus arose “early [prOi, the last watch of the night, about 3–6 a.m.] on the first of Sabbaths” [that is, the Feast of Firstfruits, always the day after the weekly Sabbath after Passover, and the start of marking off 7 weeks till Pentecost], it was while it was still dark on Sunday. Then after this he appeared to Mary Magdalene at dawn. The same but slightly less detail as Mark's account is given in **Mat. 28:1, Luke 24:1, and John 20:1**.

## Considering the Roman guards

- These were Roman soldiers rather than Jewish temple guards, since the Jewish leaders had to ask Pilate for them.
- The Jewish leaders bribed the Roman guards so they would lie about the resurrection and claim the disciples stole Jesus' body while they were asleep (**Mat. 28:11–15**). The bribe was necessary because otherwise the guards would be executed for dereliction of duty.
- The Roman soldiers had no concern about Jewish religious affairs, and thus had no motivation to help the fearful and clueless disciples (**John 20:19**) steal the body.

## Considering the testimony of eyewitnesses

- Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and their companions saw Jesus alive in the grave garden, though they were clearly resigned to the fact that he had died, rather than hallucinating (**Luke 24:10, John 20:11–18**).
- The two walking to Emmaus saw Jesus alive (**Luke 24:13–36**).
- The inner circle of disciples and many others saw Jesus appear alive and in the flesh, in the locked room where they were hiding (**John 20:19**).
- Within 30 years of the events, Paul wrote that over 500 people saw Jesus alive again after his crucifixion (**1 Cor. 15:6**).

## What did Jesus do up to the time he ascended to heaven?

### Activities

- Scolded the disciples for disbelief (**Mark 16:14**)
- Appeared to many people, as explained in the previous point
- Appeared to his apostles (**Acts 1:2–3**)
- Appeared to the disciples who were fishing (**John 21:1–14**)
- Brought the sacrifice of his blood to the altar in heaven (**Heb. 9:12**)

- Brought the righteous dead from Paradise to heaven (**Eph. 4:8–10**, with ref. to **Luke 16:19–31** where Lazarus was in Paradise, contrasted with **2 Cor. 5:8** where Paul says that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord)

## Teachings

- The testing of Peter's love (**John 21:15–19**)
- The Great Commission (**Mat. 28:16–20**, **Mark 16:15–16**, **Luke 24:45–48**)
- The unspecified teachings about the kingdom of God (**Acts 1:3,7**)

## Manner of ascension

- The witnesses, his disciples (**Luke 24:33**, **24:50–52**)
- The promise of the Holy Spirit (**Luke 24:49**, **Acts 1:4–5,8**)
- The rising into the sky and then hidden by clouds (**Mark 16:19**, **Luke 24:51**, **Acts 1:9–11**)
- The promise to return the same way (**Acts 1:11**)

## Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

Considering the testimony of eyewitnesses both friendly and hostile, and the fact that the Bible cannot be dismissed as historical record just because it's the Bible, as well as the undeniable impact on world history (including the calendar used by most of the civilized world), there is plenty of evidence to support the claim that Jesus did literally and physically rise from the dead. Historical facts in general are established by the same criteria, so we can at least say that there is enough evidence to support the claim, and not enough to deny it. A prior disbelief in miracles cannot serve as proof that none have happened.

## Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead?

The resurrection of Jesus is proof that he came from God, and of course it was the ultimate fulfillment of all the prophecies about the Messiah as Redeemer. This historical event, supported by the testimony of reliable eyewitnesses, is never going to change; it is as established a fact as any

other. Without this, our faith in the next life is futile and pointless (see 1 Corinthians 15, especially verses 14 and 19).

Unlike any other religion or philosophy, whose founders or gods did not love all mankind enough to die for them and then rise again, the Christian faith in this fact cannot be changed by whim or reinterpretation. Acceptance of the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is a strong spiritual anchor that gives us a real hope for what lies beyond this life. And this hope never depends on us performing certain tasks or rituals, or on meditation or self-punishment. It is a gift, which can only be either accepted or rejected. We are offered adoption as God's own children, not as mere slaves or "consciousness".

So whether or not it matters that Jesus rose from the dead is a question each individual must answer. Does it matter that our Creator loves us and wants us to choose to return his love? Does it matter that we have hope for an end to the suffering of this life, or that our lives really do have meaning? Does it matter that inner peace can be received as a gift, rather than worked for with no guarantee that we'll ever get it? Does it matter that there will be ultimate justice against all who did evil, and mercy for all who humbled themselves and repented? Does it matter that we'll see our departed loved ones again, if they too had been adopted as God's children?

# The Gift of Salvation

## Be Reconciled to God

The Bible teaches that salvation is a gift God offers us, which we can either accept or reject. Though Jesus paid a high price for it, he offers it to us freely and without obligation to accept, since love and reconciliation can never be forced or bought.

### What is salvation?

Salvation in the Bible means to be reconciled with God and declared righteous (**2 Corinthians 5:18–21**), which happens when we are unashamed to publicly state that Jesus rose from the dead and we accept him as our Savior (**Romans 10:9, Mark 8:38**). It means that we will be with God and all the other saved people for eternity, in peace and happiness. What we are saved from is an eternity apart from God.

### Is salvation really only by faith?

In **John 6:29**, Jesus said that what God wants from us is to trust and accept him. It's like being born spiritually (**John 3:5, 7**), but birth is not the end of life, it's the beginning. We do good deeds *because* we're saved, not to *become* saved. In **Romans 4** Paul explains that faith is not a work or deed, and nothing can be part gift and part earned wage. In **Ephesians 2:8–9** he states that salvation is by the grace of God, who decided that we only need faith— because if we needed works or deeds, we would boast of saving ourselves.

Consider also that salvation is a change of relationship with God, where we go from being orphans and foreigners to being adopted into his family as children (**Romans 8:15, 23, Galatians 4:5**). This is what it means to be reconciled to God (**2 Corinthians 5:18–21**), and it's impossible to buy or force reconciliation. Once we're reconciled, we don't ignore or annoy the one with whom we have this close relationship; rather, we try to please and spend time with them, from the motive of love. With salvation by faith, we should also show gratitude for what God did for us, paying the price we could not pay for our redemption from evil (**Ephesians 4:30, Titus 2:14, Hebrews 9:12**).

Put simply, salvation is not a license to sin or “fire insurance”, but accepting God's offer of adoption and being guaranteed an eternity of

happiness with our Creator.

### **Does God choose who will be saved?**

Volumes have been written, and debates have raged for generations, on the question of free will in salvation. We are not going to settle it here, but rather focus on the overarching theme of scripture, which is the love and mercy of God toward a world that rebelled against him and became enslaved and trapped.

There is nothing in the Bible to suggest that God chose which people would be saved, but only that God determined the way we could be saved and knew in advance who would accept his offer of reconciliation. As we just learned in the previous section, love and reconciliation can never be forced, even by God, because only genuine love from us would be worthy of our Creator. And if we had no choice in the matter, then God would be blamed for sin, since we would be robots or puppets God operates. God's power and sovereignty are not at all threatened by the free will of people.

Every place in scripture that could be taken as God imposing his will on people has to do with particular purposes or missions, not the choice between accepting or rejecting God as our Savior and Lord. Consider **2 Peter 3:9**, which states that God does not want anyone to remain apart from him, but rather that all people should change their minds (repent). And in **Romans 8:29**, Paul teaches that what God arranged in advance is not who would come to salvation, but that those who come to salvation would become like Jesus. **John 1:12** clearly states that whoever would put their trust in Jesus would be granted the privilege of becoming children of God, and **John 3:16** says that whoever trusts him will have eternal life. Nothing in those passages hints at "winning the lottery" and being picked.

The larger question, though, is this: Does it even matter? Regardless of the mechanics of salvation, it cannot be denied that scripture urges us to make this choice about God. Rather than bicker needlessly over how God reaches out to us, let us unite on the Good News about Jesus.

### **Can salvation be lost?**

Similar volumes have been written, and debates raged, on the question of security of salvation, also called "eternal security" or "once saved, always saved". But as with the issue of whether God chooses who will be saved,



what matters most is the relationship. If it is so weak and fragile that we constantly worry about being disowned and rejected by God, then we must question whether we understood salvation at all. Even as imperfect human beings, we wouldn't think of disowning our children every time they misbehave. What kind of relationship would that be? After all, scripture tells us that love does away with fear (**1 John 4:18**), and that our inheritance is kept safe in heaven for us by the power of God (**1 Peter 1:4–5**).

**1 John 5:13** "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

### **What about salvation before or after the age of grace?**

As with the free will issue, places in scripture that could be taken as our need to strive, work, and endure for salvation are either not about the salvation of our souls or are about times before or after the age of grace. Salvation in the New Testament is unique, a "new creation" (**2 Corinthians 5:17**), and something never revealed by anyone before Paul (Romans 16:24–26, Ephesians 3:2–9, Colossians 1:26). Never before did God give the Holy Spirit to all believers personally and permanently, and this seems to also be the case in the end times judgments. So the time of secure salvation by faith alone began and will end with the "church age".

There will be righteous people in heaven from before and after this age, and these too are called "saints" or "elect". So though everyone in the church is a saint, not every saint is in the church. Making this distinction can help to avoid much confusion in Bible interpretation, especially concerning prophecy of the end times.

### **Can non-Christians ever go to heaven?**

We are commanded to "evangelize", which means to spread the Good News about Jesus to everyone (**Matthew 28:18–20**), but if anyone refuses to hear it, we must not try to force it on them (**Matthew 7:6**, **Mark 6:10–11**). After all, not even God will do that, and even God will eventually give up on those who refuse to accept him (**Romans 1:18–19, 26**). But the message itself is quite narrow and specific: in **John 14:6** Jesus said that he is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by me." So can anyone get to heaven some other way? Clearly not.

Some believe that Jesus is indeed the only way to be saved, but that this does not necessarily mean everyone has to know this but only be good and believe in a God. That is, they believe that Jesus' sacrifice saved everyone whether or not they knew about it or believed it. Yet the scriptures could not be clearer about the need for personal faith: see **John 1:12, 3:16, 36, Acts 2:38, 3:19, and 1 Corinthians 6:9** for example. Surely God has mercy on any who had no chance or ability to accept the Good News, since salvation is only denied for those who knowingly reject God (**Mark 16:16, John 3:18**).

Yet if salvation is only denied for rejecting Jesus, wouldn't it be better not to tell them? Remember that Jesus commanded us to tell the world about him; it is not for us to question whether this is a good idea. And what kind of person would adopt a child and never tell the child? How can the child choose freely to accept or reject an offer they never knew was made? Further, what would we do with passages such as **Acts 3:17, 17:30-31** which speak of sins committed in ignorance? God may have granted leniency in times past, but things changed when Jesus rose from the dead.

Perhaps the most important point is this: Leave it to God to decide who gets into heaven. Our concern is to obey the clear command to tell everyone about the Jesus who rose from the dead so that we can be adopted by God simply by trusting this Jesus. We are not charged with judging those outside of our faith (**1 Corinthians 5:12-13**). Just do what scripture tells us to do, because we love God and people (**Romans 13:10**). If we believe there is any possibility that people might not go to heaven, it should be our motivation to make sure they hear about Jesus and can enjoy the same hope as we have.

# Our Walk of Life

## Living as Children of God

Now that we have a good foundation regarding the Bible, Jesus, and salvation, what next? What does it mean to live the Christian life? We need to get our teachings from the Bible rather than tradition.

### Does being a Christian mean we won't have any problems?

It hardly needs to be said that we certainly do and will have problems in this life, Christian or not. The Bible never promises a life of ease for the righteous, and scripture promises persecution for any who would follow Jesus (**Matthew 5:10–11**, **Mark 10:29–30**, **John 16:33**, **2 Timothy 3:12**). We may expect that serving God means we get physical protection, but everything God promises us as Christians has to do with the spiritual and eternal. We are promised that our faith will be guarded, even if it seems to waver at times. We need to understand that being adopted as God's children makes us citizens of the kingdom of heaven (**Philippians 3:20**), so since this world is the kingdom of Satan (**Luke 4:5–6**, **2 Corinthians 4:4**) we are "enemies of state" and can expect to be treated accordingly by the world. It is only human to be tempted to rage at God when tragedy strikes, but remember the importance of free will, and that God will compensate us in heaven for what we suffer here (**Romans 8:18**, **2 Corinthians 12:10**).

### Do Christians have to obey any of the Old Testament laws?

Those who believe that Christians must obey the laws of Moses often cite **Matthew 5:17** where Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. However, this was said to Jews before Christianity even existed, and a fulfilled law is one that no longer applies. In addition, Jesus had to perfectly meet all the obligations of the law in order to redeem those under it (**Galatians 4:5**). In the earliest days of the church, a council was convened in Jerusalem (**Acts 15:1–21**) to settle this very question, and they determined that no one was obligated to obey Moses in order to be saved.

Paul wrote extensively about this issue as well. In **Romans 4** he contrasted law and faith through the example of Abraham, who lived long before Moses. In **Romans 6:14**, **11:6** he stated that we are under

the grace of God as opposed to the law. In **Romans 7:4** he showed that we have died to the law and so cannot be under its authority. In **Galatians 2:21, 5:4** he said that righteousness cannot be gained through the law or Christ died for nothing, and that to go under law is to fall away from grace. In **Galatians 3:19, 24** he explained that the purpose and limit of the law was to bring people to spiritual maturity but that now it is no longer needed.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, certainly someone who could speak with authority about the laws of Moses, stated in **Hebrews 7:12** that where there is a change of priesthood there must also be a change of law (Jesus is our priest and is not from the tribe of Levi as required by Moses). **Hebrews 8:13** further states that the old law was made obsolete.

If we understand why Jesus came at all, we know that he came to do much more than pay for sins; he also came to free us from the burden of keeping religious rituals and going to sacred places, as he explained to the Samaritan woman in **John 4:21–24**. What we do to please God after we're saved is to love God and people, and to live to please our Savior. The laws of Israel were for the people of Israel.

### **Can Christians still sin?**

As with the question about suffering, the answer should be a clear “yes”. Someone might cite **1 John 3:9, 5:18** to claim we cannot sin, but this must be balanced with **James 4:17, 5:16, 1 John 1:8–10, and 1 John 5:16**. What the “no sin” passages say in the original Greek is that no Christian can wallow in sin, making it a habit and indulging in it. We are to hate it when we sin and confess it to God, then make it our intention to not repeat the sin. We still live in our mortal flesh with its cravings and needs, and we still live in a world of temptation and corruption. As long as this continues, we will struggle with sin.

### **How can a Christian know God's will for their life?**

Jesus had a purpose and taught and modeled how to live as children of God. So we too have a purpose and a way of life. How can we find our purpose, and how should we live as Christians? The entire letter of James is a simple, practical guide for Christian living, but those are general guidelines and examples. How do we find out what God wants us to do individually? Here are some simple, practical guidelines:

1. **Listen:** God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit but rarely shouts. Don't make him shout, it might come in the form of disaster that takes away all the reasons we weren't listening. And remember that God often speaks through other believers.
2. **Lesson:** God spoke to us all through the scriptures and gave us examples of how the first Christians lived, along with their struggles and setbacks. Learn from both the successes and failures of others.
3. **Lessen:** Less of your will and more of God's. Pride and fear have to be sacrificed to the God we trust. Hesitation to do this indicates lack of trust.
4. **Live in':** Just live your life. If you're walking with God, your purpose will find you. If you're looking for it, you're working too hard. Turning the steering wheel in your car won't take you anywhere if the car isn't in motion, and God can't do much with you if you're just sitting and waiting.

### Should Christians care about end-times prophecy?

Prophecy is one of the key attributes of the Bible that set it apart from the writings of most major religions. As God said in **Isaiah 46:9–10**, there is no other like him, who declares the end from the beginning and from ancient times what is still to come. **Revelation 1:3** promises a blessing to all who read it.

Certainly the study of Bible prophecy is often confusing and divisive. But we must at least be able to recognize the signs of the times (**Matthew 16:3**) so we are not deceived (**Luke 21:8**). Many have a particular fascination with prophecy, but over-emphasis on personal dreams and visions, as well as attempts to calculate the day or hour of Jesus' return, serve no useful purpose and cause needless strife. What matters is that we all have our faith strongly anchored, such that we will be at peace no matter what life may throw at us.

### What did Jesus mean by us being “salt” and “light”?

This is what Jesus taught in **Matthew 5:13–16**, and both words are examples of how we as his followers must not be timid or too passive with our faith. We are meant to “enlighten” and “flavor” the world, meaning we openly display and speak of our faith. In addition to our own testimony, we must also be prepared to give the reasons for this

faith, per **1 Peter 3:15**. But be sensitive to the situation in which you do this. The manner most appropriate in a library will not be the same as what is most appropriate at a party, and neither of these approaches would work well in an inner-city housing complex. As Paul explained in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**, he adapted to every situation in order to best reach people. Above all, we must not be ashamed of Jesus, or he will be ashamed of us when he returns (**Luke 9:26**).

# The Church

## Relating to our Fellow Believers

The word in the original Greek text of the New Testament usually translated as “church” is *ekklesia*, which means a gathering or assembly of people. Though it was a common word in those days, and was even used in the Bible to refer to an angry mob of unbelievers (**Acts 19:32**), it came to refer to the group gathering because of their common faith in the risen Jesus. The New Testament always uses it in reference to such gatherings in a region or in a person’s home. It never meant a building or place of worship.

## What does the New Testament say about worship?

The New Testament really doesn’t say much about what worship is or how to practice it. Jesus said that whenever even 2 or 3 people gathered because they belong to him, there he would be (**Matthew 18:20**). He told a woman in Samaria that the time had come for people to stop going to special places to worship God, but instead to worship genuinely and spiritually (**John 4:21–24**). **James 1:27** says that genuine worship is to care for orphans and widows, and to keep from being polluted by the world. Paul says in **Romans 12:1** that true worship is to offer your body as a living sacrifice. In **1 Corinthians 14:26–33** Paul corrects the people’s chaotic gatherings by teaching them to do everything in a controlled and orderly fashion— but this really has more to do with meetings than with the actual worship of God.

What we *don’t* find in the New Testament is a liturgy, a sacred calendar, places of worship, rites, or festivals. People simply shared their lives and helped each other. In fact, Paul spoke out strongly against falling back into traditional worship practices (**Galatians 4:8–11**). At best, we can see that people met on the first day of the week in honor of the day Jesus arose, and that they shared meals to remember Jesus’ sacrifice.

## Must all Christians “go to church”?

Given that there is no sacred place to go, and that such places are not churches, the real question is whether Christians should meet together, and the answer is “yes”. **Hebrews 10:25** tells us to meet together to

support each other, and how or when would we use our spiritual gifts if we kept them to ourselves? Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12:7** that these gifts are for the common good, and he goes on to list some of them.

Do families get together? We are the family of God, all brothers and sisters, so it seems obvious that we should want to be with each other. Beyond that, there is no command in the New Testament concerning such meetings except for what was already pointed out about doing things in an orderly way.

### **Are there levels of authority in the church?**

We as Christians are all parts of one body, as Paul illustrated in **1 Corinthians 12:12–26**. No part can take control over another part, and the hand cannot demand that the foot stay clean or hold a spoon. Yet as Christians we often think it is our duty to police other believers and dictate their behavior or methods. The worst things we can do are to usurp the Holy Spirit's authority to direct other believers, and to rebuke each other in front of unbelievers.

Then what about elders, overseers, pastors, and teachers? Though it was to Jewish disciples before the church age, Jesus made it clear that the greatest in his kingdom were to be the least, the humble and lowly (**Matthew 20:20–28, 23:8–12, Luke 22:24–27**), who exercised no authority over others as the world does. By washing the feet of his own disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus showed what a leader is like. We see also in **Philippians 2:5–11** that Jesus humbled himself to stoop down and lift us up, even though he is God. And in **Matthew 23:8** Jesus stated that we are all brothers and sisters, not parents and children. There is no support in the New Testament for any kind of hierarchy among sisters and brothers in Christ.

What the New Testament does say about elders, overseers, pastors, and teachers, is that they are servants and guardians rather than bosses and authorities. Even **Hebrews 13:7, 17** does not speak of authority as many translations present it, but rather mentoring and leading by example. So it would seem that the most ambitious to wield authority are the least qualified to have it. What Jesus wants in a Christian leader is humility, faithfulness, compassion, strong faith, and dedication.



## Are there levels of authority in marriage?

Considering the principle Jesus established about authority between believers, it would seem obvious that there is even less support for hierarchy in the most intimate of relationships. It is impossible to claim equality of being while making one's flesh the only reason for putting someone under your authority for life. God has not begun to play favorites or judge by the flesh (**1 Samuel 16:7, Acts 10:34, James 2:1**). Rather, the scriptures teach mutual submission, meaning we defer to each other as each one has the gift or skill to lead in a particular area for a particular time.

Likewise, it would be lazy to use our flesh to allow someone else to take spiritual authority over us so we can avoid personal responsibility. We have only one mediator between ourselves and God, and that is Jesus (**1 Timothy 2:5**). Each of us will stand alone at the judgment seat of Christ, and give an account for our own lives.

## Is there ever a situation where a person must be expelled from a church?

In **1 Corinthians 5** Paul orders a man wallowing in sin to be expelled from the church, and the "sinners" of that church were to do the expelling as a group. The man's sin was bringing shame upon the faith, and the church had to remember to be holy and not just compassionate. Paul also stated in **1 Corinthians 6:9–11** that people who wallow in sin will not enter the kingdom of God. Since Jesus has cleansed us from our sin, it is especially grievous for us to return to it.

Now what if another person has wronged us personally? In **Luke 17:4** Jesus said that a person must repent in order to be forgiven; after all, even God requires repentance. Without repentance, forgiveness enables more sin, since there are never any consequences, not even a show of remorse. This also punishes the victim twice, since they were wronged and then made to feel like a worse sinner if they didn't forgive unconditionally. Certainly we should hope for reconciliation, but it takes two to reconcile.

What about non-Christians attending church meetings? The Bible does allow them to observe (**1 Corinthians 14:16, 24–25**), but they are not to be considered brothers or sisters in Christ, since Jesus said that he would be with those who gather in his name (**Matthew 18:20**), and only those who have been adopted bear his name. No one can be called a sister or brother in Christ if they are not in Christ; a church is a

gathering of *believers*. It would be pointless to distinguish between the church and observers if they were both the same.

**Do love and forgiveness mean sin doesn't matter anymore?**

It would be challenging to read the New Testament and reach the conclusion that sin no longer matters. Sin separates us from God, or at least strains the relationship, since we are displeasing him. Suffice it to say that one might as well throw away the whole Bible if sin doesn't matter anymore. God is not just loving, he is also just and holy.

# Conclusion

## Summary and References for Further Study

This handbook was designed to serve as a foundation or anchor, a place to start and a place to refresh when needed. But like any beginning, it should compel us to keep going, to grow and mature in the faith. There are many more detailed studies that would keep us occupied for the rest of our lives, and the student is strongly encouraged to take advantage of all the teaching material at our disposal in this age of information.