

Theology Q and A Categories

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1. Theology – Doctrine

- **What is theology and what role should it play in the life of a Christian?**

Theology is sometimes called "the queen of the sciences" because it deals with ultimate truth. Theology goes beyond all sciences, however, in that its sphere is *God and the world*. Theology reflects upon God's activity in creation, redemption, and new life. Since theology deals with matters of eternal significance, it should play an important role in the life of a Christian.

- **Is theology as important as scripture, prayer, or religious experience?**

No. Theology occupies a secondary place to all three. Theology, however, is *based* on Scripture, *energized* by prayer, and *vitalized* by religious experience. As a result, the reflection of theology has its own unique significance. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1, chap. 1)

- **What is Renewal Theology?**

Renewal Theology is the ordering and exposition of all basic Christian beliefs as they relate to the contemporary spiritual movement known as Pentecostal and Charismatic. Its major focus is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts that are being renewed in our time. This theology is represented in part by my book [*Renewal Theology*](#) (3 volumes, now compiled into one single volume.)

- **What is the function of theology?**

There are basically five functions: clarification, integration, correction, declaration, and challenge. I describe hereafter the first two.

Clarification

It is important to set forth as clearly as possible what it is that the Christian community affirms. This is primarily for the benefit of persons in the community who need instruction in the faith. Often there is lack of understanding in various doctrinal areas. Participation in Christian experience is, of course, the primary thing, but this does not automatically bring about full understanding. Much further instruction is needed in order that increasing clarification of truth may occur.

It is a sad fact that many Christians are quite unclear about what they believe. They need—and often want—instruction about the contents of the faith. They are calling out for more adequate teaching. This is the task that theology is called to perform.

Integration

Theology should help bring it all together by integrating one truth with another. Theology is not only a matter of clarification of individual doctrines but also the demonstration of how these fit into a total pattern. In the teaching of theology there is the continuing effort to show how one part relates to another.

For many Christians there is need for integration of their Bible reading and study into a unified picture of truth. The Old and New Testaments in many areas of doctrine are not easy to relate to each other. This is also the case of relating the teaching of individual books to one another. There is also need among many Christians for integrating the truth they have received with various aspects of their own experience. This is true both in relation to their own Christian experience and their day-by-day experience of the world around them. They are largely ignorant of how it all fits together.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 19-20.)

- **Explain what is meant by an "argument from silence." Should we build doctrine or theology based on the argument that Scripture does not specifically address the particular point? For instance, our pastor does not believe the Church should have youth ministries with a youth pastor because there are no instances of them in the scripture.**

The "argument from silence" is a specious one. To be sure, the Church must always be faithful to the doctrines of Christian faith but also be free under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for new and different expressions.

- **What is your view on end times theology?**

Theology deals with all time—the beginning, the present, and the future. We need to reflect on all three. An "end times" concentration may lead to imbalance. However, a failure to treat the end times is a serious neglect. (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: chapters 8-15 on "Last Things")

- **I know the Lord's Prayer is in the Bible, but where did the Apostles' Creed come from? Is it biblically based? Where is the support for the statements "He descended into hell" and "the communion of saints"?**

The Apostles' Creed goes back to approximately A.D. 700, although segments of it are found as early as the second century. This creed was not written by the apostles, but is generally recognized as being faithful to their teaching.

The statement "He descended into hell" was added to the original Creed some years later and has not been universally accepted. It is omitted in many versions of the Creed. However, the statement vividly expresses the full extent of Christ's vicarious sacrifice, even suffering the torment of hell for all people. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 359-360.)

The "Communion of saints" in the Creed refers to the fellowship of believers. It is not a communion *with* saints in heaven (a common misunderstanding) but *of* saints on earth at all times and in all places.

- **What is apologetics?**

It is a theological discipline that presents argumentation and evidences for the validity of Christian faith. Peter writes: "Always...(be) ready to make a defense [Greek—*apologia*] to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). Paul declares about himself: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it point to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). The intention of apologetics is to provide, in so far as possible, a rational defense of the Christian faith. Apologetics is directed to the world of unbelief and attempts to establish certain aspects of Christian faith—for example, the veracity of Scriptures, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul—as true on the basis of rational and empirical evidence.

- **What is "Five Point Calvinism"?**

The so-called "Five Point Calvinism" is contained in the acronym TULIP: T—Total depravity, U—Unconditional election, L—Limited atonement, I—Irresistible grace, P—Perseverance of the saints.

Arminianism, incidentally, modifies especially these last four points by affirming conditional election, universal atonement, resistible grace, and the possibility of apostasy.

"Five Point Calvinism" is held traditionally by those in Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

- **Is Calvinism a true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? It appears to be false but really close.**

Calvinism stresses the sovereignty of God over all things. It goes to extremes on such matters as predestination but holds to all the essentials of the Gospel. Calvinism at best glorifies God in everything.

- **I am a Pentecostal pastor and a theological student. I have on my bookshelf your *Renewal Theology*. I do have one question. Many theologians claim that Pentecostals are pneumacentric rather than christocentric. While this may be the case in some Pentecostal circles, it has not been my experience. The Australian Pentecostal scene is very christocentric with a healthy interest in the Spirit. What are your thoughts on this matter?**

I would say that genuine Pentecostalism is neither christocentric nor pneumacentric. It may seem pneumacentric to many evangelicals because of their lack of a defining experience of the Holy Spirit.

So hold in there, dear brother!

2. Scripture, Knowledge of God, Faith

- **Which version of the Bible is most accurate and true to the original documents? Is it true that the modern versions of Scripture, such as NIV and NASB, are leaving out important words and phrases that diminish the deity and Lordship of Christ?**

I find both NIV (New International Version) and NASB (New American Standard Bible) to be helpful modern translations. The NASB is the more literal of the two, but the NIV is easier to read. Neither of these translations in any way diminishes the deity and Lordship of Christ.

- **I have often heard the statement that the Bible is "verbally inspired." What does that mean?**

Verbal inspiration is the term frequently employed to attest that each individual part of the Bible is God's word. The Holy Spirit superintended the writing of Scripture down to the last details. Paul speaks of imparting truth "not in words taught by human wisdom, but those taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:13). Thus the Scriptures while written by men and in human words are God's word in writing. They are verbally inspired.

(For more on this, see my paper entitled "Scripture: God's Written Word" here on CBN.com or also on my web site at <http://home.regent.edu/rodmwil>.)

- **I have heard many theologians quickly dismiss the dictation theory of inspiration. Is it possible that this theory is correct?**

A dictation theory of inspiration assumes that every word of Scripture was given directly by God. The human writer was no more than a secretary who transcribed the words given. This is far too mechanical a view of inspiration. Dictation would imply no human element. To be sure, dictation would apply in many places (for example, the Ten Commandments), but almost everywhere the biblical record gives evidence of unerring human input. This may be called a dynamic view of inspiration.

- **Is there such a doctrine called "Sola Scriptura"--that is that the Bible is the sole/final authority of divine revelation? If so, could you show where in Scripture does it literally state that "the Bible is the sole/final authority of revelation?"**

"All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16)--literally "God-breathed" (as the NIV translates it). *Sola Scriptura* stems from the conviction that Scripture alone--not tradition, human experience, or anything else--can occupy this singular position.

- **I noticed your article on your web site defending Scripture as being inspired. I noticed that in your discussion of "all Scripture" you did not address extra-biblical writings. I consider the Asian cultures who have been fed from their scriptures for thousands of years and view what we consider Scripture through**

their lens. To not acknowledge that their scriptures contain truth closes communication. I would be thankful for any response.

My "all Scripture" discussion deliberately did not address extra-biblical writings whatever their merit. I do not believe them to be on the same level of inspiration. All Scripture, Paul says, is "inspired [God-breathed]" (2 Timothy 3:16) and therefore occupies a unique place of authority. This does not eliminate the value of many other religious writings of the world. They may well point the way to biblical truth.

- **How should I respond from a Bible perspective to a friend who believes that all truth is relative?**

A simple but profound answer is what Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Not "a way." Not "a truth." Not "a life." There is nothing relative about the truth in Christ.

- **How do we convince people that Scriptures are genuine accounts and not, as some assert, merely stories?**

One answer to this question lies in archeological findings that increasingly confirm the accuracy of scriptural data. Many names and places in the Bible that for a long time were viewed by some as non-existent (Sodom and Gomorrah, for example) have been discovered. Further, a noted archeologist, Nelson Glueck, writes: "It can be stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference." The Bible contains genuine historical accounts throughout.

- **How can I prove to non-believers that God exists?**

One cannot prove this. Rather "he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Faith precedes knowledge—the eyes of faith receive what goes beyond mind and reason. There are evidences of God in nature (see Romans 1:20) but not so much as to constitute proof.

- **What is the meaning and value of so-called "natural theology"?**

Natural theology is the effort to build a doctrine concerning the knowledge of God without appeal to special revelation in the Bible by utilizing only the data that may be drawn from nature, human existence, history, etc. Such natural theology may be intended as a substitute for revealed theology (theology grounded in special revelation) or as providing a kind of rational base therefor. In either event, the premise of natural theology is that there is a certain basic and objective knowledge of God that can be explicated, and that any rational person who is willing to think clearly will arrive at this truth. Thus natural theology, while admitting limits in what it can accomplish, claims to have positive value. Especially, so it is said, is this needed in a world that gives priority to reason over revelation.

In reply, natural theology fails to recognize two basic things. First, a person's knowledge at best is disproportionate to the knowledge of God: he may have ideas about God, but they are no more than human constructs extrapolated into infinity. Hence, man's knowledge capacity is insufficient to arrive at a full knowledge of God. Second, though there is a general revelation of God in nature, humanity and history, it is so perverted through mankind's sinfulness that people's minds are futile and incapable of discerning what God is disclosing. If people were godly and righteous, then surely what God discloses through general revelation could afford a basis for natural theology. But since they have turned from God, they cannot know God through natural understanding.

It should also be added, however, that when God comes to mankind in His special revelation and a person truly receives it, then his eyes are once more opened to the knowledge of God in the universe, human existence, and all of history. It is ultimately only the person who has faith who can cry out, "The heavens are telling the glory of God." Hence Christian theology is not based on natural theology but is based on special revelation, which will include far more than anything that natural theology could ever attempt.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 36.)

- **My wife passed away from cancer and yet people prayed for her healing from when she was diagnosed until she breathed her last. She was in her early 40's, loved the Lord with all her heart, read the bible daily, prayed for others and believed in divine healing. She stood on the word and believed her healing was coming and would be a testament to the power of God. Jesus has many stories of how God wants the best for us and that through faith all things are possible. Why are some healed and some not?**

"For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." These words of Paul in Philippians 1:21 ring in my heart and mind as applying to your beloved wife. For hers was a Christ-like faith despite her long illness. For to her "to live was Christ," and though you doubtless grieve over her death, the second words surely apply... "to die is gain"---gain from the recurring sickness but positively that death meant ushering her in to heaven's joy and peace, being with Christ forever. So in the midst of your sorrow, you may rejoice with her. Praise the Lord!

3. God—the Holy Trinity

- **Where did God come from? We know so much about His characteristics and how He wants us to live, but where did He come from?**

God is the everlasting God. He is without beginning or ending. Human beings are temporal creatures whose days on earth are limited in number. With God there is no such limitation. Thus does God transcend everything in His creation.

God is the great "I am." He speaks to Moses: "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:14). God is the eternal contemporary, the everlasting now.

For more on this, see my [Renewal Theology](#), 1: pages 56-58.

- **Why did God blind the Jews (John 12:40) and not enable them to hear the word regarding His Son Jesus Christ?**

The "blinding" of the Jews was not an arbitrary action on God's part but rather the result of their turning from His revelation in Christ. Jesus Himself gave them ample opportunity to receive the word but in general they refused.

- **How can we absolve God of responsibility when the facts are as we apparently know them to be? We understand God to be all knowing, past, present and future, as well as being the Creator. That being the case, God had to know in advance what the result of creating man would be. I understand God's love and man's free will, but how can we absolve God of responsibility when the facts are as we apparently know them to be? It seems like if there is an original sinner here, it would be God Himself. Don't you agree?**

No, I do not agree. God truly knows in advance but is in no way responsible for sin. Sin originates in the freedom God gave man and angels. God is sovereign over the creatures' freedom but in no way coerces it. God knows the past, present, and future in detail, but such knowledge is not the same as responsibility for what happens.

For a fuller discussion of God's Omniscience, see [Renewal Theology](#), 1, pages 73-77.

- **If God is omnipotent how come he can't do evil?**

Because God is altogether holy; therefore, He will not do anything that contradicts His character. God is totally without sin. God the Almighty One is also God the All Holy One. In His omnipotence, He can do everything consonant with His holy nature and nothing in contradiction.

- **If God is sovereign, but I must choose His plan of salvation, then who is in control of my destiny? God or me? If the answer is me, then is God sovereign?**

In answer to your question, you must bear in mind the paradox between God's sovereignty and man's response. Both are included in a true understanding of salvation. It is a paradox

because it seems contradictory to speak thus of a divine-human relationship. However, God and man are not on the same level. God remains sovereign throughout. Man remains responsible for his actions.

- **Recently I had a non-Christian friend ask, "Who created God?" I tried to explain to her the best I could, but I think she left even more confused. How would you answer such a question?**

In Isaiah 40:28 are the words about God where He is described as "the Everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth." God as creator is everlasting. If the creator were not everlasting, there would always remain the question, "Who created the Creator?" God is the great "I AM" (Exodus 3:14), without beginning or ending. There is mystery here to be sure, but unless God is everlasting creation could not exist.

- **It has been said that evil in the world precludes the existence of God, or at least takes away from His divine nature. Is this reasoning flawed and if so, why?**

Evil in the world does not preclude the existence of God, but it might seem to preclude the existence of a holy and righteous God. God, however, is not the source of evil. It is the result of the sin of angels first, then man, who in the freedom God gave them were disobedient to Him and thereby brought evil into God's creation.

- **Does God's omnipresence include hell and the lake of fire?**

Hell is sometimes described in the Bible as a place of "outer darkness" (Matthew 8:11-12; 22:13, 25-30). It is therefore a place totally removed from God who is light. Omnipresence does not include hell, which is wholly the absence of God. The same thing is true of the lake of fire, which represents the agony of separation from God.

- **I have some friends who just lost their 3-week-old baby daughter due to a heart defect. If God is sovereign why would he let this happen? I know the Bible says so that His glory can be shown. It seems to me with my limited human knowledge to be a rather cruel way to show His glory. How can one keep from coming to the conclusion that they should blame God for taking her away? I do not believe Satan took her. She was being lifted up in prayer all over the world.**

There is no simple answer to your question. God and His ways are often mysterious. The words of Job may be helpful: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21). "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God" (verse 22). God in His power and love could have saved His own Son on the cross, but in the mystery of His divine purpose He did not. Should we blame God for allowing His Son to die? No, through an innocent death God fulfilled His purpose. Likewise, we must trust God in an innocent baby's death to be fulfilling His mysterious purpose. We may not know why, but we do trust him.

- **Discuss God's unchanging nature and His repentance. How do they relate to each other?**

God is One who does not change. The universe is constantly undergoing a transition from one stage to another and human existence is marked by continuing alteration. With God there is no such mutability. "For I the LORD do not change" (Malachi 4:6). Thus does God transcend everything in His creation.

God is the Rock. He does not fluctuate from one event to the next. There is constancy and stability in all that He is and does. Hence, he is not evolving from one stage to another. There is no movement from some "primordial" nature to a "consequent" nature in any aspect of His being. God is not a becoming God, a growing God. God does not change. He is "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change [literally "with whom...change has no place"] (James 1:17). Likewise, the New Testament declares that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). God, whether Father or Son or Spirit, is One who changes not.

In God there is dependability and constancy in His being, acts, and purposes. The Old Testament sometimes speaks of God as "repenting" or changing His mind (e.g., Exodus 32:14). From the overall picture, the outward "repentance" does not signify a change in God's activity, but only His dependable response to man's behavior. God invariably acts the same: when man is obedient, God blesses; when man disobeys, God punishes; when man confesses his sin, God forgives. He "repents"; that is, He turns in the other direction. Hence, God's repentance is not really a change in God, but it is His bringing to bear on the human situation some other aspect of His being and nature. God remains the same throughout.

It is important *not* to view God changelessness as that of hard, impersonal immobility. God is not like a statue, fixed and cold, but, quite the contrary, He relates to people. He is not the "unmoved Mover" but constantly moves upon and among men and nations. The flux and flow of life are not far away and far beneath Him. Indeed, He freely involved Himself in the life of a fickle and inconstant people to work out His purpose, and in the Incarnation he plunged totally into the maelstrom of human events. God in His own changelessness has experienced all the vicissitudes of human existence. This is the God—far from immobile and distant—who does not change.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 58-59.)

- **What is meant by "the glory of God"?**

The climactic word to be spoken about God is that He is the God of Glory. The Scriptures abound with their declaration of the glory of God. In the Psalms are found, for example, such expressions as these: His glory is "above the heavens" (8:1); "the heavens declare the glory of God" (19:1 KJV); "the LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!" (24:10); "be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let thy glory be over all the earth!" (57:5); "the LORD...will

appear in his glory" (102:16); "his glory is above earth and heaven" (148:13). But this is only a beginning; God's glory is attested throughout Scripture.

What then, is the glory of God? Perhaps the best answer is that the divine glory is the *radiant splendor and awesome majesty* of God Himself. Glory is not so much a particular attribute but the effulgence of splendor and majesty that shines through in every aspect of God's being and action.

Man, it should now be added, finds his highest fulfillment in relation to the divine glory. There is a deep desire in human nature to break through the limitations of finitude and to behold God as He is in Himself. Moses on one occasion cried out to God, "I pray thee, show me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). Despite all that Moses had seen of God, he yearned to go yet higher and further. When Christ came to earth, says the fourth Gospel, "we... beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Paul declared that God "has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). So for the Christian there is more than Moses was able to receive during his life. But even for those who know Christ in this life, there is yet the consummation of glory in the world to come. For there at long last, the profoundest yearning of mankind to see God Himself will be gloriously fulfilled: "they shall see his face" (Revelation 22:4) throughout eternity!

God is the God of glory. Let us ever live to the praise of that glory. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 3, "God.")

- **We understand God to be all knowing, past, present and future, as well as being the Creator. That being the case, God had to know in advance what the result of creating man would be. I understand God's love and man's free will, but how can we absolve God of responsibility when the facts are as we apparently know them to be? It seems like if there is an original sinner here, it would be God Himself. Don't you agree?**

No, I do not agree. God truly knows in advance but is in no way responsible for sin. Sin originates in the freedom God gave man and angels. God is sovereign over the creatures' freedom but in no way coerces it. God knows the past, present, and future in detail, but such knowledge is not the same as responsibility for what happens.

(For a fuller discussion of God's Omniscience, see *Renewal Theology*, 1, pages 73-77.)

- **Some people teach that "God needs permission" before He can do anything on the earth. "God gave dominion to Adam," they say, "so God can't do anything without man's permission." This seems to contradict so many scriptures! Surely God's authority is not subordinate to man's authority. God isn't on a leash, is He? Please, I would appreciate a candid, clear answer to this question! Is this a false teaching?**

A false teaching indeed. It undercuts the appreciation of God as almighty. The fact that God gave dominion to Adam over the earth does not diminish God's sovereignty. God does not need man's permission to do anything. This would be tantamount to making man into God. Perish the thought!

- **If God is the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, He knows who will do what, and before people are born He will know who will go to heaven or hell. So if He knows who's going to hell, then why create them?**

Though God knows all things including our future, this does not determine our destiny. We are free to make our own choices over which God's sovereignly rules.

- **God is omnipotent and omniscient. Therefore, when He puts you through tribulations in life, does He know that you will endure to the end or give up eventually?**

Since God is both omnipotent and omniscient, He knows who will endure to the end or give up. His knowledge and power does not, however, mean that He is responsible for our actions. God sovereignly overrules our destiny without coercing it.

- **My friend posed this question to me the other day. I would like your response. Does God need help from us?**

God has need of nothing. He is the All-Sufficient One. Thus He is our helper in every situation and circumstance. This does not call for less zeal on our part but living and acting with the assurance that God is already there to help in whatever is needed. "God is a *very present help*," says the Psalmist (Psalm 46:1). What is there to fear?

- **In Genesis 1:26, it reads, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." What is meant by "Let us" and "in our"? To whom is "us" and "our" referring in this passage?**

The "us" and the "our" points to a plurality within God. God is one as the only God but exists as threefold: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Trinity is strongly intimated at this early stage in the Bible. Note that a plurality of persons is also suggested in Genesis 3:22 and in Genesis 11:7. See [Renewal Theology](#), 1: chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity," for further elaboration.

- **Even before He created heaven and earth or man and woman, God has always been. My husband and I both have wondered before this creation what God did all by Himself? We have always been curious but have never gotten a good answer.**

God was never alone even before His act of creation. In the mystery of the Trinity, God always existed as three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As such, in the one God there is fellowship eternally. In that sense, the one God is a society of

persons. Yet each person is the one and only God. Love is the very nature of God. Each person of the Godhead eternally loves one another. This is all true long before there was a creation.

- **Some Christians pray to God the Father, praying in the name of Jesus the Son. Other Christians pray to Jesus. Whom should we address in our prayers? Some Christians say that The Lord's Prayer is our instruction in this. But Jesus was still with the apostles when He instructed them to pray "Our Father..." He couldn't have told them to pray to Him when He was still there. So this instruction doesn't seem to apply to Christians today.**

Since God is Triune -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- we may equally well pray to any of the three. One helpful way is to pray to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit: to God as our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier.

- **We know God is a triune entity, can there be any intellectual conceptualization of His nature or must we accept the Trinity on faith?**

Intellectual conceptualization of God as triune—one being in three persons—is limited because we are reaching beyond what the human mind can comprehend. A material analogy, sometime drawn, is that of the one substance water which exists in three forms as liquid, ice, and steam. However, God is all three forms at the same time, and every form is a person. A frequent human analogy is that of man as the union in one being of body, soul, and spirit; however, God is both one being and three persons. Perhaps a better analogy is that of a human family consisting of father, mother, and child, thus three persons; however, the three persons are not one being. All such analogies are inadequate. We must accordingly turn to Scripture and Christian experience. Scripture bears witness both to God as one (Deuteronomy. 6:4, Mark 12:29) and three persons (Mark 1:10-12, Matt. 28:19). Further, in a full Christian experience, we are aware of there being only one God but also three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each of whom is wholly God. Thus it is not only a matter of accepting the Trinity on faith, but also of Scripture witness and the confirmation in Christian experience. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity.")

- **Each member of the Godhead has theological significance; what is their relation to us and to each other?**

In regard to the three members of the Godhead and their relation to us, God the Father is the Creator, God the Son the Redeemer, God the Holy Spirit the Sanctifier. In each case the other two persons are also active (for example, the Father creates through the Son and by the Holy Spirit), for God is one in being. We can say little about the inner relation of the persons of the Trinity to one another. However, since God is love (1 John 4:8), there must be the deepest possible relationship of love uniting Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- **Could you explain the term "begotten" found in the Scriptures and in various creeds as applied to the Second Person of the Trinity?**

Jesus is described as "only begotten" (Greek, *monogenes*) in John 1:14 and 18; 3:16 and 18; and in 1 John 4:9. Most familiar is John 3:16: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The "begotten" refers to an eternal begetting: there was never a time when the Son did not exist, for He is also God. In John 1:18 He is described as "the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father." In the mystery of the Trinity, both Father and Son (and the Holy Spirit) are the one and only God; however, along with this essential identity there is a distinction of personhood; one God in three persons. The Nicene Creed speaks of "the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten of the Father before all time... true God of true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father." As "only begotten," Christ is secondary to the Father, hence the Second Person of the Trinity; but as "true God of true God" He is as fully God as the Father: both are the one and only God. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 93, especially footnote 34.)

- **This was put to me recently and I couldn't explain it and wish to understand it so I could explain it to others. It concerns Jesus' statement in John 14:28, "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." How is this to be understood when we believe in the Trinity with all persons being God?**

In order to answer, Jesus' words in John 14:28, "the Father is greater than I," may be compared with His words in John 10:30, "I and the Father are one." This second statement clearly affirms His oneness in essence with the Father and that Jesus is also God. Note the following accusation of the Jews against Jesus "for blasphemy" "because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God" (verse 33). Also, the Jews wanted Jesus killed because He was "calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18).

Does John 14:28 teach otherwise? Does Jesus' statement about the Father being greater than He deny also His identity and equality with the Father? *Not at all*. In the Trinity there is both oneness of being and distinctness of persons. The Son is eternally subordinate to the Father, but the subordination is not the essence of their being. To understand this, it is to be noted that the relationship is one that inheres within the one divine reality. In other words, the Son is subordinate to the Father not in essence but in relationship. Both statements are true: "I and the Father are one" and "the Father is greater than I."

Greatness does not mean that God the Father is more divine in the Trinity than the Son, but that in personal relationship they exist in mutual reciprocity of giving and receiving. This is not unlike the relationship of earthly fathers and sons in which the priority belongs to the father rather than the son.

Finally, we may rejoice in both statements of Jesus: "I and the Father are one" and "the Father is greater than I." Both are important to maintain in a truly biblical understanding of the Triune God.

- **I am a Christian and was stunned the other day when a friend told me that there is not one scripture in the Bible that says there is such a thing as the Trinity. She said the Trinity was started by the Catholic Church many years ago. I've prayed and searched, but need your help to find scripture validating my belief in the Trinity.**

Let me give you two verses—and there are many others—that validate Christian belief in the Trinity. First, there are Jesus' own words in Matthew 28:19: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Second, there are Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." Incidentally, the Catholic Church did not start the doctrine of the Trinity.

- **Throughout the OT and NT God has always been exalted as "one." The "trinity" theory is contrary to the Bible. Many scriptures such as 1 Timothy 3:16 declare one God. Did not the trinity theory come about in the 2nd and 3rd centuries? The apostles didn't teach it, did they?**

The basic thing to realize is that the apostles *experienced* God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their lives and ministry. They came to recognize God as Father in their daily contact with Jesus, God as Son in the presence of Jesus, and God as Holy Spirit through the experience of Pentecost. The Trinity is more than doctrine. It was and is to enter into a life-changing experience. None of this diminishes the fact that God is one.

- **To me, some people (including many clergy) misunderstand the mystery of the Trinity by thinking that in heaven we shall only see one personality representing God and Jesus. In my understanding, however, we shall see both God the Father and Jesus Christ to whom the Father has given all power.**

I would only add that we will also see God the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead. As one of our best known hymns puts it, "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." The mystery of the Trinity is beyond our understanding: not two persons but three. The Holy Spirit is a unique person and hard to visualize, but He is as much God as the other two. Praise God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit!

- **I have been wondering how God can tolerate: always having been in existence, not having anyone else around like Him (except the Trinity, of course), not knowing where He came from, knowing that He is the only one like Himself, knowing that there is no end and no beginning to His existence? How can He stand not knowing where He came from, that He will never end, and that nothing else is like Him? I'm feeling sorry for God. What an awful position to be in! I know our**

thoughts are not His thoughts, but it still seems pretty awful to have no roots or to be the "One and only" of His kind in the universe.

You have raised a number of searching questions about the existence of God. However, there is no need to feel sorry for God in that He is the very essence of joy and beatitude. Always bear in mind that since God is a Trinity of persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--that He abides in eternal fellowship with one another. Though God is God alone, He is not a lonely God!

- **I know the Bible says God is omnipotent, but I was recently told that He is neither omniscient nor omnipresent. I am interested in your view.**

To say that God is neither omniscient nor omnipresent is contrary to the biblical witness. I suggest the careful and prayerful reading of Psalm 139 for vindication of the high view of God's knowledge and presence.

4. Creation – Providence, Predestination, Angels

- **I am a Christian and believe in God's love for mankind. But I have for a long time now been bothered by this question: why did God create mankind? The Bible tells us that God is perfect and complete unto Himself, so God couldn't have needed mankind, either as partners in love or as worshipers. Can you please explain why God created mankind?**

You are right. God did not create mankind to satisfy Himself---as if God were a lonely God and therefore needed fellowship with some created being. God being love desired human creatures to share that love in fellowship with Himself and with one another.

- **My nine-year-old son asked me this. If God made Adam and Eve and the earth, how come when the dinosaurs lived no humans were alive? I didn't have an answer. Is this something you could help me answer? Will I find this information in the Bible?**

According to Genesis 1, all the animals were made before Adam and Eve. Verse 25 reads, "And God made the beasts of the earth after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind; and God saw that it was good. The beasts of the earth surely included dinosaurs alongside other creatures. The next verse speaks of God making man, "Let us make man in our image." Thus dinosaurs existed before man was created. It was a good world that God made.

- **My unbelieving husband tells me that one of the reasons that my Christian faith doesn't make sense to him or any other "SANE & SENSIBLE NON-BELIEVER" is: WHY DID GOD CREATE SATAN? He must have known that he would be 'EVIL' so therefore it follows that "GOD ALSO CREATED EVIL." I must admit that my theology is somewhat lacking because I just don't know how to answer that one!!!**

It is important to say that God did *not create evil*. The foreseeing of it, which God surely did, is one thing; the actual doing of it is another. Satan is the author of sin followed by Adam. Both used their free will, God-given and created, to act against God and His command. No, God did not create evil.

- **Dr. Williams: I beg to differ with your statement that God did not create evil...He said He created good and evil in Isaiah 45:7. Please expound further on this.**

I stand by my statement that God did not create evil. The verse you quoted in Isaiah 45:7, is best rendered, "I am the light and create *darkness*" (as in the NIV translation of the Bible). God from the beginning has created darkness. Recall Genesis 1 where darkness has no connection with evil.

Thanks for the opportunity to clarify this.

- **If God has a plan for everyone and indeed He knows what is best for us, why do we pray? Certainly it is not for Him to change His mind. Should we just pray to be strong enough to handle whatever is in God's plan then? Is it possible for us to sway God's plans?**

We need to pray so that we might know what His will is and to receive strength and direction to carry it out. This applies to God's overall purpose and our daily activities. It is not a matter of seeking to sway God's plans, but to give glad and grateful obedience to whatever His will may be.

- **How do we reconcile that God has His will for us, but He also says to ask anything in Jesus' name and it will be done for us?**

To pray "in Jesus' name" is not a magical formula for answered prayers. It really means to pray in the same spirit as Jesus prayed who always did the Father's will. We should only ask for those things that God Himself wills for us. Jesus sometimes struggled to know the Father's will—how much more we—but He always discovered it. Praying in Jesus' name is a challenging and exciting adventure!

- **How are we to understand the "six days" of creation?**

According to Genesis 1:1-2:4, the process of creation occurred over a six-day period.

The most obvious understanding of the days would be that of six or seven 24-hour periods, in other words, what we know as the 24-hour calendar day. Such a reading is possible but, upon careful scrutiny, rather unlikely. The word "day" itself is used in several different ways in the Genesis 1:1-2:4 passage. First, it refers to the light that was separated from darkness: "God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night" (1:5). Second, it refers to light and darkness together: "And there was evening and there was morning, one day" (also 1:5). Third, it refers to all the days together: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (2:4 KJV). This last statement is a summary of the "generations" (literally, "begettings"), which seems to refer to all that has preceded over the six days, hence the word "day" in this case covers the whole process of creation. That the word "day" does not refer to a 24-hour calendar day also seems apparent from the account of the sun and moon not being made until the fourth day. How could there be calendar days which equal solar days, when the sun is not yet present to mark them out? Finally, attention may be called to the New Testament statement that "with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8).

From the evidence above it seems quite likely that "day" represents a period of time, however short or long, in which God was accomplishing something. This seems to accord best also with reflection upon the content of many of the six "days." Although God, of course, could accomplish such acts as making all the plants and trees in one calendar day,

all the luminaries in the heavens on another, all the fish and birds on another, all the beasts and man on still another, it hardly seems likely, nor even like God, who often works slowly over long periods of time. Hence, in light of the internal evidence the preferable interpretation is to view the six days of creation as periods of time, even ages, in which God was bringing the process of creation to its climax in man.

Here we may look in the scientific direction, and note that geological and biological data say much the same thing. It is now generally recognized that prior to man's arrival on the scene there were lengthy periods of time. For example, vegetable life appeared long before animal life, and animal life long before human life. Each of these "days" could have been thousands or multiples of thousand years (recall 2 Peter); the exact length is unimportant. The important thing is that God completed a work during that period. Its completion therefore is the completion of a day.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 108.)

- **If we have free will and choice, how can we be predestined and chosen (Romans 8:29 and Ephesians 1:4)?**

While predestination and free will seem logically contradictory to each other, from God's perspective they are not. They are actually complementary. God predestines through the free choice of people. This is a part of the mystery of how God works with man. For example, if God predestines my salvation, my freedom of choice comes into play. God is sovereign and therein human choices are confirmed.

- **Many times the Bible says that God has chosen certain individuals ahead of time to be His flock (sheep versus goats). Does it explain why He's done this in the Bible? What happens to the people who were never drawn to Him?**

The words of Jesus in Matthew 22:14 are quite relevant, "For many are called, but few are chosen." This does not mean an arbitrary choice in regard to those chosen; rather the call is unlimited, and those who say "yes" are the chosen ones. Thus they are "God's chosen" by their own decision in answer to God's call. God's desire is to draw all people to Himself.

- **If life is predetermined from birth, then could it be that certain people (like Adolph Hitler) are born damned to hell from birth?**

God, to be sure, is in sovereign control over every human life, but He does not thereby determine our actions. Freedom to decide is an essential element in human nature (see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 215-219, "Man is that Entity Made to be Free"). Hitler (like Judas in Acts 1:25) was condemned by his own evil actions.

- **What is predestination taught by Calvinism and by Arminianism? And what does it have to do with salvation?**

Both Calvinism and Arminianism affirm predestination in relation to salvation: those who believe do so as a result of God's prior decision and action. Both agree with the words of Paul, "Whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:30). However, Calvinism holds that since predestination precedes salvation (that is, calling, justification, and glorification), only those whom God has predestined, or predetermined, can be saved. Arminianism goes back to Romans 8:29 that begins, "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined," and holds that God's act of predestination depends on His foreknowledge of those who will believe. On that basis, He predestines them to salvation. Calvinism stresses that salvation is the result of God's decision prior to our faith; it is in no way based on our believing. Arminianism, to the contrary, holds that only those who believe are predestined to salvation. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 1, "Calling.")

- **I think and believe that God (the only Creator) sent us His Son to be Christ our Savior. I also believe that He knew how every individual person would end up in the End. Why then did He go ahead and create us all knowing that most people were going to hell with Satan and his angels. I say that on the basis of the Scripture that says that God is love. I don't believe I would do so with that knowledge and power of those I love. Maybe I just don't understand what love is.**

God in creating us foreknew that sin, death, and hell would eventuate. Where then is God's love? It lies in the marvelous fact that He determined in Christ to *pay the cost*. Christ on the cross accordingly suffered the eternal punishment that is mankind's due, with the terrible darkness, its fiery pain, and total abandonment by God. With the cry of agony, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:24), Christ bore the full weight of sin, death, and hell. In the words of Calvin, "Christ bore in His soul the tortures of condemned and ruined man." Thus hell is no reality foreign to God in that He has already experienced the worst that any person will have to endure. This truly is love beyond all comprehension. (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 477.)

- **Explain to me the New Testament understanding of predestination.**

We may well begin by quoting the words in Ephesians, "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. In love He predestinated us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself" (1:4-5 *NASB*). Hence, predestining points to the same prior action of God, with the emphasis more particularly on God's *sovereign action* in choosing. Predestining also points more directly to the *end* to which we are called. Later in Ephesians 1 Paul speaks of our "having been predestined according to His purpose...to the end that we...should be to the praise of His glory" (vv. 11-12). Having noted these things—the broader meaning of God's sovereign action and the larger meaning of direction—we now observe that the word "predestine" may serve for "choose" or "elect."

This is illustrated in Romans 8:28-30. Paul first speaks of calling: "those...who are called according to His [God's] purpose." He then proceeds to say, "For those whom he foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.... And those whom He predestined He also called...." The end of this sequence is glorification: "Those whom He

called He also justified; and those whom He justified He also glorified." Again, both God's sovereign action is stressed—quite strongly through the whole sequence of events—and the ultimate intention: glorification.

It is important (in the light of many misinterpretations) to observe that the word "predestinate" is never used in the New Testament to refer to anything other than the arena of salvation—as we have noted, adoption as sons, living to the praise of God, glorification. Accordingly, a view of "double predestination"—a predestination referring to death and damnation as well as to eternal life—has utterly no basis in Scripture. This does not mean that there is no death or damnation, but such does not belong to God's predestining action, which refers only to the general arena of salvation.

- **Are we predestined...chosen by God...to become believers?**

There is a proper way to put it. Rather than to say that we are predestined *to become* believers, we should say that we are predestined *as* believers. There are always two sides interchangeable: God and faith, God's sovereign action and our choice.

- **I have a hard time understanding in the Book of Exodus where it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Why do you think God did this?**

During the time of the plagues in Egypt, frequently the statement is made that "the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" (Exodus 9:12; 10:1, 20-27; 11:10; 14:8). It is to be noted that the Scripture also says that "Pharaoh hardened his heart" (Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34). Both of these seemingly contradictory statements are true. Pharaoh's heart was of such a kind that when God did His mighty miracles, a hardness set in. God did it in one sense because His act caused the hardening; in another sense Pharaoh did it himself. Several other verses simply say that "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" (Exodus 7:13, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35) without specifying either God or Pharaoh to be the cause. Perhaps you have heard the saying that "the same sun that melts wax hardens clay." The hardening is not caused by the sun, but is due to the nature of the substance: so with Pharaoh's heart.

- **Should we expect visitations of angels in our time?**

On the matter of experiencing angels, it is probably wiser to speak more of *their presence than of their visitation*. There were indeed visitations in biblical times, and they surely may occur at any time again. But in the Scriptures the emphasis for the believer rests mainly on the continuing presence of angels. We observe this in statements about the angels encamping around and guarding believers (Psalms 91:11-12), about believers having angels who constantly behold the face of God (Matthew 18:10), about the worship experience in which angels are present in festal and joyous assembly (Hebrews 12:32), and so on. This is a matter largely of their unseen but very real presence. The emphasis is wrongly placed when the focus is on angelic visitation; indeed, expecting, looking for, or hoping for such visitors is nowhere encouraged in God's Word. We are rather to pray for and expect, especially in our day, a greater visitation of the Holy Spirit (that's where the

action is!). And, as far as angels are concerned, we may rejoice in their invisible but continuing providential presence. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 8, "Angels.")

- **If God is perfect, if heaven is perfect, then why did so many angels rebel against God?**

Among the highest perfections of all God's creatures is the freedom of the will. This applies to angels as well as human beings. Freedom of the will also includes the possibility of rebelling against God. Actually, if there were no freedom of the will the situation would be less than perfect.

- **What do you think about a devotion to St. Michael the Archangel? I frequently call on him when I am faced with a situation where I must hold firm in my beliefs. Some Christians think it is wrong to pray to anyone but God, even as an intercessor. I was raised to believe that St. Michael is there to defend us in the battle against evil. Do you believe it is right to call on his help when we are faced with it?**

Since the Christian worships the triune God---God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit---all of whom are available to our intercession, what need we more? Indeed, though Michael is an angel of the highest order, he is still a finite creature. He ought not to be worshiped or invoked in prayer.

5. Man

- **What is man's relationship to the animal world?**

The opening chapter in Genesis describes God's creation of the universe. The description climaxes in verse 26 with man being seen as that creature who is *between* God and the world. He is "man the amphibian"—existing between two realms.

Although the animal world is a creation of God and thus represents a totally new step ahead, it does not have the unique stature of man. When God turned to make man, He took still another step—a huge one: He made man in His image and likeness. This by no means denies man's relationship to the animal world (any more than the creation of animal life denies prior vegetable life), but it does give man a unique status. He is a fresh creation and therefore not simply a higher or more complex entity than what preceded him.

This means that there is a *qualitative* difference between man and the highest subhuman creature. There is no gradual evolution of animal into man by a series of steps over a lengthy period of time. Hence, there is no "missing link" to be found, since God simply moved past the animal kingdom and established a new order in creation.

A further word might be said about what preceded man. On the same sixth day "God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds" (Genesis 1:25). There is no new creation here (as with the first creation of life in the sea and sky [verse 21]), but a continuation of animal life on a still higher level: this is a making, not a creation. Yet the beasts of the earth (along with other land animals) are distinctive enough from the preceding animal life to occupy a separate day of creation, namely, the sixth and last. Indeed this is the same day when man was to be created. How much of the sixth day (or age) God devoted to the "beasts of the earth" and whether He "made" these in one, two, or ten thousand steps is not told us. He made them "according to their kinds," and this can also allow development within their kind. Thus, for example, there could be the development of the anthropoid ape to higher levels within its "kind," but there is a qualitative gap between the most highly developed ape and the appearance of man in creation. This by no means rules out a close biological relation to what God has just finished making, for man is the climax and fulfillment of God's preceding work. But at a certain moment on the same "sixth day," God reached beyond all that had preceded and created a new being—man. There is continuity with the past but an even greater discontinuity: man is a new creation.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 199-200.)

- **I hear we are made in the image of God. Is God black or white?**

God is a spirit. He is beyond color. To be made in the image of God refers to man's distinctiveness. No animals are said in the Bible to be made in God's image. The human spirit images God in its transcendent character.

- **Would you please explain the difference between soul and spirit? When the Old/or New Testament uses the word "heart" does this refer to our spirit or soul?**

"Spirit" is the deepest dimension of human nature. It is breathed into man by the breath of God (Genesis 2:7) and is immortal. The soul results from the spirit functioning through the body. It is man's conscious life in terms of mind, feeling, and will.

"Heart" is not a separate part but represents the inmost thoughts and feelings of a person. It relates to both soul and spirit.

- **Do we, as Christians, believe in the preexistence of the soul?**

The Bible does not teach the preexistence of the soul or any other aspect of human nature. Once the soul is created, however, it will never die.

- **When the serpent confronted Eve in the garden, why did she say that God said, "You must not touch it, or you will die" (Genesis 3:3) speaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For God only said in Genesis 2:17, "You must not eat of the tree...." Why did Eve tell a lie?**

Eve's words were the result of Satan's deception. The serpent (Satan's disguise) had just said to Eve, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 2:13). These were very crafty words in that Satan was perverting God's earlier word that referred to only *one* tree—"From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." Satan's question, subtly shifting from the one tree that God had forbidden to *any* tree implied that if God were truly good and just He would not have prohibited Adam and Eve from enjoying the good fruit from all the trees in the garden. What a malicious God, Satan is insinuating, that would place you in this beautiful garden but not allow you to enjoy its many fruits!

Eve momentarily resisted the serpent by defending God, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat," but then Eve added, "But the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You must not eat from it or touch it lest you die.'" Although Eve first of all defended God, as deception grew she viewed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as being in the middle of the garden—which it was not. Earlier in Genesis the Scripture speaks of "the tree of life being in the midst of the garden" (2:9). Thus in Eve's mind, as Satan's deception worked its way, what was forbidden became central and more and more alluring. Then she, totally deceived, not only saw the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as being in the midst of the garden but also wrongly said that they were not allowed even "to touch it."

From there on Satan had the upper hand, bluntly contradicting God's words, saying, "You shall not die" (Genesis 3:4) without so much as a counter word from Eve. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 227, for more details.)

- **Why does God give us free will to choose, but then punishes if we choose against His will? How can we love someone who created us against our will, allowed sin to occur, and then threatens us into loving Him or burn in flames?**

Freedom to choose is a special mark of human nature. If it is to be genuine freedom, there must also be the possibility of wrong choice. Punishment inevitably follows from such a choice, not as an arbitrary act of God, but as resulting from the way things are in a moral universe.

On the second question, I do not believe it is correct to say that God created us against our will—our will was involved in His creative act. God allowed sin to occur as a result of the very freedom He gave us. Never does He threaten us into loving Him, but shows His great love for us in sending His only Son. As a result "we love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19 KJV). "Burning in flames" is not a threat to force "us into loving Him"; love cannot stem from a threat or be coerced. It is when we know that Christ suffered the pains of hell ("burning") in God's great love that we freely and gladly love in return. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: "Man Made to be Free," page 215.)

- **From a biblical standpoint is there anything wrong with being cremated versus a plot burial? Thank you for your guidance.**

There is nothing wrong with cremation since the body at death will not be the body of the coming resurrection—"it [the body] is sown a material body, it is raised a spiritual body." (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 402-404.) So whether the burial is cremation (or other disposal) is of no ultimate consequence.

- **What is the difference between your soul and your spirit? And when a Christian or a sinner dies, where exactly is the soul?**

Spirit is the deepest aspect of human nature. The spirit like God is eternal, thus never dies. According to Ecclesiastes 12:5, "At death the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." When Jesus died on the cross He said, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Also Hebrews 12:23 reads: "The spirits of righteous men made perfect" are "enrolled in heaven."

Soul—in its various dimensions of mind, feeling, and will—is very closely related to the spirit of a human being. Thus at death the soul may be said to continue. Accordingly, the soul is not somewhere else than the spirit. There is no "soul sleep" after death, as some have claimed, for either the righteous or unrighteous.

- **Please tell me your view of God's perspective of what women should experience in childbirth. Do you believe that born again Christian women who believe they have a covenant with God will experience pain in childbirth?**

Hear the words of Genesis 3:16a: "To the woman [Eve] He [God] said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children." Listen also to

Eve's words in Genesis 4:1—"Eve gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.'" Her pain in giving birth to Cain is not so much as mentioned in her joyous cry at the privilege of bringing forth a child with the Lord's attending help. Pain could not erase her sense of victory.

Yes, you may experience some pain in childbearing, but you can also rejoice in the Lord's real presence!

6. Sin, Death, Satan

- **What is sin, from a theological prospective, and why is redemption so important?**

Sin is the personal act of turning away from God and His will and the breaking of any of His commandments. This results in bondage to sin—"Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Redemption is so important because all people are sinners in bondage to sin from which they cannot free themselves. Only through Christ is redemption possible and the bondage to sin broken. Thanks be unto Him! (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 10, "Sin")

- **I want to know and understand where sin came from. I know it entered the world through deception by the serpent, but how did it enter into Lucifer? Where did it come from?**

The wording of your question implies that sin was some external force that entered into Lucifer. Rather, Lucifer was the author of sin. Being the highest of angels, he pridefully determined to set himself above God. This he did of his own free will and volition (for more on this, see my [Renewal Theology](#), 1: chapter 10 on "Sin").

- **I was raised Apostolic, and my grandfather is a minister, but there's one thing that my grandfather teaches that I do not understand. He's ALWAYS said that "God does not hear a sinner's prayer." How can that be true? In order for a sinner to be saved, he must first ASK (pray) for God to come into his life. That IS prayer! If God does not hear a sinner's prayer, then wouldn't that mean NO ONE could be saved, or forgiven for that matter? I'm a sinner, and I pray, and I feel that God hears, sees, and knows my every thought and want. Could you please clarify this for me?**

Your position, I believe, is correct. Sin may block a prayer from getting through, but God is always ready to listen.

- **If you are a Christian and commit fornication, can God still forgive you?**

Fornicators have no place in the kingdom of God. Paul writes: "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [by perversion], nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Paul then adds: "Such were some of you" (note the past tense "were"). A basic change has occurred in regard to fornicators, and all the others mentioned: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (verse 11). Fornication, if it happens by a Christian, is all the more heinous since such belongs to the old life of sin and is contrary to the Christian's new nature. Can God forgive? Yes, if one truly repents. Paul writes about being "made sorrowful to the point of repentance" (2 Corinthians 7:9). If a Christian commits an act of fornication but is so deeply sorrowful as to repent and turn from it, God in His mercy will forgive.

- **If Jesus' blood on Calvary can save us from all sin, then how can there be an unpardonable sin? Also, if someone committed it but wanted to be right with God, couldn't he be?**

First, we need to note Jesus Himself spoke of the unpardonable sin: "All sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" (Mark 3:28-29). The unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. In another Gospel, the Scripture reads: "Whoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:32, cf. Luke 12:10). The unpardonable sin is not some extremely vile sin of gross immorality, for all such may be forgiven. Nor is it the terrible sin of denying, even repudiating, Christ. *Even* this may be forgiven. What then is the unpardonable blasphemy or speech against the Holy Spirit? The Scripture clearly states it in the following words: "For they were saying He has an unclean [or 'evil, NIV] spirit." "They" were the scribes and Pharisees who had just been saying about Jesus, "He is possessed by Beelzebub" and "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22). The unpardonable sin was to maliciously attribute to Christ the work of the devil, to declaim as evil what is of the Lord, to viciously label an act or work of the Holy Spirit as a demonic spirit. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shows a conscience so perverse and hardened as never to be able to receive forgiveness.

Those who commit this sin are not the murderers, the thieves, the liars, the worldly corrupt, not even the atheists who deny Christ, but religious leaders (like the scribes and Pharisees) who fight against the Holy Spirit. (For more details see *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 256 and note 54; also *Renewal Theology*, 2: page 66, note 24 and page 132.)

- **Since God created all that is in our temporal universe (including abstract realities such as love and kindness), is it fair to say He also created evil? I realize, theologically, that Satan is the father of evil and that Adam and Eve opened the door with their disobedience. But can evil exist without first being created?**

God did not create evil. According to Genesis 1, everything God created, or made, was declared "good" (verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), indeed altogether "very good" (verse 31). Among the highest good there is the gift of freedom: "Man is that entity made to be free" (see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 215-19). Genuine freedom includes freedom of decision for or against God (man was not made a robot!). It was man's decision against God and His command that brought evil upon the earth. (Satan was also involved but not the cause of this evil; man was fully responsible.) Evil is disharmony that man willfully brought into the world.

- **How is God's permissive will related to the occurrence of sin and the Fall?**

Sin could not have occurred without God's permissive will. It was a matter both of God's permission and of His will. God permitted it to happen, yet also through its occurrence He purposed to make it an instrument to manifest His grace and glory.

There is undoubtedly a strange paradox here. God surely did not will the sin of man, else He would have been the author of evil; yet He did will that through sin and the fall His purpose should be fulfilled. One aspect of this surely will be the demonstration of His grace, for only through sin will the glory of God's grace become utterly manifest. Without the sin of the human race, there would have been no Calvary and no demonstration of the incredible love of God. Thus it is through the very sin and fall of man that the "amazing grace" of God the Father in Jesus Christ will be made known.

The permissive will of God stands ultimately behind the sin and fall of mankind. This by no means mitigates the heinousness of sin and evil nor the ensuing misery of the human condition. But it does say that through it all God is sovereignly working out His purpose to manifest the heights of His grace and glory. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 10, "Sin.")

- **What does the doctrine of "original sin" affirm?**

"Original sin" refers to the fact that *the human race is sinful in nature*. This by no means refers to human nature as God made it—or makes it—but to the fact that before man commits any sin he is already a sinner. This situation may be described in terms both of sin being passed on to all people from the first man and our identification with primal man in his sin. However depicted, the important feature is that man does not come into the world as an innocent or neutral creature but is affected by sin in all aspects of his being (Psalm 58:3; cf. Psalm 51:5). Indeed, by virtue of this fact, man is vitiated in every area of his nature—body, soul, spirit—so that he is utterly incapable himself of restoration and salvation. His only hope is in Jesus Christ. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 11, "The Effects of Sin.")

- **I know that the unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is to call the work of the Holy Spirit demonic. Are Christian pastors and teachers committing the unpardonable sin by stating that speaking in tongues and the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit are all demonic?**

The Apostle Paul declares that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:7). The gifts stand out as exhibitions of the Holy Spirit in word and deed, signifying that He is on the scene in sovereign grace and power. Thus to declare the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be demonic is a terrible offense against Him and His work. Such an attitude is unpardonable whether or not it is labeled as "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit."

- **Are practicing homosexuals accepted by God?**

Yes, surely, if they cease from their practice!

This is akin to asking the question, "Are practicing adulterers accepted by God?"! Paul includes homosexuals and, for that matter, adulterers among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God: so "do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, ...nor homosexuals ["abusers of themselves with mankind," KJV]...shall inherit the kingdom of God." Paul adds, "Such were some of you; but you were washed... sanctified...justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

This is the way out---far beyond the practice!

- **When our body dies, where in Scripture do we find what happens to us, spiritual or otherwise. I'm not asking about the Second Coming, I'm asking about our physical death and what transpires after we take our last breath prior to the return of Jesus. Do we go to heaven, hell, a holding pen, or what?**

Those who believe in Christ go immediately to be with Him. For example, the repentant thief on the cross was told by Jesus, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Paul writes about his desire "to depart and be with Christ" to occur immediately upon his death" (Philippians 1:23). In another place Paul writes about being "absent from the body and at home with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6). There is no "holding pen"!

- **Recently my youth group has been asking questions about infant death. What do you believe happens to babies when they die? Do they go to heaven?**

I suggest you look at Matthew 18:2-4 and 19:13-14. Note especially the words "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Since Jesus graciously received them during His ministry, surely He will do so in heaven. This does not mean that little children, or infants, are innocent, but they have no ability to make a decision for or against Christ, which is the requirement for salvation.

- **I would like to know what happens to Christians who kill themselves? Do they go to hell or are they still considered saved?**

Suicide, though it is a grave sin, does not necessarily mean the forfeiture of one's salvation. It is sometimes said that taking one's own life is "the unpardonable sin," since there is no opportunity for repentance after death (on the unpardonable sin see Mark 3:28-30—definitely not suicide). No Christian believer *in* his right mind will take his own life—a life redeemed by Christ—but there may be cases in which due to a variety of circumstances—such as stress, worry, anxiety, and the like—when even a Christian, *out* of his right mind, might do this extreme thing. Suicide is definitely wrong; however, we may believe that Christ's death can cover such a person's death and allow him to enter heaven.

- **Is it OK to pray for the soul of someone who died several years ago?**

There is no suggestion in Scripture of praying for the souls of those who have died. The decision in this life is determinative of a person's future state of continuing lostness or blessing. Further, the view that there is a purgatory after death, and that prayers may be offered to help in an ongoing purification before entering heaven, is totally foreign to Scripture.

- **Is there such a place as purgatory?**

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, purgatory is a place where the souls of believers go for the further purging away of sins before entering heaven. However, Scripture makes clear that the souls of believers at death are immediately in the presence of God. In the book of Hebrews there is the picture of heaven as a place where "the spirits of righteous men are made perfect" (12:23). No purgatory is needed: upon death believers are made perfect in the presence of God. (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 400.)

The belief in purgatory leads people unfortunately to much anxiety and to prayers for the dead that their loved ones' time of punishment may be shortened. It is a blessing to know that believers at death are "made perfect" and enter into the joy of heaven.

- **What happens to a Christian person when he/she dies?**

The spirit of the Christian believer at death goes directly to be with the Lord in heaven. The body is resurrected on the Last Day when Christ returns.

- **I know that the unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is to call the work of the Holy Spirit demonic. Are Christian pastors and teachers committing the unpardonable sin by stating that speaking in tongues and the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit are all demonic?**

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- **Why do we hear about demons and evil spirits in the New Testament and not so often in the Old Testament?**

Since Christ's coming was in part an attack on the demonic realm, evil was more and more exposed by Him. "The Son of God appeared that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The New Testament records the crisis for which the Old Testament is preparation.

- **Can a Christian believer be demon-possessed?**

A Christian may be demon oppressed but not possessed. A true believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within. Although a Christian may have many struggles against sin and evil, he or she cannot be possessed by that evil reality. "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

(For a discussion of demonic possession see [Renewal Theology](#), 2: 257-263.)

- **Where in the Bible does it talk about Satan and his fall? I have been told that he is the prince of music and that he used to be the head angel, but I can't seem to find this.**

In Isaiah 14:12 are the words: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [literally 'son of the morning']." This passage, while relating to the king of Babylon and his fall (see verse 4), goes far beyond into a fall "from heaven." Also, in Ezekiel 28:12 are words directed specifically to the king of Tyre, but that likewise suggest more, "You were blameless in your ways, you sinned, therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God" (verses 15-16). Jesus speaks of seeing, "Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Luke 10:18), and in the book of Revelation there is the vivid declaration that "the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan" (12:9). These are important references relating to Satan and his fall.

The Bible does not speak of Satan as "prince of music" (however much he does seem to dominate many forms of music today!). That Satan was "head angel" seems to be implied in the words that follow in Revelation 12:9—"Satan and his angels." (For more, see [Renewal Theology](#), 1, page 226 and notes.)

- **Why is it that Satan works so hard to break certain people? I am in such shame, I rebuke him every moment. No matter what I do, he will not leave me. It seems I am losing this battle, or am I?**

Rebuking Satan is important, but such needs to be undergirded by calling on the name of Jesus for deliverance. Satan cannot withstand a living faith in Christ.

- **If God created the devil and the devil is the prince of the world, does that mean that God is the cause of all evil, since the devil is the one who hurts us and he was originally a creation of God?**

God did not create the devil! He *did* create the angels, one of whom—possible the highest—*became* the devil through his own willful action against God. The fact that the devil is instrumental in all evil thereafter does not mean that God is the cause of such since the devil was not originally God's creation. (For more on the devil's role in human evil, see [Renewal Theology](#), 1: pages 224-229.)

- **Why do we hear about demons and evil spirits in the New Testament and not so often in the Old Testament.?**

Since Christ's coming was in part an attack on the demonic realm, evil was more and more exposed by Him. "The Son of God appeared that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). The New Testament records the crisis for which the Old Testament is preparation.

- **Why were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed?**

Read carefully the story of Sodom and Gomorrah as found in Genesis 18 and 19 and as summarized in 2 Peter 2:6-10 and in Jude 7. The climactic picture is that of citywide perversion, the Genesis account reading: "All the men from every part of the city of Sodom---both young and old---surrounded the house. They called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them'" (Genesis 19:4 NIV). This situation of citywide corruption brought complete destruction upon them after Lot and his company escaped: "Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah---from the Lord out of the heavens" (verses 24-25).

For more on this, see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 250-253.

- **Please help me find passages in the New Testament concerning homosexuality showing that it is a sin. A person I am counseling does not believe it is such.**

Two main passages in the New Testament declaring homosexuality to be a sin are Romans 1:24-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In the former, Paul speaks of the world as given over to "degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another, men with men committing indecent acts." In the Corinthian passage, Paul includes homosexuals among those who will not inherit the kingdom of God. "Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers... nor homosexuals... shall inherit the kingdom of God." Paul adds, "Such were some of you; but you were washed... sanctified... justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Thank God, there is a way out!

On homosexuality as a sin in the New Testament also see 1 Timothy 1:10 and Jude 7. The former links together "immoral men and homosexuals," and the latter speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah as those who indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh." They are "exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire."

- **i am an artist and i know i have knowledge and the power to reach others and point them in a good direction but what is the point life is meaningless because everything u do goes away, anything u do is just momentary with no real long lasting effects and all things end so what is the point of doing anything at all. u can't get into heaven with good deeds and most good deeds will be forgotten in a few years to come so what's life all about. why are we here death is better maybe because we all go there why not get there faster and save this meaningless trip called life. need help with an answer.**

I suggest you read and meditate on the Book of Ecclesiastes all twelve chapters. Especially note the climax in chapter 12 verses 13-14.

7. Christ – Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection

- **I've been reading the four gospels, and I want to ask why Jesus is called the Son of man. What is its relationship with Him being the Son of God?**

Jesus was one person with two natures. He called Himself the Son of man in that He identified Himself with all humanity. He was a human being in the fullest sense but also the Son of God. As the Son of God, He was likewise through and through divine. As such a dual person, He was the Redeemer of the world.

- **Speaking of the pre-incarnate Christ, Philippians 2:7 says that He "emptied Himself." What exactly did He empty Himself of?**

Paul's words in Philippians 2:7 are to be understood as Christ's surrender of His glory and riches in the taking on the form of a servant or slave. The self-emptying was a profound expression of the love and compassion that is the central reality of God's nature. (For more on Christ's self-emptying (or kenosis), see my [Renewal Theology](#), 1: pages 323 and 342 with footnotes).

- **Is Jesus God?**

Yes. As God, He shares the Godhead with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Thus He is not a separate deity. He is also totally man. Except for sin, He fully shares our humanity. This is the great mystery of the Incarnation.

- **John wrote in Revelation 1:17 that when he first saw Jesus he fell at his feet as dead. If this was the Jesus that John knew and loved why was he so afraid?**

John fell at the feet of Jesus not out of fear but due to the vision of Jesus in His majestic glory. John had known Jesus in the flesh but this was a revelation of His divine being.

- **Are we to believe that Judas Iscariot was predestined to betray Jesus or could he have refused to do so? Was this individual a part of God's ultimate plan for the death and resurrection of Jesus?**

The following words of Jesus are particularly relevant: "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that man through whom He is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). This verse contains both the fact of predestination as well as Judas's personal responsibility. In that sense, he was a part of God's ultimate plan but at the same time freely active in the betrayal of Jesus. Thus Judas was fully guilty.

- **Who is Jesus and who is the Christ?**

Jesus is both God and man. As God, He came to earth and took upon Himself human flesh. He was truly God and truly man in the same person. This is the mystery of the Incarnation.

The word "Christ" literally means "anointed." Jesus was the Anointed One to fulfill God's mission to save mankind. To believe in Jesus Christ is the way of salvation.

- **Is there such a thing as the "Immaculate Conception"? What does it mean, to whom does it apply, and are there biblical references to support or disprove the "Immaculate Conception"?**

The "Immaculate Conception" is a dogma of the Roman Catholic Church that claims that Mary herself was conceived without sin (hence, immaculately) and so was sinless when she bore Jesus. This dogma has no basis in Scripture and must not be confused with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth which is solidly taught in Scripture.

- **My sister recently converted to Islam due to her son's influence. She claims Islam is the only religion. What information can I give her or tell her about this decision she has made?**

If Christ's claim is valid, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), Christianity is the only true religion. Islam is a religion, but by not focusing on Christ misses the truth.

- **What is your opinion of the visions of Mary (mother of Jesus) that so many people are having? Do you think it is Mary, or, as I believe, a familiar spirit to deceive and take the prayer emphasis off Christ?**

Visions of Mary are delusive, yes, because they do take the focus off Christ. For example, in Medjugorje (Yugoslavia), where for a number of years presumed appearances by the Virgin Mary have occurred, such words as these have been spoken: "Dear children, abandon yourself to me that I may lead you totally," "I will be forever close to you," "I want to bring you to heaven to God." These, and many others, are words that only Christ has the right to speak. Christ, to be sure, is also recognized. For example, "Without love, you cannot accept me or my son." The Mary of the New Testament would never speak such words as these. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1, pages 346-349, with the notes, for more on the Virgin Mary.)

- **In the third chapter of Luke, verse 23, it speaks of Jesus as the (supposed) son of Joseph. I don't understand this verse because Jesus was not the son of Joseph. So my question is, how do you explain this verse and the genealogy that follows to verse 38?**

You are correct in saying that Jesus was not the actual son of Joseph. However, people at large supposed he was since they had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth. Joseph nonetheless was Jesus' legal father, and Mary was betrothed to him (see Matthew 1:18—"Mary was betrothed to Joseph...before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit"). Betrothal at that time constituted a legitimate marriage even though the sexual union had not been consummated. Hence although Jesus was not, as people supposed, the physical or natural son of Joseph, he was the legal son. Thus the

genealogy that follows to verse 38 legitimately traces Joseph's line all the way back to Adam. (For further information see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 345-46, and especially see footnote 194.)

- **What is the mystery of the Incarnation?**

"The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). This is the mystery of the Incarnation, namely, that the Word who was "with God and...was God" (1:1), took upon Himself flesh: He became man. Without ceasing to be God through whom all things were made, He concurrently became man by assuming our flesh. Thus is He Emmanuel--"God with us" (Matthew 1:23)--in the person of Jesus Christ.

Let us pause a moment to reflect on the wonder, the awesomeness, the utterly amazing character of the Incarnation. This event is a fact of such proportions as to transcend human imagination: the God of the universe, the Creator of all things invisible and visible--angelic hosts as well as countless galaxies and stars--has in Jesus Christ come to this minute planet called Earth and taken upon Himself our human existence. If the original creation of the universe out of nothing is an immeasurable vast and incomprehensible act of Almighty God, the Incarnation is surely no less stupendous. Superlatives will not suffice. Perhaps best are the words of Paul: "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). Great indeed!

And the purpose of the Incarnation (again one is carried beyond adequate words to declare it) is the redemption of the human race. Jesus was born to die and in dying to bear the awful weight and punishment of sins of all mankind. He came as a Mediator of the covenant of grace, the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5). In the words of the Fourth Gospel, the Word who became flesh was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14) and "from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace" (1:16). Verily, it is the unfathomable grace of God bringing eternal salvation.

- **What does the "Son of man" mean?**

The phrase "the Son of man" means basically "the man" or "man." All men are sons of men, that is, mankind. Even so Jesus "the Son of man" is a man, a human, a member of the human race. "Son of man" and "man" basically are equivalent terms.

The expression "the Son of man" occurs frequently in the four Gospels as a reference of Jesus to Himself. Eighty-two times the phrase occurs and on more than forty occasions. It is used invariably as Jesus' own self-designation. No one else ever addresses Him by that title. It is as open a statement about Jesus' identity as "the Son of God" is a hidden one made known supernaturally by revelation.

By Jesus' use of the title "the Son of man," He identified Himself with our humanity. Also, as "*the* Son of man," He was man in perfection and could be a substitute for sinful man on the cross. Further, by calling Himself "the Son of man," Jesus demonstrated His deep

humility (see for example, Matthew 20:21—"The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve"). Jesus did also on a few occasions call Himself "the Son of God" (John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4).

(On Jesus calling Himself the "Son of man," see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 328-331).

- **I get puzzled when I hear that Jesus Christ had brothers. My understanding is that the Virgin Mary had no other children after Jesus' birth. Were Jesus' cousins referred to as His brothers? This is confusing for a lot of people. Please explain.**

Listen to the following verses of Scripture: "While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and His brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him" (Matthew 12:46); ""Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew 13:55-56); "After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers..." (John 2:12).

The most natural interpretation of these passages---and other similar ones ---is that those referred to were half brothers and half sisters of Jesus, born of Mary and Joseph subsequent to the birth of Christ. There is no suggestion of their being cousins of Jesus.

- **What powers did Jesus have?**

Jesus being both God and man had the power of God Almighty and of man at his peak. He functioned, therefore, with multiple powers belonging to both deity and humanity.

- **Why did Jesus pray to God? If Jesus is God, wouldn't that be just like praying to yourself? Wouldn't praying to yourself be a futile exercise?**

Jesus was also a man. As such, He offered prayers to God. In the mystery of the Incarnation, He was both one with God the Father as well as a distinct person. So Jesus' praying was not a futile exercise. (For a further discussion of this matter, see my book *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 13, "The Incarnation.")

- **Do you believe that Jesus was holy at His birth? I do, and some say no.**

I agree with you that Jesus was holy at His birth. He was God in human flesh and as such holy as God is holy. Jesus also showed forth perfect holiness at every stage of His life's journey.

- **Our minister said you can be a Christian without believing in the Virgin Birth. That's a new one on me. He thinks you only have to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ.**

It is true that you only have to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation. There is no reference in the New Testament to anyone proclaiming the Virgin Birth or belief in it as a requirement for being a Christian. However, this is not to deny the importance of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth which is well attested in the Bible and set forth as background for the Incarnation--Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

- **If Christ is fully God as most evangelical theologians hold, then what was the need or purpose for the Holy Spirit to come upon Him and work miracles through Him as the Scriptures plainly state?**

In the mystery of the Incarnation, Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man so that the miracles that He performed stemmed from His twofold nature. He was both the Son of God and a Spirit-filled man. One Person with two natures is more than we can rationally comprehend.

- **I used to believe that Jesus gave up His humanity after His ascension. Now I believe He is God-man forever. This makes His Incarnation more profound than ever---to think He would take on humanness forever in order to win those He loved. Do you believe this is correct?**

One aspect of the marvel of the Incarnation is that the Word became flesh *forever*. For example, in all the biblical pictures of the return of Christ He definitely will come again in the body. Yes, this makes His Incarnation more profound. Praise His holy Name!

- **Why is there no reference to Christ's early childhood/developmental years after His birth? He re-emerges as a young adult, but I am curious if He is a regular child during those developmental years and treated any differently from His siblings?**

Note Luke 2:51-52: "He went down with them (His parents, Joseph and Mary) and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them....And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men." Thus from the aspect of His humanness, Jesus was a regular child and not treated any differently by His parents than were His brothers and sisters. So did Jesus continue in subjection to His parents and grew steadily in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.

- **How did Jesus become God?**

Jesus did *not* become God. He was God in human flesh. Read John 1:1-14 carefully, noting especially the opening statement that "the Word was God." The "Word" clearly refers to Christ. This same Word became flesh (verse 14) without ceasing to be the eternal Word. In the mystery of the Incarnation, Christ was both the eternal God and a human being.

- **I hear many people say that in the Bible there is no Scripture where Jesus claims to be God. Is this true?**

The most direct statement by Jesus Himself of His own deity is found in John 10:30 where He declared, "I and the Father are one." His opponents called His statement "blasphemy because you being a man, make yourself God" (verse 33).

There was no doubting that Jesus claimed to be God---even by His detractors.

- **In John 11:35, "Jesus wept." Why did Jesus weep? I've heard some conflicting answers, and I can't quite figure it out.**

"Jesus wept" (as in John 11:35) is a vivid picture of Jesus' tenderness at the graveside of Lazarus. Many who were also there said about Jesus, "Behold how He loved him!" Another occasion of Jesus recorded weeping was in relation to Jerusalem, "He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). In both cases there was judgment mixed with pain (see context) due to people's unbelief, but through it all a deep sense of tenderness on Jesus' part.

- **In John it says that Jesus is God, but when Jesus was on earth He talked to God and He called Him Father. So is He His own Father and was He talking to Himself? I am really wrestling with this question in my heart.**

In the mystery of the Holy Trinity there is only one God whose essential being is that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So while Jesus is verily God, He is also the Son of God and as such offers prayer not to Himself but to God as His Father.

- **Why didn't God make another way to redeem man instead of requiring the death of His Son?**

To answer your question, I recommend that instead of questioning God's way of redemption that you first of all rejoice in it. Now to move on: the way God chose was the way of vast love in which Christ, the Son of God and the Son of man, died for all people. The sin of man was so grave that only God Himself could redeem man from it, and only one who was also man could suffer and die in our place. On the matter of requiring the death of His son, God's great love and Christ's willing consent made it all possible. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...."

- **We know Jesus died and rose; what is the theological impact of these events on the Christian life?**

In Jesus' death He bore all the punishment due us for our sins and in His resurrection made immortality possible—"He abolished death and brought life and immortality to light" (2 Tim. 1:10). Jesus is Victor over all! (See *Renewal Theology*, 1, pp. 389-90.)

- **Can you tell me what happened to Jesus during those three days He was dead before He rose to heaven? Where was He? Did He go to hell before going to heaven?**

During those three days Jesus was alive in the spirit and dead in the body. In regard to the spirit, immediately following His cry from the cross, "It is finished," the Scripture adds, "He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (John 19:30). In another gospel, the wording is, "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46). After this, His dead body was put in the grave but did not decay—"He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay" (Acts 2:31). Thus Christ did not go to hell before going to heaven: His spirit went into heaven, the Father's presence ("it was not abandoned to Hades") and His body placed in the grave. It is a mistake to assume (as some do) that Christ went to hell where, after three days of struggle with Satan, Christ finally defeated him. No, when Christ said, "It is finished," victory was already won! Our redemption was accomplished by His death on the cross.

There is one passage that speaks of an activity of Christ in the spirit: "He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:18-20). It is apparent—whatever the meaning of this passage—that Christ Himself was not in hell but made proclamation to those who themselves were locked up in prison there. Christ's work of redemption had already been accomplished! (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 363-368, for further details.)

- **When Jesus died on the cross, did He die for all possible wrongdoings committed by humans at present and in the future? Could He anticipate my sins and others 2000 years ahead?**

Christ in His divinity could surely anticipate all sins and so in dying on the cross bear the full weight of every possible wrongdoing. Paul's declaration that Christ was made "sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21) refers to the totality of sins of all times and places. How vast is the love of God!

- **Why was Jesus tortured? I just saw the Passion of Christ movie...and am confused as to why God allowed Jesus to be tortured. Was His death not enough?**

When one ponders the fact that Jesus on the cross was bearing the full weight of mankind's sin, *death without torture* would not begin to convey His identification with all humanity in pain as well as death.

Further, God the Father alone did not simply allow this torture to happen to Jesus; rather it was through the willingness of Jesus that it occurred.

Blessed be His name!

- **In a Q & A related to the Apostles Creed, you wrote that the statement "He descended into hell" "vividly expresses the full extent of Christ's vicarious sacrifice, even suffering the torment of hell for all people." At what point did Christ suffer the torment?**

Christ endured the torment of hell in His suffering and death on the cross. The agonizing cry of "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) bespeaks Christ's undergoing the torment of hell itself and, "It is finished!" (John 19:30) marks the end of His redemptive suffering. The veil of the temple "torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:35) immediately after His "yielding up His spirit" was God's sign that entrance into the Holy Place had been secured for all. The victory was complete! (Also see *Renewal Theology*, 1: page 363, footnote 30.)

- **I know that Jesus is God's Son, and that He was sent to the earth to die on the cross for our sins. I just don't understand why He had to die for us? Was it to satisfy God's anger against man? Why His Son, though?**

Christ did not have to die for us, but He did so willingly for our salvation. As the Son of man, Christ took upon Himself our flesh and bore the full weight of God's wrath against sin and evil. Thereby He was our substitute, dying in our place. As the Son of God, hence fully divine, He was able to reach out and accomplish the mighty work of redemption. Why His Son? The answer is that only God could have paid the full price, the Father in heaven through His Son on earth. This is the marvel and mystery of the Incarnation.

- **Could you speak about the Atonement and God's forgiveness?**

One way of summarizing the whole matter of the Atonement is to view it in terms of divine forgiveness. Here we begin by recalling the words of Jesus: "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). The pouring out, or shedding, of Jesus' blood was for forgiveness of sins. We may, accordingly, speak of the death of Jesus--the shedding of His blood--as the cost of God's forgiveness. Let us observe several things.

First, it is important to recognize that only the one sinned against is in a position to forgive. Christ was supremely sinned against because in His suffering and dying on the cross He endured the attack of evil, not only of those who directly put Him to death but of sinful man of every race and age. As God in human flesh He could and did receive this total attack. If there was to be forgiveness, it could come only from Him. But it would be at a terrifying cost.

Second, Christ in His great love received the assault of mankind's sin and evil without fighting back. In the fulfilled words of Isaiah 53: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth" (verse 7). He accepted the gibes and mockery of those around the cross, He suffered the pain and anguish of the crown of thorns and the spikes of nails, He did not call down legions of angels from heaven to scatter and destroy the vicious foe. He simply took it all--all the evil of mankind reinforced by the powers of darkness. The agony of Christ dying on the cross therefore is beyond all comprehension; His affliction without retaliation transcends all that mankind has ever known.

Third, not only did Christ receive all of evil's bitter onslaught, but He also reached out in compassion to bear evil's shame, guilt and condemnation. Although He was wounded by the transgressions of the world, His even greater anguish was that of sensing the utter loss, misery, even damnation of those attacking Him, and (marvel beyond marvels) in infinite compassion receiving that misery and condemnation as if it were His own. "He was pierced for *our* transgressions; he was crushed for *our* iniquities; the punishment that brought *us* peace was upon him..." (Isaiah 53:5 NIV). As a result, in His great love and mercy He took away the sin, the guilt, the punishment of the world and gave us His peace and salvation.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 9, "The Atonement" for further discussion.)

- **Which is the most important: The death of God's Son for our Redemption, or the proclamation of the death of God's Son for our Redemption?**

In order of priority, the death of God's Son for our Redemption is primary. Otherwise, there is nothing to proclaim. The gospel proclamation is based on fact not myth.

- **Since angels are created beings, as we are, and also have free will, and the capacity to fall, is there any indication that Christ's atonement for sin also covers them?**

There is no indication in Scripture that Christ's atonement also covers the sins of angels. Christ took on Himself human nature not angelic nature. There may be some other plan for angels, but the Bible does not reveal it.

- **In Mathew 27:46 why did Jesus say "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And what exactly did He mean?**

Jesus cried out these words because at that moment He was making atonement for the sins of all mankind. He was experiencing terrible God-forsakenness as He endured our agony and punishment.

- **In light of the recent Passion of Christ movie and its graphic nature, I am once again wondering about the physical pain and torture Christ suffered. As mankind we have all endured physical pain and many have suffered tremendously, and we daily survive and overcome obstacles of a physical nature. I am wondering if Christ's biggest suffering and pain was His separation from God while atoning for our sins. We seem to only be able to imagine our worst physical limits and are applying them to Jesus. My only fear is separation from God.**

Very well said. In line with this are the words of Jesus from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34).

- **What is the significance of Christ's resurrection for us?**

First, His resurrection brought the climax of our salvation. If Christ had not been raised from the dead, our salvation would not have been consummated. As Paul says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). For despite God's act of reconciliation in Christ, if Christ had remained locked in the grave, there would have been no life and no salvation. John Calvin writes, "How could He have obtained the victory for us, if He had fallen in the contest?" Paul says elsewhere that Christ was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Justification, the free gift of righteousness, is the very heart of salvation and is made possible through the death of Christ. But unless Christ had been raised, justification would literally have been a dead matter. Hence through the resurrection of Christ our salvation has been completed.

Second, let us observe more closely that the problem of mankind is not only *sin* but also *death*. So salvation means victory over both sin and death.

Thus did Christ in His great saving act deal decisively not only with sin at the cross but also with death through His resurrection. For truly He has also broken the power of death. In the words of Paul, our "Savior Jesus Christ...has broken the power of death and brought life and immortality to light" (2 Timothy 1:10). However, we need to add immediately, death does not inherently have power but derives its power from Satan who brought it into human existence. And the marvel of what Christ has done is that He partook of our nature that "through death He might break the power of him who has death at his command, that is, the devil; and might liberate those who, through fear of death, had all their lifetime been in servitude" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Thus Satan's power over death has been broken. Not only did Christ rise victorious over Satan and death, but He also has wrought this victory *for all who belong to Him*.

We may now state it more specifically: By rising from the dead, Christ has won the victory over both sin and death. Thereby our justification is complete, and life has been raised up.

Beyond forgiveness and reconciliation is a new life in Jesus Christ *to be with Him alive for evermore!* For in Christ's resurrection we are raised to eternal life with Him.

- **How can we be sure of our future resurrection?**

Christ's resurrection from the dead assures our resurrection in the age to come. For not only are we raised from the dead spiritually now through faith in Christ, but we will also be raised bodily in the coming age. Paul writes that "if for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied." Then he adds, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:19-21). Since the raising of Christ is the "first fruits," other fruit is sure to follow, namely, our resurrection from the dead. Thus Christ has brought *life and immortality to light*.

This means that some day--"at the last trumpet"--"the dead will be raised imperishable...For this perishable must put on the imperishable and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:52-53). This is not some natural immortality but an immortality to be "put on"--and it all comes through Jesus Christ. Paul climactically cries forth, "Death is swallowed up in victory'...thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54, 56).

Because of Christ's resurrection from the dead we thus have assurance of our resurrection to come. With Paul and the saints of all ages, we may rejoice in what God has done through Jesus Christ. Another declaration of Paul provides a fitting summary word of the Christian testimony:

"If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Romans 14:8-9).

- **Why is the resurrection an essential part of the gospel message?**

If Christ is not risen, our faith would be literally a dead faith. By Christ's death, He conquered sin. By His resurrection, He conquered death. Thus we can say with Paul about the resurrection, "O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?....But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15: 55, 57).

8. Salvation – Calling, Regeneration, Justification

- **As we've all heard the old saying, "A leopard can't change his spots." Is this true with man? I want so badly to change the person that I am, I want to be a better spouse, a better parent. I have sinned in all aspects of my life. All I want to do is become a different person, and stop doing the same things that I struggle with daily. Is this possible? Can God literally change a person? Is there really such a thing as "a new lease on life?"**

Hear the New Testament: "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The leopard may not be able to change his spots, but Christ in you can change your whole life into a new one. It is not so much that you should want to be a better person as rather to become a new person wherein all aspects of your life can be changed. Not better but new!

- **I myself am a Christian, but I have an interesting question. The Bible says all who know Jesus Christ as their Savior will go to heaven. But what about Jews?**

Paul writes about the status of the Jews in Romans 9 through 11. He says at one point, "My heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation" (10:1). Jews have a special place in God's plan. This does not mean they are automatically saved. Jew and Gentile alike need faith in Christ for salvation to occur.

- **My friends, who call themselves Christians, believe that certain Muslims, Mormons, Jews, etc. will go to heaven. Their reasoning, if you can call it that, is God is so infinite how do we know He doesn't reach other people through these religions...sort of a many roads to salvation theory. What scripturally can I tell them to refute this theory?**

By way of refutation, see, for example, the following Scriptures: John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (note, the way not one of several ways); Acts 4:12, Simon Peter declared about Jesus, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved"; Romans 10:9, Paul writes, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." Such verses as these, and many more could be cited, contradict the "many roads to salvation" theory.

- **Do you believe that Christians from different churches...like Seventh-Day, Baptist, Pentecostal...will all be saved?**

Surely, Christians from many different churches will be saved. It is a personal matter. Romans 10:9 declares: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved." It is not a question of which church you belong to but whether you have genuinely made a personal statement of faith in

Christ. It is important that the church you attend be a believers' church, one that steadfastly proclaims the way of salvation.

- **What is the difference between Regeneration, Justification, and Sanctification?**

All three are ways of talking about salvation. Regeneration means to be born again. Justification means to be declared righteous by what Christ has done by His death on the cross. Sanctification refers to the new life of holiness that has begun. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2, chapters 2-4.)

- **I believe in Jesus and want to "share" the good news with others but the question that others keep asking me is why do I say that Jesus is the only way to the Father and what gives me the right to impose my beliefs on others? I can show scripture references to why Jesus is the only way to the Father with no success but my main question is what gives me the right to as they say "impose" my belief on them? Not wanting to impose anything but to share.**

A proper presentation of the gospel must be done without imposition. We truly have good news to share. The joy of your faith should be so present as to be almost contagious. After all, there is nothing else that comes close to the blessing of salvation that you have received. So let the non-coercive joy of the good news be present in all your witness.

- **How can I have eternal life?**

The answer to your question may be found in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Believing in Christ is the key: accepting Him, trusting Him, committing yourself totally to Him. This includes also repentance for past sins in the strength that Christ provides. I suggest that you talk about all this with some pastor or spiritual leader and, in that person's presence, you declare your faith in Christ as your Savior and Lord.

- **Is sanctification of yourself through your own efforts with support from Jesus essential for salvation?**

By your question, I am afraid that you have made salvation basically a matter of your own achievement. However, salvation is more than support from Jesus, thankfully. Salvation is a matter of grace not works, relying totally on Jesus as Savior and Lord. Sanctification also is more than your own efforts with support from Jesus. It is likewise not a matter of your own achievement but of Christ working in you.

- **Are people baptized by the blood of Christ at conversion or is it a separate experience? If the Trinity is in Christ, should I pray for Holy Spirit baptism? Should I try to divide the Godhead by exalting the Comforter?**

People are saved by the blood of Christ at conversion. The Trinity is not in Christ, but Christ is in the Trinity. So is the Holy Spirit. Yes, you may surely pray for Holy Spirit baptism without dividing the Godhead or exalting the Comforter.

- **As Christians we are saved through Christ. What about the Jews? Will they be judged differently from others?**

Jews and Gentiles alike are saved through Christ. There is no difference for, in Paul's words, "Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin" (Romans 3:9) and "God will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith" (verse 30). The same faith in Christ is necessary for both Gentiles and Jews to be saved.

- **In the Bible, the risen Jesus said to His disciples, "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven" (John 20:23). Catholics believe that this means you must go to the priest to get forgiveness for your sins, (as well as asking Jesus yourself). Does this mean that we need to go to a priest to really be forgiven and saved? I know that I'm saved, but this still bothers me.**

John 20:23 does not mean that we must go to a priest to get forgiveness for sins. Jesus is speaking to His disciples in general (see verses 19 and 20—"disciples" twice used). As Christians, we may pray for others, forgive and receive forgiveness, and also individually pray directly to the Lord for our own forgiveness. According to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Christ is "the high priest of our confession" (Hebrews 3:1). We need not go to any other!

- **What about the God-fearers who lived before the time of Jesus? If Jesus is truly the ONLY way and we need His sacrifice in order to be saved, what about those who lived before the crucifixion? Are we to assume that none of them were saved or made it to heaven? Or, are we to infer that it was possible to make it to heaven without the work of Christ?**

We must always bear in mind that Christ's sacrifice was sufficient to cover the entire human race past, present, and future. What happened at Calvary was, of course, the objective event that makes salvation possible for all people. We do need His sacrifice in order to be saved. Verses like Genesis 3:15 point from the beginning to the future hope and promise of One who would someday "crush the serpent's head" (NIV). Believing in God's promise was basically the way of salvation in the Old Testament. The Old Testament worthies did not make it to heaven without the work of Christ in redemption.

- **I'm writing to further your discussion of a question on CBN.com about infant baptism and salvation. I agree with your perspective that baptism alone does not save. However, I would like to get your thoughts on this follow-up question: Do children who die before the age of accountability go to heaven or not?**

On the matter of children that die before the age of accountability, there is little Scripture to go on. The closest approximation would be the words of Jesus in Luke 18:16, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (NIV), and Christ embraced them all. This does not mean that little children are innocent, but by a special act of God's grace they are taken into His presence.

- **Can one who has committed adultery still be saved? I have prayed for forgiveness but still feel lost. Can I be helped?**

We read in the Bible: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4). Thus your situation of adultery is a very serious matter. However, God delights to forgive the truly penitent soul: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

- **In John 3:16, Jesus says that "He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life," yet in Matthew 7:21 He says that "not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." Could you please help me see how this is not contradictory?**

There is no contradiction here. Believing in Christ is the way of salvation. Calling on His name, even to saying "Lord, Lord," is not enough. Rather, in this latter case, the person who does the will of the Father shall enter the kingdom of heaven. Believing in Christ includes commitment to the Father's will, a saying of 'Lord, Lord' from the heart.

- **The Bible refers to the Jews as the "chosen people." Does that necessarily mean that they will enter the kingdom of God, even if they reject Christ?**

It was to the Jews that the Gospel was first proclaimed and all the first Christians were Jews (see the Book of Acts). Their standing as in some sense God's "chosen people" did not suffice. They needed, along with Gentiles, salvation to enter the kingdom of God. Rejection of Christ would surely prevent this from happening.

- **Please explain the doctrine of unconditional election. Can the unelected still be saved?**

The doctrine of unconditional election as affirmed particularly by Calvinistic churches declares that salvation is wholly God's doing. He elects those whom He wills unconditionally, and man has nothing to contribute to it. This, I believe, is an extreme view of the sovereignty of God that leaves nothing to the human decision.

On the contrary, God's election stands in close correlation with faith. The elect are those who believe. God surely has the priority, but there must be the response of faith. We are elected by God as believers. Without faith there is no election. Unconditional election too much omits the human side. (For more on Election see *Renewal Theology*, 1: pages 18-21.)

- **If the Bible states that we can only come to Jesus if we are drawn by the Spirit, then do we actually have free will? In other words, the Bible states that He chooses us. Did we not choose Him? So where is the free will?**

According to Matthew 22:14, Jesus says, "Many are called but few are chosen." Hence, though His calling is primary, not all are chosen. In Jesus' own ministry He called many to follow Him but not all did. See for example Luke 9:59 where Jesus says to a man, "Follow Me," but the response was negative with the excuse, "Permit me first to go and bury my father." The man was called but not chosen by virtue of his own free decision. Hence the choosing by God always includes the willing response of faith.

- **If we are chosen to be saved or not, then does prayer help for a non-Christian's salvation? I was told that if I pray for my daughter's salvation but the Lord has not chosen her, it would do no good. Please advise.**

It is a serious error to say that "we are chosen to be saved or not" as if God arbitrarily excludes a person from coming to Christ. In one of His parables Jesus declared, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14). "Many" refers to all to whom the gospel is preached—it is the universal call for salvation. The chosen ones are those who respond affirmatively to the call and thus are saved. God chooses those who respond in faith; if anyone is bypassed, it is not God's doing, but is due to the negative response to His call. Praying for your daughter's salvation is much in order! Such may help her come to a living faith and be among God's chosen ones. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 15-17.)

- **In the chapter on Calling in volume two of your Renewal Theology book under the Excursus I, you described Calvinism and Arminianism, and then in section 3 you use the phrase "elected to believe." Could you expand on this? I am not sure how this is different from Calvin if some are elected to believe and others are not.**

I did not say "elected *to believe*," which I agree with you would be a thoroughly Calvinistic statement, but "elected *as believers*." See my italicized words on page 19. Thus a close correlation is maintained between election and faith. Else one tends to slip off into extreme Calvinism on the one hand or Arminianism on the other.

- **Can a person who is born again but has unforgiveness in his or her heart towards another believer still go to heaven?**

Jesus Himself placed a very high premium on forgiving sins in the Lord's Prayer. He taught His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we also forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12). Note the word "as." "As" signifies "in proportion to." At the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus stressed again the need to practice forgiveness: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15).

Also, in Jesus' ministry He emphasized that there is no limit to the number of times one should forgive, "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22). Finally, Jesus demonstrated the ultimate forgiveness from the cross when He cried out, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

So unforgiveness is a very serious matter and should be dealt with by every sincere believer.

- **What is "Regeneration"?**

Regeneration means essentially rebirth: it is *re*-generation. Hence regeneration is a being born again or anew. The classic New Testament passage is these words of Jesus: "You must be born again" (John 3:7). We may also note Peter's words to Christians: "you have been born again" (1 Peter 1:23). Paul declares to Titus that God "saved us...by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). These three passages stand out in their testimony to regeneration; and the last (in Titus) specifically relates this to salvation.

It is apparent that this is a *spiritual* rebirth. It is not a second physical birth, but a rebirth that is spiritual. Jesus emphasized this in His words just prior to those about rebirth: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Thus, through the Holy Spirit there is spiritual rebirth. The Old Testament looked forward to this. God spoke through Ezekiel concerning Israel: "I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them" (Ezekiel 11:19; see also 36:26). Jeremiah says: "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord" (Jeremiah 24:7). And the psalmist prays, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). Although the language of the Old Testament is not precisely that of rebirth, it points in the direction of a spiritual renovation for which the word "regeneration" is the fulfillment.

Regeneration, however, cannot be limited to one area of human nature. It is not only that the spirit, or heart, is made new, but the person himself is thereby *a new being*. As noted, Paul writes that God "saved *us*"--not just our spirits--as persons: *we* have been born again. Paul writes similarly elsewhere, "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The person is a new creature. This is the wonder of regeneration.

(For more on Regeneration, see *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 2.)

9. Sanctification, Perseverance

- **Is sanctification an immediate experience when somebody becomes a Christian? Can a born again Christian live a sanctified life here on earth?**

First of all, sanctification is experienced in the new birth. Paul writes about the born again experience, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Thus immediate sanctification is part of the experience. We are holy, therefore, by virtue of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us and dwells within.

Still there remains sin in every life which calls for further sanctification. Thus sanctification is also a process day by day. Concerning this matter, Paul writes, "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God" (1 Corinthians 7:1).

(For further information, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 4, "Sanctification.")

- **For the last two years, I have had nothing but heartache and trial and God placing me in the impossible and carrying me through. At times, I feel I have reached the end of the lesson and now I can do anything, but then I slide here and there back into temptation and my wants. After sanctification do we still struggle to behave as God wants...or is it foreign for us to sin?**

Sin is basically foreign to the believer since the Holy Spirit dwells within. However, the flesh is still there often warring to a high degree against the Spirit. This should make us rely more on God to give us the victory.

- **The Wesleyan persuasion has a doctrine of "entire sanctification." They separate this from salvation as a second work of grace. Can you explain your viewpoint on this?**

I have difficulty with this Wesleyan doctrine. While it affirms rightly the goal of "entire" or total sanctification in the whole person---body, soul, and spirit---it is too much to say that by a second work of grace "sin ceases to be" (Wesley's words). The Scriptures remind us that "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us," but "If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

- **What is the meaning of "progressive sanctification"?**

Paul writes: "Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). In one sense every born-again believer has already been sanctified, "You were washed...sanctified...justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). It is against

the background of this initial sanctification in salvation that we are called upon to devote ourselves to ongoing sanctification. Whatever remains in the carnal self we should find intolerable and seek both cleansing and removal. Paul again speaks elsewhere "by the [indwelling] Spirit put to death the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13). We cannot put to death the flesh in our own strength, but by the power of the Holy Spirit we can—if we are really serious about it. Day by day there can be progress in sanctification, and living a life more pleasing to our Lord. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 4, "Sanctification," for further help.)

- **Can you ever lose your salvation? Because I have done so much bad after I became a Christian that I think I have lost my salvation. I'm really scared. I don't want to go to hell but I fear that is my fate. Please help me.**

Yes, it is possible to lose your salvation. There are many places in the Bible that warn of this happening. However, if you truly repent all is not lost. The fact that you are deeply concerned is a positive sign. I suggest that you make earnest confession to the Lord of your sins and believe that He will forgive them and reestablish you.

For further help, see [Renewal Theology](#), 2: chapter 5, "Perseverance."

- **Can a Christian lose his/her salvation?**

The security of our salvation rests not in ourselves but in God. He has given us a new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit dwells in us. Thus there is strong security from God's side; the undergirding of salvation is His doing not ours. We should not therefore be anxious as if some slip on our part will quickly cost us our salvation. No, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). However, salvation may be lost. There are grave warnings in Scripture, for example, Jesus' own words: "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). Again, "If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume..." (Hebrews 10:26). Our security is truly in God; however, all may be lost if we fail to abide in Christ and go on willfully sinning. (For other warnings in Scripture relating to believers, read 1 Corinthians 10:12; Colossians 1:21-23; Hebrews 2:1-3, 3:12-14, 6:4-8; 2 Peter 2:20-22—also see *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 5, entitled "Perseverance.")

- **If you have been saved, but you sin every day—some you think worse than others, can you lose your salvation if you pray and ask for forgiveness every day?**

Salvation may be lost only by those who persistently and willfully go on sinning. If a person genuinely seeks God's forgiveness and His way, salvation will not be lost.

- **You said our security is in God—but then you said if we go on sinning we will lose our salvation. It sounds to me that our security is based on us and whether we sin or not—not in God as you say. For if it were up to God, he would never let us go.**

Our security in God means that it is not primarily a matter of our achieving such by our own efforts. If that were the case, we would never be secure. However, we may forfeit that security by our own apostasy (see *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 130-136).

- **Could you please explain Hebrews 6:4-6?**

This passage points up the ominous fact that even full-fledged believers—"those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the power of the age to come"—if they "then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance." Why? "Since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame." The falling away is total; there is no hope of repentance. The end is "being burned" (verse 8). Compare Hebrews 10:26-27—"If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment." A tragic end: "impossible to renew them again to repentance"—"no longer remains a sacrifice for sins"—total loss. Little wonder that Hebrews earlier says: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (2:3).

- **What is the meaning of "sinning willfully" in Hebrews 10:26?**

The word "willfully" (Greek—*ekousias*) may also be translated as "deliberately." The Amplified Bible includes both translations: "If we go on deliberately and willfully sinning..." The point made in Hebrews is that by willfully, deliberately, persistently continuing to sin "after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment."

- **How should we then live?**

First, as Christian believers we should ever move forward, rejoicing in our great salvation. Since God delights to forgive, when we turn to Him in sincere confession, He will surely cleanse us from all unrighteousness and establish our way. Second, we should give serious heed to the New Testament warnings about possible falling away. These warnings are declared not to create fear and anxiety, but they are God's counsel not to neglect what has been so graciously given us. Third, we can continually give thanks to God for what He has done and intends to do. He is fully able to keep us to the very end. To God be the glory!

- **Will a person who once firmly believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but then turned from Him, enter Hell or Heaven?**

Why should a person who "once firmly believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" but has turned from Him want to go to heaven? For heaven is the place where Jesus is glorified and all people rejoice in His presence. An unbeliever would hardly be comfortable there.

10. The Holy Spirit

- **Who is the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is God. All the attributes of full deity are possessed by Him. He is also within the mystery of the Godhead a distinct person from the Father and the Son. As one of our hymns puts it: "God in three persons, blessed Trinity."

For further information, see [Renewal Theology](#), 2: chapter 6, "The Holy Spirit."

- **I have heard the expression "Grieving the Holy Spirit" most of my Christian life and wonder if you could give me more detail.**

The expression relates to Paul's words in Ephesians 4:30—"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Since the Holy Spirit is a holy person who dwells within the believer, He will be grieved by any sinful actions. Read also verses 29 and 31 for Paul's description of some of the words and deeds that may bring pain to God's Holy Spirit. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: page 152.)

- **When does a person receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit who is everywhere present indwells those who believe in Christ. Jesus said to His disciples about the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) that "He abides with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). Later in the Upper Room, He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). They had come to faith in the risen Christ so that now His Spirit dwelt within them. Later they were to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit occurred at the moment of a living faith in Christ. So with us.

- **I have been hearing a lot about "being slain in the Spirit." I have heard both sides, pros and cons, of its validity. Are there any scriptures on this subject and what are your thoughts?**

- I prefer the language of "falling in the Spirit." The biblical illustration that stands out is Revelation 1:10 where John says he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" and after recounting a vision of Jesus says, "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man" (verse 17). Falling in the Spirit may genuinely happen when one senses the glory of the Lord.

- **Is it proper to speak of the personhood of the Holy Spirit?**

The personhood of the Holy Spirit is clearly affirmed in the Fourth Gospel where Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, *He* will teach you all things" (John 14:26), and thereafter adds that "the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, *He* will bear witness to Me" (15:26). Note that personal pronouns are used in regard to the Holy Spirit.

There are many other references in the New Testament that depict the Holy Spirit functioning as a person. A few may be mentioned: "The Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2); "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us" (Romans 8:26); "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30); and "the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (Revelation 22:17). There are many other similar references that portray the Holy Spirit as a person.

Hence it is important *not* to think of the Holy Spirit as merely an attribute of God, such as power. There are passages that might suggest the Spirit to be God's power in creation (e.g., Genesis 1:2), or in regeneration (e.g., John 3:5), or at Pentecost where the Holy Spirit is promised and the disciples receive power for their witness and ministry (Acts 1-2). The fact that they were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4; cf. 4:31) might sound more like being filled with energy than with a person. However, in all these instances the important thing to recognize is not that the Spirit equals power, but that where the Spirit of God is there *is* power. Moreover, we are to understand that to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" is not simply to be filled with a substance or force but to be fully possessed by the Holy Spirit, the personal Spirit of God.

In the spiritual (or "charismatic") renewal of our time, one of the most outstanding testimonies is that of how real and personal the Holy Spirit has become to many individuals. Thus, deepening Christian experience marvelously confirms the biblical record.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 4, "The Holy Trinity.")

- **My husband and I have been on a quest with the Lord to see Him and know Him more. We have both received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. We both speak in tongues. What do you think it is? Is it a language that only God can understand? Our church is in much turmoil and part of it is over doctrinal differences. The pastor believes that all the gifts died with the apostles. Whom do we believe? We are reading our Bibles but still are not sure. Please help us. We want to be in God's will.**

It is a joy to know that you both have received the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. Speaking in tongues is a language known only to God. As Paul says, "For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God" (1 Corinthians 14:2). On the matter of the gifts of the Spirit: there is no reason to believe, biblically or experientially, that they died with the apostles. If you want to be in God's will, continue to seek all the spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14). You will be blessed!

- **I have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and I want so badly to serve God in my Presbyterian church, but neither of my pastors is at all open to the whole idea. They have made it very clear that we will not have that kind of thing happening in our church. There is a group of 15-20 people who all have had the same experience and have stayed in the church. We are all frustrated and have no idea**

how to proceed. Do you have any suggestions? The church has about 500 members.

Show yourselves all the more loving and kind toward those who oppose you. So long as the pastors allow you to stay, reach out to them in a spirit of cooperation. Though you may as a group meet separately at times, do not isolate yourselves from the wider church family. By all means, do not give the impression of being a superior group from the rest of the church but demonstrate humility in all things. And may the joy of the Lord be your strength!

- **Previously you answered a question regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit and about how one doesn't necessarily have to be baptized in the Holy Spirit to enter the kingdom of Heaven. How can you say we don't need it, when it's the most important necessity in our journey? In John 3:5 Jesus declared "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and of the Spirit." Peter also spoke about it in Acts 2.**

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not for the purpose of salvation; rather it refers to a special empowering of the Holy Spirit for those who have already been saved. Being born of the Spirit is background and condition for being baptized in the Spirit. You are right about the basic importance of being born of water and the Spirit whereby we enter the kingdom of God. The first disciples were baptized in the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) with power to bear witness to the gospel. They had already been born again several weeks earlier (John 20:22). So the distinction continues to this day.

- **I would like to know if it is required for someone to be sanctified (a second work of grace) before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**

There is no biblical evidence for sanctification as a second work of grace before receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

- **I am a "confused" Pentecostal. I have a desire to serve God, but I hear that to serve Him effectively I need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, or to receive a second blessing. When you read the likes of Packer, Carson, etc., they seem to have good arguments against this second blessing. Where does a committed Christian go to find out who's right and who's wrong?**

I think you may find my three-volumes-in-one Renewal Theology helpful---especially volume two, my chapters on the Holy Spirit. Also, see my web site at <http://home.regent.edu/rodmwil> for articles and papers of mine on the subject. Blessings on your search!

- **I've studied a lot about Charismatic theology as well as the Third Wave theology. What is your response to the Third Wave theology concerning the Baptism in the Holy Spirit? Do you agree with them or disagree and why?**

I have concerns about Third Wave theology in that it fails to affirm a distinct Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The emphasis of Third Wave is almost totally on certain gifts of the Holy Spirit. By playing down the power dimension, I believe that there is a diminution in the effectiveness of the gifts. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is more than conversion; it is an empowering for ministry.

- **Is the baptism of the Holy Spirit automatic? Somebody used the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River to affirm this, but I disagreed. What do you have to say?**

There is nothing automatic about being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself was the forerunner by being baptized in the Holy Spirit at the Jordan River. Years later, after His resurrection, He told the disciples, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" and "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses..." (Acts 1: 5, 8). Again, there was nothing automatic about this happening. The disciples waited and prayed expectantly for ten days, and as a climax to their waiting and prayers the Holy Spirit came in power upon them. So it remains to this day. God gives the Holy Spirit in power to expectant believers to enable them better to share in the mission of Christ.

- **If as a born-again Christian you already received the Holy Spirit, why is it that some Christians pray and ask for God to fill them with His Spirit if they already have it?**

Filling with the Holy Spirit is both a point in time action as well as a continuing experience. It can be repeated. Paul writes, "Be filled [the Greek word means 'continuously filled'] with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Actually, there are never times that we do not need to be refilled. Therefore, you may well pray, "God, fill me again and again."

- **Could you please explain John 20:22 where Jesus breathed on the disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit. If they received the Holy Spirit at that point, why were they told in Acts 1:4 to tarry in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was outpoured?**

When Jesus breathed on the disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit, He thereby imparted new life and salvation. This occasion marked the beginning of new life from the risen Lord whereby the Holy Spirit came to dwell within them: their regeneration. The command in Acts 1:4-5 refers to a later occasion when the Holy Spirit was promised to give power to the disciples for witness about Christ. The initial reception of the Holy Spirit recorded in John 20:22 was for new life. The later reception was to be a fullness of the same Holy Spirit, also designated as the "baptism with the Holy Spirit": a veritable outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples. (See [Renewal Theology](#), 2: page 174 for more details).

- **When a person has been saved, is that person "Spirit-baptized," or "filled with the Holy Spirit," at the some moment? Is "speaking in other tongues" evidence?**

Spirit-baptism, or Spirit-filling, may or may not occur at the time of salvation. The first disciples in Jerusalem had been saved (see John 20:22) for some time before they were Spirit-baptized, or filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8 and 2:4). Years later, in Caesarea, the Holy Spirit was "poured out" (equals "baptized") on Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:45) in conjunction with their coming to salvation. In both cases, in Jerusalem and Caesarea, speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4 and Acts 10:46) immediately followed. Tongues were specifically said to be evidence in Acts 10:45-46. Since then many people have spoken in tongues as confirmation of a profoundly spiritual experience. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 8, "The Coming of the Holy Spirit," and chapter 9, "The Phenomenon of Tongues.")

- **Is receiving the Holy Spirit necessary to go to heaven? What sign must I look for to know I have received?**

Receiving the Holy Spirit is a frequently occurring theme in the Book of Acts. See Acts 2:38; 8:15, 17-19; 10:47; 19:2. This expression refers basically to receiving power for witness (Acts 1:8—Jesus' words). Receiving the Holy Spirit is not for salvation ("to go to heaven") but for those who are saved a special endowment of power to bear witness to Christ. Speaking in tongues is often a sign that the endowment has been received. See Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6. In our present day, great numbers of believers testify that their speaking in tongues is clear evidence of their having received the Holy Spirit. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 11, "The Reception of the Holy Spirit.")

- **In a recent response to an email you said that the Holy Spirit indwells each believer and that this is different from the baptism in the Holy Spirit. How is it that baptism (immersion) in the spirit means the same thing as filling with the Holy Spirit? If they are the same, why are there such disagreeing English words?**

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and filling with the Holy Spirit are expressions that refer to the same event. Jesus told His disciples, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). Then several days later "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). These are not "disagreeing words" but refer to two aspects of the same experience. From one perspective, it is a total immersion as in water; from another perspective it is an infilling or total permeation with the Holy Spirit. Other terms used in Acts are "the Spirit's coming upon," "falling upon," and "outpouring on." (For a discussion of all these terms see *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 190-203.)

- **Can you lose the baptism in the Holy Spirit? I got it a while back, but now it seems like the power I once had has left me. Does the Holy Spirit ever leave you?**

To answer the second question first: In at least one case, that of King Saul, the Scripture says that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 16:14). The baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to a Christian experience of being "filled with the Holy Spirit" (e. g., Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). It is possible to "quench the Spirit" (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Thus it is important to be filled and to keep on being filled—which is the fuller meaning

of Paul's words in Ephesians 5:18. Be much at prayer, seek the Lord's presence, and ask for the continuous renewing of the Holy Spirit. He will surely grant it!

- **In regard to the question, "Is receiving the Holy Spirit necessary for going to heaven?" you answered No. Are you saying you can go to heaven without receiving the Holy Spirit?**

One needs to be "born of the Spirit" to go to heaven, but "receiving the Holy Spirit" is for another purpose, namely, the believer's power for witness and Christian living. For more detail, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 11, "The Reception of the Holy Spirit."

- **I have some questions regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Is it possible for this experience to occur when alone in prayer or does it always happen in church or in the presence of a pastor, etc.? Is there any advice that you could give on how to actually yield to the Spirit? How does one set aside his mind and his own understanding and just yield? I'm having trouble with the yielding part. I just don't know how!**

The experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit may occur in almost any setting, alone or with others present. Ordinarily, the church is involved in Spirit baptism because this baptism is basically to strengthen one's life of praise and ministry in the church.

Yielding is the heart of receiving the gift of God's Holy Spirit. For it is only when a person lays himself totally at the disposal of God and holds back nothing that the Spirit moves in to take full possession. There are no shortcuts, no simplistic formulas, no outward manifestations that can bring this about. The Spirit is given only to those who let everything go, who are empty before the Lord, who thereby may be filled with His fullness. This yielding may mean the willingness to give up earthly reputation, security, and ambition so that God may be glorified. It is absolute and irrevocable surrender.

(For a fuller understanding of yielding, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 302-05.)

- **Doesn't the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues suggest that one is superior spiritually to one who has not experienced this blessing? What is the proper way to minister to those who have never experienced this and feel offended because they feel "less spiritual" than those who have experienced the baptism? Doesn't the emphasis on this doctrine suggest division in the body of Christ because some do not experience this?**

A proper understanding of baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues does not point to some superior spirituality of the believer. All believers by virtue of their salvation are already spiritual persons with the Holy Spirit indwelling them. As such, they may grow in spirituality through the process of sanctification. Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers not to salvation or sanctification but to a special act of empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Recall Jesus' words to His waiting disciples that "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5) and also "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). These disciples were all believers, and the Holy Spirit was at work, but they needed this extra baptism of power. This was not that they be more spiritual but better equipped to be witnesses for the Lord.

Speaking in tongues as a sign of special empowerment was not the heart of the experience. However, it did demonstrate the powerful impact of the Holy Spirit in breaking forth in a new language. So it continues to this day.

There should be no division in the church of those who have and those who have not. That belongs to the arena of salvation. But to those who have, they may have more. That is where baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues comes in. Praise God for all His blessings!

- **Can you be baptized in the Holy Spirit and not be filled with the Holy Spirit?**

According to the Book of Acts, Jesus said to His disciples, "You shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (1:5). When the Day of Pentecost arrived, the text reads, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4). Evidently, *baptism* and *filling* refer to the same experience. The two terms express different aspects of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. However, the word *filling* is used for the initial experience but also for later occasions (Acts 4:8; 4:31; 13:9; Ephesians 5:18--"Keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit" literally). In other words: one baptism but many fillings.

- **Is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit an essential of being born again?**

The answer is no. However, the reverse is true: You must be born again to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (For a full discussion of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, see *Renewal Theology*, 2:190-194.)

- **How do I explain the difference in receiving the Holy Spirit at the time you are saved and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? I struggle with explaining this to people who insist that we receive the Holy Spirit at salvation.**

At the time of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within. For example, the risen Christ breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). At Pentecost, there came about a later experience of the disciples being baptized in the Holy Spirit, primarily for ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5-8 and 2:4). Two separate experiences: one for enlivening by the Holy Spirit for salvation; the other for empowering by the Holy Spirit. We need both!

- **How can I get the gift of the Holy Spirit?**

Hear the words of Jesus: "And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened....If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:9-10, 13). If God is your Father by virtue of your faith in Jesus, you may ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. By persistence in asking, seeking, and knocking, you may be sure that God delights to give the Spirit to the ardent seeker.

- **How do you know when you have received the Holy Spirit? Do you receive it the minute you are born again? Do you receive it when you are baptized with water? I have been born again, but when people ask have I received the Holy Spirit, I honestly don't know. I know that God loves me and is with me, but I have never spoken in tongues.**

In salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within the Christian. In this sense, you have received the Holy Spirit the moment you were born again. Baptism in water is a sign of the cleansing that the Holy Spirit brings in salvation and new life. The reception of the Holy Spirit refers also to a further experience of the Holy Spirit's filling known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is a sign of this having occurred. The basic thing here is the Spirit's filling for which you may ask as a child of God. (For a full discussion of this, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 11, "The Reception of the Holy Spirit.").

- **What should Pentecost mean to me?**

Pentecost is both a historic and contemporary event. Historically, it first occurred on the Day of Pentecost with some 120 persons being baptized in the Holy Spirit. They were believers in Christ before being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today, Pentecost occurs again and again with believers who are open to receive it. History, thereby, becomes a living reality!

- **I was told that if a person did not have the Holy Spirit, he would not make it into heaven. Is that true? I know people who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior but have not asked for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. I have the Holy Spirit, but it haunts me to think that saved people can still go to hell.**

It is true that if a person does not have the Holy Spirit, he will not make it to heaven. For every born-again believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him and is thereby saved. The infilling of the Holy Spirit is a different matter. Not all believers have received it—a reality not for salvation but that makes for a fuller Christian life and ministry.

So do not be anxious about saved people going to hell because they do not have the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

- **What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit and how does it differ from the Holy Spirit which every believer receives at conversion?**

It is the same Holy Spirit in two modes of operation. First, He comes as the indwelling reality of the believer's life and works therein for sanctification and Christian growth in general. Second, He comes to empower the believer for Christian witness and ministry. This latter occurs especially through baptism in the Holy Spirit.

- **How can I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?**

Jesus Himself provides the answer: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13). *Asking earnestly* is the key. Jesus a few statements earlier declared: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (verse 9). If God is your heavenly Father, but you have not received this heavenly gift, He has promised to give it to anyone who truly asks.

- **I have been dealing with this question for several years. I was taught that "speaking in tongues" is the sign that you were filled with the Holy Spirit. And if you didn't speak in tongues you weren't filled with the Holy Spirit and will not be able to enter into the kingdom or heaven. Please explain.**

Speaking in tongues is the initial sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit--based on Acts 2:1-4, Acts 10:44-46, Acts 19:1-6, and also countless numbers of believers' testimonies since then. However, this filling with the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with our entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues happens against the background of the experience of salvation.

- **I understand that speaking in tongues is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is also evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Can you be filled with the Holy Spirit without the evidence of speaking in tongues?**

Based on Acts 2:1-4, on the occasion of Pentecost, the believers assembled were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. It would be proper to say that the Pentecostal experience normally includes being filled with the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues is tangible evidence of being filled with the Spirit.

- **I have been saved for about 8 months. I believe in tongues and all other spiritual gifts. I have been told that speaking in tongues is a sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit. I have not had the experience of tongues. What exactly must be done to be filled?**

To be filled with the Holy Spirit requires a total yielding to God. The disciples at Pentecost who were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4) had been in prayer for ten days as they more and more yielded themselves to the Lord. The length in time, however, is not important but only the surrender of everything including the tongue.

Sometimes the laying on of hands, as Paul did to some Ephesian disciples in Acts 19:6, helps in receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. (For more on yielding, see *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 302-305.)

- **Does everyone have to speak in tongues?**

On the three occasions when in the book of Acts people were said to speak in tongues—Acts 2:4; 10:46; and 19:6—all of them did so. They so spoke as a result of the Holy Spirit's action upon them, but there is no suggestion of necessity. Rather, tongues are the free expression of praise to God. Such a deed is not required but highly blessed. Accordingly, Paul says, "I wish that you all spoke in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:5). It is not a matter of *must* but *may*.

- **Should every believer pray in tongues?**

It is not a question of whether every believer *should* pray in tongues but that every believer *may*. On the Day of Pentecost, the one hundred and twenty believers gathered together "were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Note the word *all*. The Apostle Paul later said to the Corinthians, "I want you *all* to speak in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:5). It is a high privilege of Spirit-filled people so to speak. Is it a necessity? No. A privilege? Yes.

- **I want to learn to speak in tongues. Please help me.**

Speaking in tongues is not a matter of learning. What would you study? Tongues in the New Testament are spoken without any prior knowledge. Look up Mark 16:17, the words of Jesus: "They will speak with *new* tongues." On the Day of Pentecost, the first speaking of new tongues occurred thus: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). They were able to speak with tongues because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Tongues were a kind of overflowing praise to God (Acts 2:11). So pray earnestly for the Spirit's filling and open your mouth. Do not speak English and new tongues will gladly be given you. You may receive a full language or only a few syllables or words that will increase day by day as you continue to pray. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 9, "The Phenomenon of Tongues.")

- **My church believes that you have to speak in tongues to have the Holy Spirit. Is this correct?**

Your church's faith as described is entirely backwards. It is the other way around: you have to have the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues.

- **We see from Acts 2:38, 39 that the promise for the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for all that are called of God, that is for every believer. The evidence of that Holy Spirit baptism was tongues in Acts 2, 10, 19. Mark 16:17 says that one of the signs is tongues, and Paul clearly said that he spoke in tongues more than all of the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 14:18). It seems clear to me that this is a**

serious Bible doctrine. Paul said that if anyone preaches another gospel than the gospel he preaches let him be accursed. What is your opinion?

I heartily agree with your statement above of biblical doctrine about baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. However, I deem it unfortunate that you seem to equate this biblical doctrine with the gospel of salvation that Paul preached and taught so vigorously. Otherwise, your statement about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues is well put.

- **What does the Bible say about the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Is it a bad thing? As I understand it, it is FULLY submitting your WHOLE self to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Our church is in conflict over this. We are not Pentecostal or charismatic. Can you please help?**

11. Gifts of the Holy Spirit

- **Some say that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not in operation for today. I believe they are not only in operation for today but are very important for one's spiritual life. What do you say on this subject?**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are or should be operational today among all true believers. They are very important, not so much for one's spiritual life as for one's ministry. We should distinguish between the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit: fruit such as love, joy, and peace which have to do with one's spiritual life; and gifts of the Spirit such as word of wisdom, word of knowledge, and prophecy which have to do with ministry. Fruit and gifts are both essential for a full-orbed Christian life.

- **I would like to know how to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifts like the word of knowledge.**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11) are "the manifestation of the Spirit." By His gifts, the Holy Spirit openly shows Himself in word and deed. He is in charge of the gifts and distributes them as well. At the same time, we may and indeed should ask the Holy Spirit to move through each one of us as He carries forward His work. We may, of course, ask for any one of these gifts recognizing that the Holy Spirit is sovereign. (For a detailed study of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, see *Renewal Theology*, 2, chapter 14, "The Ninefold Manifestation.")

- **Mark 16:17-18. Do these signs spoken about in Scripture apply to Christians today, or was Jesus just addressing Jews of that day?**

The words of Mark 16:17-18--"These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover"--are clearly addressed to believers in Christ of every day and generation.

- **Do the gifts of the Holy Spirit (tongues, prophecy, etc.) exist today for use by Christians or did they cease at the closing of the canon?**

There is no reason to assume that the gifts of the Spirit ceased at the closing of the canon of Scripture. First Corinthians 12:8-10 gives a list of the spiritual gifts beginning with the declaration of "is given." No hint is there that they will be taken away. Incidentally, if the gifts were withdrawn at the closing of the canon, the gift of salvation could also have been taken away at the same time.

- **Should the gifts of the Spirit be in operation in the church services, and at most every service?**

For Scripture on the gifts of the Holy Spirit see 1 Corinthians 12-14. Paul is writing to the whole church and expects all the gifts to be operational. For example, he says, "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (12:7). Thereafter Paul lists nine gifts, all of which relate to the regular meetings of the church in Corinth for worship and ministry. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 13, "The Gifts of the Holy Spirit.")

- **What is the biblical basis for the spiritual gift of "the word of knowledge"? A friend of mine who does not believe in this gift says that the Bible is the only revelation of God, and that God doesn't give us anything else. What do you think?**

The Bible is God's special and unique revelation of truth. Nothing can be added to or taken from it. However, God also gives subordinate revelation to His people. Note, for example, Ephesians 1:17 where Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." Also Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:26, "When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation." The word of knowledge is a gift given by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:8), and thus is a revelation from God. The Bible remains the ultimate authority in all truth. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 354-58.)

- **I believe God's grace is enough for me; why do you think we do not see miracles in America?**

God who worked miracles in Bible times is the living God who does not change. He still works miracles whenever there is faith to see them and receive them. Surely that includes America!

- **Do you believe a teen as young as 13 can receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual gift such as prophecy?**

Age has no bearing in regard to receiving the anointing of the Holy Spirit and such a gift as prophecy. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17). Freshness of youth has a special place in things spiritual. Praise the Lord!

- **Does Paul teach in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, that the spiritual gifts would pass away?**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that "If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away." All of this refers to the future life when we see the Lord "face to face" (verse 12). Any thought of a temporary nature of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in this life is totally foreign to

Paul's teaching. We should therefore rejoice in all these and other gifts available until the face to face beholding of Christ.

- **Can you give me more information on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of discernment and its purposes/uses?**

The gift of the discernings (the Greek is plural) of spirits is one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). By this gift, one is able to perceive spirits—human, evil, and angelic. This is a supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit. (For a full discussion of this gift and the others, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapter 14, "The Ninefold Manifestation.")

- **You mentioned in one of your answers the ability to discern spirits—human, evil, and angelic. Please tell me more about the discernment of human spirits. Are human spirits ghosts?**

Concerning the discernment of human spirits, I do not refer to disembodied human spirits but to the inward spirits of live individuals. The discernment of a human spirit is not the perception of a ghost at all but of what is directing that person in his or her attitude, actions, words, and the like. Only the Holy Spirit can provide such depth perception of a human spirit.

- **What is the difference between the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit?**

The fruit of the Holy Spirit---love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)---represents qualities of character brought about by the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life. The gifts of the Holy Spirit ---word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, the discernings of spirits, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)---are manifestations of the Holy Spirit for ministry to others. Accordingly, both fruit and gifts are important in Christian life and ministry. (See my *Renewal Theology* 2: chapters 14 and 15, "The Ninefold Manifestation" and "Christian Living.")

- **What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?**

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are found in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: "To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy. and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues (NASB)."

Then the Scripture adds: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (verse 11).

Thus the spiritual gifts are all supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit through willing individuals whom He chooses to anoint.

(For an extended discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: chapters 12 and 13.)

- **When a person gives a message in tongues in a church, and no one interprets that message, does that mean it is not of God?**

Although a tongues message may be of God, those who hear are not edified unless there is interpretation following. In Paul's words, "Seek to abound for the edification of the church" (1 Corinthians. 14:12).

- **Being a Baptist all my life, I was taught that tongues ended when Christ was born. I believe that the verse that talks about tongues ending—"If there are tongues, they will cease" (1 Corinthians 13:8)—really means when He comes the second time. Am I right or wrong about this?**

In the same verse, Paul added immediately that "knowledge will be done away." Knowledge surely did not cease when Christ came the first time, nor now by implication did tongues cease. Knowledge and tongues (as well as prophecy—same verse) belong to the whole present era until Christ returns. When we shall see Christ "face to face" (verse 13), knowledge becomes total sight and tongues become perfect praise! You are entirely correct. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 343-344.)

- **I am currently a member of a small church group in Australia that believes you must speak in tongues to be saved. Please reply.**

Such a view is unbiblical. Speaking in tongues first occurred on the Day of Pentecost among believers (i.e., those already saved) in connection with the baptism or filling with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). It is important that this distinction be maintained lest you have people wrongly questioning their salvation.

- **The Book of Acts supports tongues as initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, but is it the only evidence? Could you be baptized in the Spirit with a different accompanying charism? And could you receive the gift of tongues without the baptism in the Holy Spirit?**

You are correct in saying that in the Book of Acts the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. There was other evidence such as exalting God (Acts 10:46) and prophesying (Acts 19:6). Thus there may be other accompaniments of Spirit baptism, but the continuing evidence is glossolalia. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the background for the gift of tongues: the latter cannot occur without the former. Speaking in tongues is the supernatural overflow of baptism in the Spirit.

- **Why speak in tongues?**

Not too long after my first experience of speaking in tongues, I recall a friend saying something like this: "I don't deny that such a phenomenon exists, but actually I see no reason for it, no value in it." In other words, why should one want to speak in tongues? What need is there for it, what worth to it?

The basic reason for such questioning, I am convinced, is the failure to comprehend the essential nature of speaking in tongues, which is *transcendent praise of God*. Speaking in tongues--glossolalia--is an expression of that praise of God wherein there is the breakthrough of usual speech limitations of one's native tongue into a higher and fuller realm of praise, blessing, adoration, and thanksgiving. It is to go beyond the most elevated of earthly expressions--even "Hallelujahs: or "Hosannas"--into spiritual utterance. To put it directly: it is the praise of God in language given by the Holy Spirit.

If such transcendent praise is possible, would one not want to share in it? Would one not want to speak in tongues, yes to sing in tongues, that is, to speak and sing by the Holy Spirit's inspiration? Would one not want to transcend the limits of earthly language in the high praises of God? Why speak in tongues? The answer is not far off: because it is the vehicle of praise par excellence for glorifying and extolling God. If there is little desire to praise God, then tongues are of little significance; but if the worship, the praise, the adoration of Almighty God is the chief concern of one's life, then tongues have unlimited value as a supernatural avenue of that transcendent praise.

- **Why speak in tongues? Part 2**

The praise of God, of course, should also sound forth as fully as possible in the native speech of man. One's mother tongue—whether it be English, French, German, or something else—is so much a part of one's whole being that it is the most natural vehicle of worship. Hence there are hymns, anthems, prayers which, whether sung liturgically or spontaneously, may in human language declare the glory of God. And surely those who are enamored of God will ever seek ways of fuller worship in the speech of their own place and time. However, there comes—or may come—a moment when the level of natural speech is left behind and one enters upon the extraordinary praise of God in the language of the Spirit.

A word of personal testimony may be helpful. My attitude concerning tongues formerly was much like that expressed at the outset by my friend (Part 1). I could see no value in it. Indeed, the whole matter was a bit repugnant to my sensibilities. However, there came a day and hour when all this suddenly changed. And what brought it about? Namely, there came a sudden intensity of desire to praise God more totally and completely. It was in the context of saying the opening words of Psalm 103—"Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits"—that my spirit, full of joy, yearned to express this totally—"all...within me" to break forth in heavenly blessing. Then came the gracious gift of a new tongue, a spiritual language—an extraordinary, even shocking event. But now at last I was praising God with my whole being—body, soul, and spirit. Truly this was transcendent praise!

(For more on transcendent praise, see my *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 226-228.)

- **Why speak in tongues? Part 3**

It is important to add that situations vary among people who first speak in tongues. Some filled with the Holy Spirit are so flooded with the reality of God's presence and power that they can scarcely contain themselves; thus speaking in tongues, or transcendent speech, quickly occurs. They sense deep within their spirit a great yearning and urge to break forth in fresh praise to God, and so they allow the Holy Spirit to provide the language. Others likewise Spirit-filled, through ignorance, fear, and uncertainty, may seek to hold things in check and thus do not immediately speak in tongues. However, the possibility is now present, and with the proper conditions and a willingness to venture forth, they will soon be speaking a new language of the Spirit.

This is not always easy. There is so much resistance to the whole matter of speaking in tongues--as being irrational, hyper-emotional, even a bit shameful--that it takes some courage for many even to contemplate it. Furthermore, when people speak in tongues they often burn their bridges behind them. They may now be labeled a "tongues-speaker" (with all the negative images usually associated). Reputation, respect, and position may be forfeited. Thus it is not easy for some to take the step. However, on the other hand, it may be that what is folly in the sight of others is wisdom in the eyes of God and that God has established this strange, and often despised, way as a channel for His praise and glory.

- **The question of speaking in tongues has been bashed around forever it seems. Why are people so afraid of such an honor? If I can communicate with the Father in a special language He gives me, why in the world wouldn't I relish the opportunity to do so? Also, if tongues were of the devil, wouldn't more of the devil's people speak with them?**

Well said. You are surely on target! I will let the question stand as its own answer.

- **Could you please give me Scriptural references permitting the use of tongues as a gift for today and not just during Bible times?**

According to Mark 16:17, in reference to all future believers, Jesus said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in My name they will...speak with new tongues." Also, Paul speaks several times of tongues as a gift of the Holy Spirit in the local congregation (1 Corinthians 12-14). There is no suggestion that what Paul says to the Corinthians about speaking in tongues would not continue to apply to today.

- **Did tongues cease with the completion of the New Testament?**

The answer is No. There has been no time in the history of the Church when tongues have not been spoken. Paul writes: "Love never fails, but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be

done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Prophecy, tongues, knowledge all pass away when "the perfect" comes; that is when we see Christ face to face. (see verses 9 through 12). Until then, it is a joy to know that the gifts of the Holy Spirit will function upon the earth.

- **Do you have something through the Internet about "speaking in tongues"? We have a friend, she is a "Baptist," and she has raised many questions about this, but I want a good explanation to show her.**

Perhaps you would find my article entitled "Why speak in Tongues?" a helpful study and personal witness. It is chapter 9 in my book *A Theological Pilgrimage* that you may find here on CBN.Com (http://www.cbn.com/SpiritualLife/drwilliams/BK_TheoPilgrim.asp) or on my personal web site (<http://home.regent.edu/rodmwil>).

- **I have heard it said that Satan and demons cannot understand speaking in tongues. I do not know of any scripture to support that thought, but I thought that you might be able to give some insight on if it is true and if it matters one way or the other.**

Paul writes: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14 RSV). This lack of understanding and discernment would apply all the more to Satan and his demons. Speech in tongues must cause utter confusion to them!

- **How are we to view the words attributed to Jesus in Mark 16:18: "They will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them"?**

Reference to picking up serpents and drinking deadly poison should best be understood as protectional statements. Paul, for example, was protected from harm when he accidentally picked up a deadly viper, and it "fastened on his hand" (Acts 28:3). The New Testament records no example of a person protected from the effects of drinking poison; however, Eusebius (*The History of the Church*, page 151) states that this happened to Joseph Barsabbas (named in Acts 1:23). In any event, the deliberate picking up of snakes or the drinking of poison should not be understood as the demonstration of a miracle. Either would be testing God, and Jesus spoke against this kind of evil when He was tempted by Satan to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test" (Matthew 4:7; Luke 4:12). Thus the activities of snake-handling cults today should be viewed as presumptuous rather than miraculous.

- **I am from a Reformed denomination but have had the Holy Spirit manifest in me in ways that "only Pentecostals" have. I have questioned and wondered many times what is happening to me and hope that the Reformed faith and the charismatic world can be brought together. One question I have is that if the Holy Spirit is given to us at the time of salvation and that is all we ever need, why do we have outpourings and "rain" of the Holy Spirit at specific events or**

occurrences? Is there a difference between the Holy Spirit's presence residing in us and His presence as we may sing "fall on us" or "rain on us"? From experience I would say that yes, we have the Holy Spirit living in us yet there definitely is a difference when the Holy Spirit falls on us? How is this to be explained biblically?

To explain this biblically is to note that there are two basic differences between the Holy Spirit's activity in the Christian life: the first, salvation brought about by the Spirit's indwelling; the second, the filling by the Spirit which may occur at any and every point along the Christian way. Praise God, you have obviously experienced both!

If you have my three-volumes-in one book *Renewal Theology* available, I suggested you concentrate on chapters in volume two on the Holy Spirit (examining the footnotes carefully as well as the text) for not only a fuller answer to your present questions but a full grounding in the work of the Holy Spirit.

- **Is it possible to have the gifts of the Holy Spirit without the fruits?**

It is important to bear in mind that every true believer should be a channel for the exercise of the spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:8-10) as well as the fruit of the Spirit for growth in Christian character (Galatians 5:22-23).

So it is not a matter of either/or but of both/and.

- **Does Paul teach in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13, that the spiritual gifts would pass away?**

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that "If there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away." All of this refers to the future life when we see the Lord "face to face" (verse 12). Any thought of a temporary nature of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge in this life is totally foreign to Paul's teaching. We should therefore rejoice in all these and other gifts available until the face to face beholding of Christ.

12. Christian Living

- **What is the will of God? How does an individual know the will of God?**

I have outlined in my [Renewal Theology](#) several steps to knowing God's will. In summary: First, we must be ardent seekers. After the manner of Jesus, we must say, "I seek not my own will but the will of Him who sent me." "Seek" is the key word. Second, we need to pray much. Again, we need to follow the example of Jesus who often spent the whole night in prayer seeking the Father's will. Third, we must constantly hear God's word in Scripture. As the psalmist declared, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Fourth, to know God's will we often need the help of other believers. Through the fellowship of others and their words, we may gain further insight into the will of God. Fifth, we need to have a personal ongoing renewal of the mind. Paul instructs, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove [by testing] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). One whose mind is being constantly transformed is better qualified to know the perfect will of God (see [Renewal Theology](#), 2 :pages 414-17 for fuller details).

- **How do you forgive others when they have hurt you so badly?**

I suggest that you contemplate the words of the crucified Jesus who cried out to His torturers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Now compare the hurts you have received to what happened to Christ and try to respond the same way He did. It will be both a blessing to those who hurt you and to yourself.

- **If I have wronged someone, what is my responsibility as a Christian to the person I have wronged? Can I simply ask them to forgive me and leave it at that? Do I give my responsibility for these wrongdoings only to God?**

Even though your first responsibility is to God, it is not enough to pray for His forgiveness alone. A sincere asking the person wronged for forgiveness is basic. Also there must be genuine repentance for the wrong done else the asking for forgiveness will be superficial.

- **Do we preach an unbalanced gospel by focusing on what God did through the Lord (i.e., righteousness) and forgetting the work of His Spirit in our lives to fulfill all of these commandments the Lord spoke here on earth?**

I answer your question with a strong affirmative! God's work in redemption needs always to be supplemented by His work in sanctification whereby the Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill the Lord's commandments. Otherwise there is an unhealthy imbalance between faith and works in our Christian walk.

- **I have meningitis of unknown origin and suffer severe headache pain continuously for about 2 years now. I believe we can be healed but I was taught that one should not ask for personal gifts, rather we should ask for help for**

others. Is it wrong to ask for healing for myself...is this considered selfish in the eyes of God?

It is surely not wrong to pray for healing for one's self. In the New Testament, Jesus healed many persons who came to Him. Physical healing for those who believed was part of His mission. There are also instances of healing being done for others upon the request of individuals. So to pray for healing for one's self and for others is proper in the sight of God.

- **Why does God love me?**

Basically, God loves you-and me-because His own nature is love ("God is love" 1 John 4:8). His love is also very particular. You have probably heard it said, "God loves each individual as if He had only one to love." So, no matter where you are or your position in life, rest assured God loves you. How can you measure the love of God? God's love is so vast that in Christ He died on the cross, bearing the full weight of our sin and pain.

- **In Matthew 6:7, Jesus says when we pray we should not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. What exactly does He mean? I often pray about the same thing over and over until it is answered. Does that mean I can't pray about the same thing persistently?**

"Vain repetitions" refers to the empty use of the same words or expressions in prayer. Such repetitions will not bring about genuine results. Such speaking is worthless and meaningless. On the other hand, we are enjoined by Scripture to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God delights to hear the many prayers that spring from a devout heart, for even the same words repeated may emphasize true earnestness. There cannot be too many prayers of that kind!

- **I am from Congo-Zaïre, but I live in Toulouse in south of France. I do not speak English very well and am a girl 24 years old. My question is this: Why God can allow the early death of a Christian? Is it the will of God or Satan's plan?**

In the New Testament, we find numerous examples of Christian believers dying. Most of them were young at the time. Take Stephen, a young man known as the first martyr. As he died, the Bible says that his face shone "like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Thus his death was according to God's will and for His glory. Jesus Himself died young as part of God's plan. Satan was involved, but it was not his plan. The early death of a Christian can surely glorify God.

It is surely not wrong to pray for healing for one's self. In the New Testament, Jesus healed many persons who came to Him. Physical healing for those who believed was part of His mission. There are also instances of healing being done for others upon the request of individuals. So to pray for healing for one's self and for others is proper in the sight of God.

- **I am learning to live a Christian life, but I heard that celebrating birthdays is wrong as a Christian. Is this true?**

Celebrating birthdays as a Christian is certainly in order. By so doing, it represents thanksgiving for God's act of creation in bringing forth new life and sustaining it. How precious in the sight of God are all His human creatures!

- **I have a very important question to ask. You have implied that we should keep God's commandments (i.e., the Ten Commandments). Therefore must we keep the Sabbath as within the context of the Ten Commandments, and if we don't, are we in danger of losing our salvation even after accepting Christ?**

Keeping the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, is vital to the true ordering of human existence. They were given by God through Israel for the benefit of all mankind. This stands out vividly in the Sabbath command to rest after labor: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:9-10). What a boon to mankind when the commandment is truly kept. Moreover, it is grounded in the very nature and activity of God who commanded it: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day" (verse 11). Surely the human creature made "in God's image" (Genesis 1:26) all the more needs labor and rest!

- **Do you believe in "storehouse tithing"? Please give me your opinion as to where the tithes should be given. Do you feel it goes ONLY to the church to which you belong, or do you think part of it can be given to other ministries that "feed you"? Do you believe in "storehouse tithing"?**

The tithe belongs to the Lord! Primarily, it should go to the local church (the "storehouse") of which one is a part, but by no means be limited thereto. One may surely give as a part of the tithe to any true ministry of the Lord.

- **Jesus said about the Spirit, look at the wind...from where it comes to where it goes you know not, so it is with those who are born of the Spirit (John 3:8). Does this mean that a sign of walking in the Spirit of God is creativity and spontaneity? Would the reverse be equally true, Christians who are tend to lack creativity and spontaneity are not walking in the Spirit?**

The answer to your interesting question is yes. To be born of the Spirit is to be born of the Spirit of new life. This surely includes creativity and spontaneity. We sometimes fail to recognize this and allow legalism to come back in. Of course, there are limits, but we should not quench the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a creative Spirit. So should be all who are born of Him.

- **If you pray for something and you feel like you get a clear sign from God, but it has been a long time and no answer, should you still hang on?**

If a clear sign has been given, you should surely persist in prayer. There is frequent reference in the New Testament to praying for something "night and day" (see, for example, Luke 18:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:5). This may cover a long time. It is not that God is reluctant to answer, but His time may be different from ours, and we may need to be better prepared for the answer when it does come. So hold on!

- **When I received Christ into my life, my whole life changed. There is a time when I rarely pray to him and eventually it's like I don't feel His presence. Is there something wrong with me?**

If you "rarely pray," you are not likely to feel God's presence. Paul says, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians. 5:17). If you continue to pray like this, God's presence will be increasingly known.

- **In John 13:1-20, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and commands them to do so to one another. I see the Catholic Church observes this command. Why is it not done in the Pentecostal denominations and other churches?**

It is to be noted that just following Jesus' washing the disciples' feet He said, "For I give you an example that you also should do as I did to you." Menial service was the example that Jesus set, even washing dirty feet. It was an *example*, not literally to be followed, that we should always be humble servants of one another.

- **What are the Christian holy days of God that we should observe?**

There are no particular "holy days." In various ways, certain ones--especially Christmas and Easter--have been established by tradition, but they are not so designated by Scripture. Paul even warns in Galatians 4:10 against people who "observe days and months and seasons and years," saying, "I fear for you." It is not that such observances are wrong, but they may substitute for the real thing.

- **What is required for a person to go to heaven? (For example, what must their life be like and what must they believe?)**

John 3:16 is an answer to your question: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." To believe in Christ means to trust in Him as your Savior from sin and the only hope for eternal life in heaven. Living a life that is pleasing to Him must surely follow.

- **How do we abide in Jesus?**

We abide in Him by allowing His words to abide in us and letting His Spirit control our daily walk. Of special importance is the matter of ongoing obedience and forsaking all sin.

- **Why do sometimes when I pray and sing to the Lord I laugh or smile? I feel there is a joy inside me. Am I overreacting or is it something normal? I have such a peace inside me. It feels so good.**

A fine testimony indeed! You speak of a prevailing joy and peace that should be the situation of every follower of Christ. His words: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you" (John 14:27); "these things I have spoken to you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (John 15:11). May Christ's joy and peace be multiplied to you!

- **I would appreciate your discussing the words of Jesus in John 14:12: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do."**

In John 14:12, Jesus says two extraordinary things. First, *those who believe in Him will also do the works* ("works" equals miracles throughout the Gospel of John) *that He did*. The works/miracles that Jesus had done to this point in the Fourth Gospel include turning water into wine (John 2), the healing of an official's son by simply speaking a word (John 4), the curing of a man long crippled and helpless (John 5), the feeding of the five thousand (John 6), the giving of sight to a man born blind (John 9), and climactically the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Miracles in the believers' life accordingly would include everything from turning water into wine to raising the dead—and all in-between (as recorded not only in the Book of John but also in the Synoptics).

Now this, to say the least, is a startling promise by Christ: those who believe in Him *will do* (not may do or may possibly do) His works, His miracles. All miracles that Christ did in His earthly ministry will be done by those who believe in Him.

Second, and far more startling, is the further declaration that *those who believe in Him will also do greater works than Christ did*. This unmistakably means works beyond everything mentioned in the Gospels! Whatever miracles Jesus did on earth will be transcended by the miraculous works of those who believe in Him. How is such an astonishing thing possible? The answer is given in Jesus' own words: "because I go to the Father." Jesus in heaven will have power and authority far beyond what He had during His earthly ministry, and thereby He will enable those who believe in Him to do greater works than even the greatest that He had done within the confines of His own earthly existence.

In summary: not only will miracles continue after Jesus' earthly ministry, but they will be even greater. And they will be done not only by apostles, prophets, and the like, but also by others who believe in Him. This accords well with Mark 16:7 that begins: "And these signs [i.e., miracles] will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues...." Those who believe will do Christ's earthly works and even more through the entire age of the proclamation of the gospel. (See *Renewal Theology*, 1: chapter 7, "Miracles.")

- **Do the words of Jesus in Luke 13:4-5 about the tower in Siloam have relevance to our present crisis? "Those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think they were worst offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."**

Jesus basically makes one point: The unexpected falling of the tower is a call for repentance, not just with eighteen but all other inhabitants of Jerusalem. Those upon whom the tower fell were not worse sinners than others in Jerusalem. This is a very sobering message in relation to the need for all peoples to repent before it is too late. The eighteen represent those for whom repentance came too late. Thus they are a warning to all people to repent before it is too late.

Our present crisis calls for a renewed vigilance against the foes of freedom and a heartfelt compassion for the thousands of casualties and their families. The words of Jesus are a clarion call to deep repentance of our nation that needs to return to God. The words of 2 Chronicles 7:14 become critical now, "If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." Billy Graham is quoted as saying, "If God does not judge America soon, He will need to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

- **Twice, recently, I have seen a reference made about God's permissive will which is what prayer touches. I think I have an understanding regarding His perfect will as Scripture teaches His desires toward us, and trusting Him in all situations. I wonder if I need to know more about His "permissive will" and the things I pray about.**

God in His will functions either actively or permissively. For example, in God's creation of the universe He operated actively. In the freedom He gave man, He operated permissively allowing Adam to obey or disobey. Even in man's disobedience, which God permitted, God still was in control. In that sense, the situation was never out of His will. God remains the sovereign Lord. God's perfect will includes both His active and His permissive will (for more on "God's Permissive Will," see my [Renewal Theology](#), 1: pages 229-230).

- **Do you believe that after one is saved, generational curses follow? The doctrine of generational curses is being greatly pressed at our church. Do you believe that it's biblical that even after one is saved and in Christ that generational curses follow us? Isn't it more true that Christ became a curse for us and automatically cut them off? And that instead, only our sin nature follows us which Christ is in the process of purifying and sanctifying and bringing us deliverance from? I would really appreciate your comments on this.**

The concept of generational curses is too heavy a burden for the body of Christ to bear. Your question is actually a good counteractive which recognizes that in Christ we are set free from any and all curses of the past. To be sure, we do inherit a sinful nature from Adam and his descendants; however, all generational curses are removed from believers by

the blood of Christ. Therefore there is no need for spending time in searching out what curses apply to us today. I repeat, it is an unnecessary burden from which we have been freed in Christ.

- **I believe that you are saved by faith but I get hung up on "works."
I am a born again Christian and everything and believe that you are saved by faith and Jesus' death on the cross. But sometimes I get really hung up on the works stuff. Like a lot of times in the Bible in the New Testament it seems to be saying that you get to Heaven by doing good works.**

Faith always has the primacy over works in terms of salvation. We are saved not by works; but also we are not saved without them. A lively faith will always demonstrate itself through good works. "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). In Paul's words, it is a matter of "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

- **Are the Ten Commandments still binding on us who are saved by faith in Christ Jesus? Paul in Romans 3:31 seems to indicate that they are when he says, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."**

Paul is speaking here against antinomianism, namely, the view that because of our salvation through faith the law is void, or nullified. His reaction is very strong against such a viewpoint ("May it never be!"). The fact that we are not "under law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14) does not mean the voiding of the law. The law, especially as embodied in the Ten Commandments and in our moral consciousness (see Romans 2:15), is God's law for all people. However, until salvation came, the law could not be truly fulfilled. Now there is the inner motivation and ability to accomplish such. Grace amazingly establishes the law!

- **My question pertains to faith and works and how the two concepts should be applied in our daily living. Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, and Ephesians 2:8 state that by grace we are saved through faith but not by works. How does this agree with James 2:14-26?**

According to James 2:21, "Abraham our Father was justified by works." Does this contradict other words such as those of Paul in Romans 4:2, "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God"? There is no contradiction here. Further on James adds, "Faith without works is dead" (verse 26). This means that, although we are justified by faith alone, true faith is never alone. Paul speaks elsewhere of "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). A living faith will always overflow in good deeds. (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 76-78, on "Place of Works.")

- **Do we have to do away with the law if we are saved by grace?**

Not at all. The law, referring particularly to the moral law (to which our consciences and the Ten Commandments bear witness) is from God and is binding upon all people. Yet, because of the sin of the human race, the law cannot be kept; indeed, as Paul puts it, the law has become a curse ("the curse of the law," Galatians 3:13). Now, however, when we are saved by grace (not by law!), the law for the first time can be maintained. As Augustine said long ago, "Grace was given that the law might be fulfilled." The law is by no means done away by grace; instead, by the indwelling Spirit the law may at last be kept (even if there is still continuing sin). Rather than the law being a curse, we can now joyfully say, with the Psalmist, "O how I love Thy law!" (119:97).

- **I am a born again Christian and everything and believe that you are saved by faith and Jesus' death on the cross. But sometimes I get really hung up on the works stuff. Like a lot of times in the Bible in the New Testament it seems to be saying that you get to Heaven by doing good works.**

Faith always has the primacy over works in terms of salvation. We are saved not by works; but also we are not saved without them. A lively faith will always demonstrate itself through good works. "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). In Paul's words, it is a matter of "faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).

- **Does there have to be an order? Like, first, you get saved. Second, you get baptized in water. Third, you get filled with the Holy Spirit. Does it have to be in that exact order?**

You have well spoken of three separate elements that make up the Christian walk, and also you have listed the usual order of their occurrence. However, for example, water baptism may on occasion be the third element that follows being filled with the Spirit. It is only important that all three of these elements be present for the full Christian life.

- **In John 21:15-19, why does Jesus ask Simon (Peter) if he loves Him three times? He knows Peter's heart, so why ask him three times? What point, if any, is Jesus trying to make here?**

This vivid scene of the risen Lord questioning Simon Peter three times calls to mind the earlier dreadful occasion when three times, out of fear and cowardice, Peter denied all relationship with Jesus (see Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:25-27). So Jesus' threefold questioning of Peter was not for information but most likely to give Peter threefold opportunity against the background of his former denials to affirm deep love for Jesus.

13. Church and Ministry

- **On what is the church Jesus built and is still building?**

Jesus said to Simon Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Peter had just declared to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16). On that confession about Jesus, not on Peter himself, the church was to be built. It is a mistake to view Peter as the foundation of the church. The church is built and continues to be built on the basis of faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

- **I have a lot of good friends that are in the House Church movement that I am really having a tough time with. To me it is almost cult-like, and I wish to be able to learn more about the early church and their house meetings. Can you help me?**

1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3-5, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2 are good New Testament examples of the house church. I am not sure about the present "House Church" movement. So long as they do not claim the "House Church" as the only church, they surely have substantial biblical background and may be recovering valid insights for our time.

For a description of the house church in the New Testament, see my [Renewal Theology](#), 3: pages 38-40.

- **I believe in Jesus but don't have a church such as Baptist, Catholic, or Methodist. How do I go about finding a church?**

I suggest that you pray for guidance. Since you believe in Jesus, He will surely help your choice. Then take time to visit various churches where you find a people that love Jesus and seek to do His will. It should be a church that challenges you to build on your faith and grow in Christian maturity.

- **What is meant by the "replacement theory"?**

The replacement theory deals with the relationship between Israel and the Church. It affirms that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God; therefore, all the promises to Israel are obsolete and instead find their true fulfillment in the Church. My reply: The Church is the spiritual people of God uniting both Jew and Gentile. This is not to eliminate Israel from having a special place in God's purposes.

- **In the 16th chapter of Matthew, Jesus asks Peter who He is. After Peter's response that He is the Christ, Jesus says "Upon this rock I will build my church." Is the rock Jesus is referring to Peter, or is it the faith of knowing Jesus is the Christ?**

The rock on which the church is built was not Peter himself but his confession that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." The genuine church continues to be built on that confession. If so, the very gates of hell "will not prevail" against it.

- **Is the church age over? Is the Holy Spirit not in the churches anymore? I heard this on the radio.**

The church age is not over. It will continue as long as there are people who believe in Christ, fellowship with one another, and carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. In fact, nothing can destroy the church. In Jesus' own words, "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). There surely are churches in which little life is present. But there are also countless numbers of churches that are alive with activity of the Holy Spirit. So be not defeatist; but be assured of victory!

- **Why do some churches stress the importance of membership? I tithe and practice living God's way, but I don't understand the reason for membership.**

Since all Christians are spiritually members of the body of Christ—"members of one another" (Romans 12:5)—this should normally express itself by physical membership in some local body. Why would you want to hold back? (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 61-71.)

- **Do the seven churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, pertain to the future or has this already been fulfilled? If they pertain to the future, what would be considered the seven churches today?**

The seven churches in Revelation 2-3 were specific churches in Asia Minor at that time. However, the letters are quite relevant for our own time also. Seven is a composite figure that refers to the totality of churches at any period in history.

- **Why worship on Sunday and not Saturday which is the Sabbath?**

Jesus rose from the dead on the *day after* the Sabbath (see, e.g., Mark 16:1-2—"When the Sabbath was over...very early on the first day of the week"). The first day, namely Sunday, was the Day of Resurrection, and soon became the special day of worship. For example, see Acts 20, verse 7—"On the first day of the week when we gathered together"; 1 Corinthians 16:2—"On the first day of every week." The first day soon came to be known as "the Lord's Day" (see Revelation 1:10—"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Thus the first day of the week may properly be called the Christian Sabbath.

- **If I teach my children to believe in God and live a Christian life, is it wrong not to attend church?**

It is admirable that you give Christian teaching to your children, but this should not exclude participation in the life of a local church. A good church fellowship will broaden and deepen your home life and teaching.

- **I belong to a Pentecostal (Assembly of God) Church and over the past few months have discovered that my current Pastor is obtaining about 95% of his messages from the Internet (namely, Pastors.com). Mostly these messages are delivered verbatim and without personal illustrations. Previously I was accustomed to my Pastor praying to the Spirit for the messages, and they seemed more timely and alive. Plus the Spirit was really "thick." How should I now feel with these "dry," non-anointed messages?**

Dry, non-anointed messages do not belong in the pulpit! Go to your pastor and tell him that the congregation deserves more than that. Even a poorly worded sermon that comes from the heart is far better.

- **We go to a fundamental community church. It is Baptist based. Sermons are very biblical, but there is much control. The folk are expected to stay much within the dotted line---no raising of hands or audible "amens," even when a rare praise song mentions an expression of praise. We are finished in one hour. Prayers from the pulpit are read, but sound reverent enough. I need advice. Have increasing hunger for a Holy Spirit manifestation. Am I having a critical spirit?**

I do not sense in what you say a critical spirit but a hungry spirit: in your own words an "increasing hunger for a Holy Spirit manifestation." A church may basically be doing everything right but be lacking in life and vitality without the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Pray continually for this and talk with your pastor and church leaders about your felt need. Do this in a loving, non-judgmental way. The Lord will surely bless a Bible-based *and* Spirit-filled congregation!

- **What is meant by the term "five-fold ministry"?**

The five-fold ministry refers to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11) given by Christ for the equipping of the saints for serving and building up the body of Christ. A well equipped church will function fully in all these ministries.

- **Is it scriptural for a woman today to be an apostle? I need to know before getting involved with one. Thanks.**

There are no scriptural examples of women apostles. Christ's original twelve apostles were all men and so were others like Paul and Barnabas. If a woman assumes the title of "apostle" today, it is without scriptural warrant.

- **Can deacons preach?**

Deacons can certainly preach if called by God. Two of the most outstanding preachers in the New Testament were Stephen and Philip, both deacons. See Acts 6 for the names of

several early deacons and Acts 6 through 8 for the record of Stephen and Philip's preaching. See *Renewal Theology*, 3:207-210, for more on deacons.

- **Did women ever serve as pastors/elders in the New Testament church?**

There is no record of women so serving.

(For a delineation and summary of the twelve-fold activities of women serving in the New Testament church, see my *Renewal Theology*, 3: "Ministry of Women," pages 210-216.)

14. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

- **Why in the Bible does it state that there is only "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:6)? What is its nature? Aren't there several other baptisms mentioned in the New Testament?**

Paul is doubtless referring in Ephesians to water baptism as a symbol of our unity—"One Lord, one faith, one baptism." Water baptism, despite many differences in its practice, is a visible token of our oneness in Christ.

There are other baptisms: with fire (through suffering, Mark 10:39) and with the Holy Spirit (for power and ministry, Acts 1:5, 8).

- **Why do some people believe that if they are baptized as a baby, that they are saved and automatically enter the gates of heaven?**

This view is based on the misunderstanding that baptism in and of itself conveys salvation. However, if there is no accompanying faith, baptism is null and void. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). What is needed is that when a baby comes to the age of accountability, he or she make a life changing and saving confession of Christ. (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 229-241, on Infant Baptism.)

- **I had a couple over to my house, and I was showing them that salvation and baptism are not the same. They used Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 to show how baptism saves you. Every time I would give them answers to their questions they would say, show it to me in the Bible. What Bible verses can I go to the next time they come over to show them that baptism in water does not save?**

A helpful Scripture passage is Acts 16:30-33. The Philippian jailer asked Paul, "What must I do to be saved?" To this Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved." Shortly thereafter the believing jailer "was baptized." The baptism in water did not save him; that occurred the moment he believed in Christ. Baptism that followed was an outward symbol and seal of his being buried and raised with Christ. In regard to 1 Peter 3:20, it is not that baptism in and of itself saves; it is rather "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (See *Renewal Theology*, 2: pages 38-39 with footnotes for discussion of Mark 16:16 and 1 Peter 3:21.)

- **If one hasn't been baptized after they invited Jesus Christ into their hearts, can they still enter the kingdom of heaven? At what point are our names written in heaven? If baptism is an important step after salvation, why isn't it mentioned as a second step after saying the sinner's prayer?**

Baptism is important as a visible sign and symbol of salvation. By faith we are baptized in Christ spiritually; baptism in water is its counterpart. Thus baptism should never be neglected, for it deepens our experience of salvation. The all-important factor is faith in Christ. For example, see Romans 10:9, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord,

and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." This confessing and believing is the moment when one's name is written in heaven.

- **In regard to baptism: What is the difference between Matthew 28:19—baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and Acts 8:16—baptizing only in the name of the Lord Jesus?**

Either form of baptism—"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" or "only in the name of the Lord Jesus"—is valid. The longer form expresses that to be a Christian is to enter into a new life in which all three persons of the Godhead are actively involved. The shorter form focuses on Jesus in whom all "the fullness" (Col. 1:19) of the Triune God dwells, so that baptism in Jesus' name is also a complete and valid baptism. Christ is the vital center of all baptisms! (See also Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12 and *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 222-23.)

- **I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My brother-in-law says you should be baptized in Jesus' name only. Is this true and does it make a difference?**

The historic formula for Christian baptism is that found in Matthew 28:19: "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Since the New Testament period, the church has regularly practiced triune baptism.

In the Book of Acts baptism was performed in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (2:38). At a later date the Samaritans were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (8:16); thereafter the Caesareans were "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (19:5). Other references to baptism in Acts do not specify the formula, but presumably in those instances also it was done likewise in the name of Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus.

Both formulas, accordingly, are found in the New Testament and either of them may properly be used in a baptismal ceremony. The fact that the early church in Acts did not practice triune baptism is sufficient basis for the church today, despite centuries of baptismal practice, also to baptize in the name of Jesus only. Either practice is surely valid.

(See my *Renewal Theology*, 3:138-139 and 222. Also in *Renewal Theology*, 2:286-87, there is an earlier discussion of this matter--especially footnote 48--in regard to extreme Trinitarian and "Jesus only" [Pentecostal] views.)

- **In whose name should a Christian believer be baptized? In Jesus' name? Or the Trinity? Does it really matter?**

All recorded baptisms in the Book of Acts (2:38 and thereafter) are done in the name of Jesus only. According to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, baptism is to be done in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, biblically

speaking, it does not matter which form is used. What is basically important is that the one who is baptized be a true believer.

- **If a child is 5 years old and wants to be baptized, should he be? If he understands the main idea of what baptizing is, or should he wait until he's older and understands more thoroughly?**

If a 5-year-old child says he believes in Jesus and desires salvation, there is good reason for him to be baptized. Thorough understanding is not required. Indeed, a young child's faith at that early age might be even more deeply grounded in simple but true understanding.

- **Were Christ's disciples baptized? Is there any reference in the Bible?**

There is no direct record of Jesus' disciples being baptized. However, first of all, the disciples of John the Baptist were doubtless baptized by John. Some of John's disciples later became disciples of Jesus. Furthermore, we are told that the disciples of Jesus baptized many followers of Him (John 4:1-2). Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost said to the assembled throng, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). This surely presupposes that Peter and the other disciples were baptized themselves.

- **If you were baptized and backslid for 10 years and did some major sins, should you be baptized again? I have fully committed myself to the Lord and would like closure on this issue.**

Baptism is a once-for-all matter. There is no record in the New Testament to a second Christian baptism. Baptism, after all, is a sign and seal of your salvation in the name of Jesus. Perhaps your desire to seek a second baptism could be provided for at a church service of rededication instead. You say that you made a personal commitment to the Lord. Why not make that publicly known in an assembly of believers? Also you speak of major sins. It is important that you guard against backsliding again. I suggest for you a careful reading and application of 2 Corinthians 7:1---"Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

- **Does everyone have to be baptized to be called a Christian? I am thirteen years old, and I believe and tell everyone I know that I do. I try to do everything in life the way Jesus would want me to do. But I haven't been baptized yet. Is that okay?**

You are to be highly commended for your devotion to Christ. However, you need to be baptized. According to Jesus' own words, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Baptism will be a sign and seal of your belief and should not be delayed. You might inquire of a local pastor how to proceed.

- **Must you be baptized to have eternal life? I have not been baptized, and this is a big concern to me.**

The basic matter for eternal life is not baptism but faith in Jesus Christ. Without such faith, baptism is solely an external and meaningless event. Notice the order in Mark 16:16, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved." Thus belief in Christ is the primary thing. Have you made a personal commitment to Christ? This should be followed by the act of baptism.

- **Does baptism have to be performed by a minister? Or can a baptism be performed by any born-again Christian to another person who wishes it?**

In regard to who is authorized to baptize, there should be no requirement beyond being a Christian. Even as every believer stands under the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to "go and make disciples," so likewise every believer is commanded to baptize: "baptizing them." To hold that every Christian is called to evangelize but only certain ones are allowed to baptize is wholly contrary to the command of the Lord. (For more on this subject, see my *Renewal Theology*, 3: the chapter on "Ordinances," especially pages 237-8.)

- **If you are not baptized by immersion but by sprinkling and have given your life to Christ and obey his word. You have the gift of prophecy and speak in tongues. Are you born again or not and do you qualify to enter the kingdom of God?**

The mode of baptism is inconsequential as long as water is applied and the intent is to baptize. According to your words, you have numerous signs of a Christian walk. Fear not, and let no one confuse you in this important matter. (For more on this, see my *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 228.)

- **Is it biblical to take Communion by oneself?**

There is no such thing as individual communion in the Bible. The very fact that it is called "Communion" implies more than one person. That it is also called the "Lord's Supper" points to its communal nature.

- **To the question, "Is it biblical to take Communion by oneself?" you answered, "There is no such thing as individual communion in the Bible. The very fact that it is called 'Communion' implies more than one person. That it is also called the 'Lord's Supper' points to its communal nature." My question is: Based on this, would you see a problem with a family observing Communion (Lord's Supper) in their home?**

If done with reverence and prayer, there should be no basic problem.

- **When taking communion, does the bread and wine actually change into Christ's flesh and blood?**

No, but Christ is *really* present in and through the bread and wine. He is present *spiritually* as we partake of Him by faith (see *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 249).

- **Is it a sin to take communion if you have not taken baptism by immersion in water?**

Perhaps the question should be, "Is it a sin to take communion if you have not been born again?" In that case, it would be better not to take communion. Baptism by immersion is important; but more important, indeed critical, is the matter of being a believer in Christ whether baptized or not.

- **In response to your words about the Communion not being the body and blood of Jesus, I have looked in the four Gospels and cannot find any place that says other than "This is My body....This cup is the new covenant in My blood." So it must be His body and blood. Why again do you say it was otherwise?**

Let me clarify by saying the following: At the Lord's Supper as we partake of the elements of bread and wine, we partake *spiritually* of Christ. The bread and wine are important because they *symbolize* Christ. In that sense Jesus called them His body and blood. Indeed, when Jesus said, "This is my body...my blood," He was obviously speaking symbolically because He was not the bread and wine He spoke about: *He sat at the table with them*. Further, not only are the bread and wine symbols of Christ but also by partaking of them physically the believer has an opportunity to gain a deeper spiritual experience: the appropriation of physical bread and wine leading to a deeper spiritual appropriation of Christ. There is indeed a correspondence between the physical and the spiritual. At the same time that we physically partake of the bread and wine and receive these elements into our bodies, we likewise partake of Christ spiritually so that He has fuller entrance into our souls and spirits.

(See my *Renewal Theology*, 3:249, especially footnote 131, for various views of the significance of the body and blood of Christ.)

- **I would like to know how frequently do you feel the Lord's Supper should be observed by the church. Are there any regulations or examples of when to do it in the New Testament?**

There are no regulations in the New Testament about how frequently to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Paul does speak of "often" in the familiar words, "As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). But Paul did not specify how often. Neither did Jesus say so. He simply declared it was to be done in the future. As far as the early church goes, the first believers "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship and the breaking of bread and prayer" (Acts 2:42). In as much as "breaking of bread" probably refers to the Lord's Supper (or to a meal climaxing with the Lord's Supper), this demonstrates regular, frequent observance. Moreover, later on the text reads, "day by day...breaking bread from house to house" (verse 46). Also in the book of Acts, there is a noteworthy reference to the

breaking of bread "on the first day of the week" (20:7). This of course would parallel our Sunday, and it is an example but certainly not a regulation. So we have possible examples in the New Testament of daily and weekly celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Practically speaking, any time is good so long as adequate spiritual preparation can be made for it.

- **Can my husband administer the Lord's Supper to our family?**

Concerning the administration of the Lord's Supper, there is no New Testament specification. Indeed, since members of the early church broke bread "from house to house" (or "in their homes"), it is likely that the head of the house would give the leadership. In most cases, it would surely be the husband. He would administer the Lord's Supper to all gathered in the home. So there is good precedent for a husband today to lead his family in the observance of the Lord's Supper.

- **What is the theory of transubstantiation?**

The theory of transubstantiation is a Roman Catholic dogma about the Lord's Supper that reads as follows: "By the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation."

(For a discussion of transubstantiation, see my *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 249, footnote 131).

15. The Return of Christ

- **Is amillennialism a valid view in eschatology?**

Amillennialism may better be spoken of as "present-millennialism." Those who hold this view stress the *present* reign of Christ over the church and all believers. There will also be a future reign of Christ in the final order of things (i.e., the new heavens and the new earth). Other views such as postmillennialism and premillennialism speak of a *future interim* reign of Christ rather than in the present. All three views of the millennium have been held by Christian believers; no one of these views should be a test of one's orthodoxy. The word "amillennial" is somewhat misleading in that it may suggest no millennium. That is why I prefer the term "present-millennialism." (For a full description of all these terms and other related matters, see *Renewal Theology*, 3: chapter 13, "The Millennium.")

- **I have been reading some early church historians and came across the view known as Preterism. In regard to Matthew 24, this view says that all these things were fulfilled with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. I was wondering if you would comment as to how valid you think this viewpoint is.**

The destruction of the temple in 70 AD was the fulfillment of the first question of the disciples in Matthew 24:3, "When will these things be?" (which refers back to verse 2—"Not one stone here shall be left upon another"). The next two disciples' questions, "What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age," have yet to be fulfilled.

Preterism is right in regard to the temple destruction but mistaken in viewing Matthew 24 as fulfilled totally in that event.

- **Lately there have been discussions on some radio talk shows that Christians will go through the Rapture, Tribulation, etc. Is that correct?**

According to the New Testament, Christians will go through tribulation. Tribulation (Greek: *thlipsis*) is the lot of all true believers. For example, see John 16:33—"In this world you have tribulation"; Romans 5:3—"We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance"; Revelation 1:9—"I, John, your brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation." The word "tribulation" is used three times in Matthew 24: verse 9—"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation"—which unmistakably refers to tribulation throughout history; verses 21-22—"Then there will a great tribulation" so intense that "unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short"; verses 29-30—"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened...the Son of man coming on the clouds." It is apparent from this sequence in Matthew that Christians (the elect) will go through tribulation, including "great tribulation" (often called "the Tribulation"), just before Christ returns. There is no place in these verses for a pre-tribulation rapture of Christians. (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 360-70, on the "Great Tribulation.")

- **Will there be a rapture?**

Yes, according to Scripture. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:17--"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." "Be caught up" refers to the rapture of believers which will occur immediately after the resurrection of the believing dead (see preceding verse 16--"The dead in Christ shall rise first"). But it will be so nearly at the same time that both dead and living will "be caught up together." In 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, Paul writes: "We shall not all sleep [i.e., die], but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet...and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." Thus not only will the rapture represent a change from the natural body to a spiritual body (as in verse 44), but also this change will take place immediately.

It should be noted that the background of the rapture, as well as our resurrection, is the "coming of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). This coming is depicted in vivid language: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command ['Rise from the dead! Be changed!'], with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God" (verse 16). After this amazing double event--the resurrection and rapture--we shall be with the Lord for ever more. Praise be unto Him!

(For more, see *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 405-10.)

- **I have studied for a long time and cannot prove to myself that the rapture is a valid Bible-based belief. What are your thoughts on this matter?**

The rapture is clearly taught in the Bible. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Paul writes, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, thus we shall always be with the Lord." This follows immediately after "the dead in Christ" (verse 16) are raised up. There are various views about the time of the rapture; however, the fact of the rapture as a future event is unmistakable.

- **A friend of mine asked me if there is any description of an atomic bomb in the Book of Revelation. Is there? There appear to be descriptions of things which could be the aftermath of a bomb type explosion, but I'm not sure if there is a description of an atomic bomb.**

There are many descriptions of devastation in the Book of Revelation, but none particularly of an atomic bomb. We should not expect that much detail in referring to God's judgments.

- **Our Sunday School class was asking if it is actually scriptural or myth that everyone on earth will hear the gospel message of Christ (and this must happen) before Christ returns.**

In connection with the mission to reach all nations, the "sign of the end" will be the universal proclamation of the gospel. As Jesus earlier declared, "This gospel of the

kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). What is said is *not* that all nations will turn to Christ--though this is the goal (as Matthew 28 states)--but that all will hear and have opportunity to turn. When this occurs, the end will come.

Let us look more closely. The Great Commission is not only to proclaim but also to reach--and this refers to "all nations" (in both Matthew 24 and 28)--so that people are disciplined, baptized, and taught. The goal is testimony plus conversion: it can never be anything less than that. And as surely as Christ is with His church throughout the ages, there will be--and unquestionably has been--the turning of many "nations" to Him. However, Christ does *not* say in the Great Commission that this goal will be fully reached. Nor--and here we return to the matter of "sign"--did He earlier say that all nations must be converted before the end of the age and His return. *But*, when the church universally proclaims the gospel as a testimony (or witness) so that all may hear and believe, then the end will come. The "sign," therefore, is not universal salvation but universal witness with opportunity for decision.

Now let us examine more closely Jesus' words "the whole world" and "all nations." The word translated "world" is *oikoumenē*, meaning literally "the inhabited earth." Hence the gospel of the kingdom is to be proclaimed wherever there are people. The word translated "nations" is from *ethnos*, meaning not necessarily a political entity but a large number of people who make up a cohesive group socially, culturally, and racially. To all such *ethnē*--wherever they are across the face of the earth--the gospel must be proclaimed as a testimony. Then the end will come.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 320-321.)

- **If we have accepted Christ as our personal Savior, we know we are going to heaven by God's word. My question is: How does God want us to be prepared for the rapture or return of Christ? How do we make ready? What should mark the Christian's attitude and activity?**

I list several marks of preparation with Scripture references:

- Eager Waiting--Philippians 3:20
- Loving Christ's Appearing--2 Timothy 4:8
- Exercising Patience--James 5:7-8
- Purifying Ourselves--1 John 2:28; 3:3
- Being Watchful--Mark 13:32-33
- Practicing Faithfulness--Matthew 25:21, 23
- Proclaiming the Gospel--2 Timothy 4:1-2

I will concentrate on purifying ourselves, for there is much stress in the New Testament on the importance of self-purification and holiness in preparing for Christ's return.

Let us attend to the words from 1 John: "Abide in Him [Christ], so that when He appears we may have confidence and not shrink from Him ['away from Him,' *NASB*] in shame at His coming....Every one who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure."

Will we be ready when the Lord returns? Will we be living in such sin that although His arrival is "our blessed hope" (which indeed it is), we will shrink in shame at His presence? The Lord who will come is holy and pure; shall we meet Him in unholiness and impurity of life? To be sure, none of us will be perfect when Christ returns, but we can make better preparation, as John says, by seeking in every way possible to "purify ourselves as He is pure." Hebrews put it quite strongly: "Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (12:14). If we are striving and seeking for holiness and purity of life, we need not shrink in shame at the Lord's appearing. Are you--am I--making ready?

(The viewer is encouraged to look up the above scriptures and also for fuller elaboration to see my *Renewal Theology*, 3: chapter 9, The Return of Jesus Christ, pages 297-302.)

- **A lot of people say when persons die they either go to heaven or hell. What about the Rapture, do they leave heaven to be raptured from the grave?**

The Rapture refers only to what happens to believers who are living at the time of the return of Christ. Paul writes, "We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [the dead in Christ] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

- **All of the pretrib prognosticators claim Revelation 4:1 is the Rapture. How can this scripture possibly be a historical fact and future prophecy at the same time?**

The words spoken to John, "Come up here," have nothing to do with the Rapture. Rather do they express to John an invitation to come in the Spirit into God's presence and receive divine revelation. To confuse this with the Rapture is to make a critical mistake.

- **I've been told the spirit leaves the body at death. If that is the case, how will the dead in Christ rise?**

It is true that the spirit leaves the body at death, in the case of believers to be with the Lord. "The dead in Christ will rise" (1 Thessalonians 4:16) refers to the bodily resurrection of the same believers which will happen at the return of Christ.

- **I understand that the Lord is coming back for His people. Is every single Christian going to rise to meet Him, or will some be left behind?**

No true Christian will be left behind. That means: If we have been born again and are walking in faith, our destiny is assured.

- **If you will, please explain to me the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming of our Lord. I thought the Rapture is when we (Christians) will be caught up to meet Christ in the air and the Second Coming is when the Lord comes to rule in the 1,000 years. I'm confused, please help.**

The Rapture is *one aspect* of the Second Coming. It is not a separate event. For at the same time that Christ comes to catch up ("rapture") His people, He comes to establish His kingdom rule. And we shall reign with Him for ever!

- **Will the Second Coming of Jesus Christ be after or before the Great Tribulation? What does Jesus say?**

I suggest you turn to Matthew, chapter 24, for Jesus' words. Jesus speaks of tribulation to come three times therein:

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name" (verse 9).

"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall" (verse 21).

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (verses 29-30).

The language is that of "great tribulation" in verse 21. Only thereafter does He speak of His Second Coming which will occur "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (verses 29 and 30). It is apparent that Jesus Himself stated that His Second Coming would occur after much tribulation, including the "Great Tribulation."

- **I've heard that when Jesus returns, He will come like a thief in the night. But I've also heard about Him coming with a shout and trumpets blasting. I've never heard of a thief announcing their arrival with a lot of noise. What will it be like?**

That Christ will return *suddenly* and *unexpectedly* is the meaning behind the imagery of a thief. Note the Lord's words in Matthew 24:42-43: "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into."

- **I love the Lord with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, but I have just one question that I haven't found an answer to: I know when Jesus returns for us (rapture) that we will fly up to Him after the dead in Christ are raised. But when**

people of faith die before the rapture, we are told they are "with Jesus." Please explain if it's possible.

I appreciate your expressed love of the Lord--heart, soul, mind, and strength. You may rest assured that at each believer's death that person will continue to be with Jesus. This is true in the realm of the spirit which is eternal. The body of the believer, however, awaits the resurrection when the Lord returns. So we are with the Lord both now, at death, and in the resurrection and throughout eternity. Praise the Lord!

16. The Consummation – Last Judgment, Eternal Life

- **Could you please tell me how a Christian deals with the death of a loved one or friend (who is not a Christian) who will be in hell for eternity?**

Though hell is a reality, it is not up to us to judge the final state of anyone, but let our spirit rest in the mercy and justice of God. He will surely do what is right.

- **Are there levels in Heaven? I have heard reference to this but cannot find it anywhere now. Paul refers to being caught up to the "third heaven." Is there any valid literature on the subject?**

Paul speaks of "the third Heaven" in 2 Corinthians 12:2—"I knew a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven." "The first heaven" was an expression often used in Paul's time for the clouds, the earth's atmosphere; "the second heaven" for the stars, the physical universe beyond; "the third heaven" would therefore refer to the transcendent spiritual realm of God and His angels. For example, in His ascension, Christ "passed through the heavens" (Hebrews 4:14) on "into heaven itself" (Hebrews 9:24). Accordingly, there are no levels *in* heaven but levels *of* heaven.

- **Please explain the resurrection of the body at the end of time. From my study of the New Testament, it seems that we sleep from death until the resurrection, not that our souls go to heaven immediately.**

At death, believers leave the body to be with Christ. Paul speaks about being "absent from the body...at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The natural body "sleeps" the sleep of death, but not the spirit which at death goes immediately to heaven. Hebrews refers to "the spirits of righteous men made perfect" in heaven (12:23). When the Lord returns, we will receive a new spiritual body—"It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44)—to be joined with our redeemed spirits. United in spirit and in body, we shall ever be with the Lord.

- **Concerning death of the body, do we go straight to heaven (as a born again Christian) or do we go to heaven when Christ returns? There is a Scripture that says the dead will meet Christ in the air first then those who are alive will go up. I am confused as to the state of our spirit when we die.**

Our spirit goes directly to heaven when we die. Jesus Himself at His death said to the Father, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Where the Scripture says that the dead in Christ shall rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16) the reference is to our bodies. They will at this moment be joined to their spirits coming with Christ from heaven (verse 13). This will immediately be followed by the rapture of living believers ("We also who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them"—verse 17). (See *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 407.)

- **If the dead in Christ shall rise first, then where are they now?**

The spirits of the dead in Christ are now in heaven and present with the Lord. Their bodies are not raised until the Day of Resurrection. On that day when Christ returns, their spirits will be joined with their new resurrected bodies. So they will live with the Lord forever.

- **When a believer dies and goes to heaven can he/she recognize known ones (parents, loved ones, and so forth)?**

In heaven there will surely be recognition of other believers known on earth. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah were seen together with Christ—"Behold, two men were talking with Him, and they were Moses and Elijah" (Luke 9:30). Thus Moses and Elijah recognized each other.

Hebrews 12:23 speaks of "the church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." The glorified church in heaven means, along with much else, a common recognition.

Yes, heaven will be a fulfillment of all human relationships without earthly limitations. Truly we will know one another fully and completely and rejoice in the Lord's presence forever!

- **My question is about how Christians will be judged at the final Judgment. Will we be accountable for our sins? Haven't they been removed as far as the east is from the west?**

Paul declares that God has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man (Jesus) whom He has appointed" (Acts 17:31). All people of all times—as well as fallen angels (2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6)—will be present to give account. Paul writes to the Romans, "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God...each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (14:10, 12). Every sin ever committed will be apparent to the eyes of the Judge, *but* in the case of believers they will all be recognized as forgiven. For truly He has removed all sins "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). The giving account will not be a reinitiation of our sins, but a deeper realization of the vast number of them mercifully forgiven in our salvation.

- **Why is the church referred to as the bride of Christ? Are there any Scriptures to base this on? Revelation 20 and 21 talk about the bride of Christ but to me it reads as if New Jerusalem is the bride.**

On the church as the bride of Christ, see for example Ephesians 5:25-32, 2 Corinthians 11:2, and Revelation 19:7-9. "Bride" and "New Jerusalem" are figures of speech to express both the beauty and the magnificence of the church in the world to come (see *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 491-495).

- **In the Bible it says that Christians who do more work for the Lord on earth shall have greater rewards in heaven. How could there be greater rewards in heaven? Isn't being in heaven enough? What kinds of rewards are there in heaven?**

Heaven is truly the Christian's future. In that sense, it is "enough"—to know life everlasting, joy and peace beyond measure, the direct vision of the Lord; what more could one possibly want? But heaven is not a reward; it is totally a matter of God's grace in Christ that we should go there and share equally with all believers. However, there *are* rewards in heaven. For example, Jesus declared about those persecuted for His sake on earth, "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). Jesus speaks also of "a prophet's reward" (Matthew 10:41), hence something special. "Love your enemies...and your reward will be great" (Luke 6:35). What these rewards are, Jesus does not say, but they surely are promised. Heaven, indeed, will be glorious, but we shall also rejoice in the many and varied rewards that our Lord will deliver to His faithful ones. (For more on rewards, see *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 454-457.)

- **I have a question about John 5:28-29: "The dead in the graves will hear the voice of God's Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to judgment." I thought that when we die, our spirit goes to heaven at that very moment. Please explain this verse.**

At death the spirit of the true believer goes directly to be with the Lord. The body will not be raised until the Day of Resurrection. It will then be transformed from a natural body to a spiritual body. See 1 Corinthians 15:44.

- **When you go to heaven, will you remember those who are sinners and went to hell? If you can, how could you ever be truly happy knowing they are in hell?**

In *Renewal Theology*, 3: page 477, I wrote: "Hell with all its misery will be less torment for still sinful persons than to have to live eternally in the presence of a holy God and of those who are continually praising His Name." Again, "the punishment of hell, whatever its measure, will be far less than the punishment of being in the courts of heaven; the fire of Gehenna far more tolerable than the brilliance of God's face; the outer darkness of the nether world infinitely more bearable than the splendor of heaven's glory." The saints in heaven would not be happy at seeing sinners having to endure all this.

- **Question: After I get to heaven, will I still have to fight temptation and sin?**

Answer: No, the fight against temptation and sin belongs to the present world. In heaven, our spirits will be made perfect in righteousness (see Hebrews 12:23). Temptation and sin will be forever gone!

- **Who is the "Antichrist"?**

The antichrist is one who deceives others by denying that Christ is God come in the flesh. "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7, NASB). This is the ultimate deception, namely, that the Incarnation did not occur; anyone who denies this is "the deceiver," "the antichrist." By such deception the ultimate in apostasy occurs: Jesus Christ, the Word become flesh, is spurned.

I have quoted from John's second letter. In his first letter, John emphasizes that it is "the last hour" because of the many antichrists that have appeared: "As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour" (2:18). Later he adds, "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son" (v. 22). Still later in this letter John speaks about "the spirit of antichrist" (4:3) being now present in the world.

Incidentally, there are no other occurrences of the word *antichrist* in the New Testament. I have mentioned all of them: 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7.

From these statements there is no suggestion that "antichrist" or "the antichrist" is a particular person. *Anyone* who denies the coming of Christ from the Father, that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14)—the central truth of Christian faith—is "the antichrist." Thus, many antichrists have come, and many more will come. For "the spirit of antichrist" is in the world—all the way to the end. What, then, about "the last hour"? It is "the hour" of the multiplication of antichrists (again see 1 John 2:18).

The antichrist, then, is not one who commits such sins as murder, adultery, and theft—even to the maximal degree. Rather he is actually far worse than any of this, for he deceives people about Jesus Christ. In this wicked deception (which ultimately goes back to *the Deceiver*—Satan), he shuts the door to eternal life. He is "*anti*"—opposed to—"Christ." This is the ultimate evil, and his activity is the ultimate deception. For there is no greater tragedy in the world than that of turning people aside from Christ, the Son of God, who has wrought mankind's salvation.

(For a more extended discussion of the Antichrist, see my *Renewal Theology* 3:330-34, including footnotes—especially 58.)

- **What about the salvation of Israel in the end times?**

The focus of gospel proclamation throughout the centuries has been to the "nations" or "Gentiles"—the *ethne*—primarily. When they have all had an opportunity to hear and respond, the end will come. But—and this is an additional highly significant fact—the end will not occur without Israel's coming to salvation. Paul writes, "Lest you [Gentiles] be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number [or fullness] of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). Paul had pointed in this direction earlier: "Now if their [Israel's] trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion [or fullness] mean!"

(Romans 11:12}. Thus the fullness of the Gentiles—through proclamation of the gospel to the *ethne*, and the growth of the kingdom (largely Gentile growth)—is not the last word! Indeed, there will finally be such a fullness of Israel when their hardness and blindness to the gospel is overcome as to vastly enrich the whole world. For the almost unbelievable truth is that *all Israel will be saved*. The fullness of Gentiles will climax with the fullness of Israel.

All of this belongs to the realm of "mystery." Moreover, it shows that God is not done with Israel. Paul had earlier said, "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2). Although for a time Israel has been cut off, like branches, through unbelief, and the Gentiles grafted in, God will "graft them in again (11:23). When this happens, truly the end is at hand!

When the Lord returns, it will be to an Israel who is blessing His name—indeed, along with Gentiles from all over the world.

(See *Renewal Theology*, 3: pages 323-326.)

- **What happens to those souls who are predestined for eternal damnation?**

There is no teaching in the New Testament about eternal damnation as predestined by God. God does not will anyone to eternal death. It is the result of an unbelieving life. The word "predestined" is used only in connection with salvation. For example, note the words in Romans 8:30: "And whom He predestined, these He also called, and whom He called, these He also justified, and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

- **What does someone who is a Christian and calls themselves a "universalist" mean?**

Universalism is the view that ultimately all people will obtain salvation. In a popular vein, universalism is the outright denial of hell because God is viewed too good to send anyone there. Hence, if there is a heaven God will take in everyone. Universalism, however, fails to recognize that God is also a God of righteous judgment who will provide a way of salvation for those who believe in His son and continuing separation for those who turn from Him and His ways. Heaven and hell are both realities.

- **I would like to know if Judas was sorry for betraying Jesus and that is why he killed himself? Also, if he was sorry was he forgiven or was he sent to hell?**

According to Matthew 27:3, Judas "felt remorse" which is a worldly sorrow. The fact that he went out and hanged himself shows that there was no true repentance or godly sorrow. Paul writes, "The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of this world produces death." Thus there could be no forgiveness, and Judas was doomed forever.

- **Will we know each other in heaven? I believe yes! But with a greater love than our earthly ties. Knowing that I would see my Dad again was what helped**

me through my grieving his death, also, knowing he was in the presence of Jesus.

Rest assured that we will know one another in heaven. Indeed, this will go beyond any earthly knowledge. According to Scripture, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

- **Will we see the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in Heaven or just Jesus? I heard a teacher explain that we will only see Jesus, and I thought what a disappointment it would seem to be since I pray to my Father in heaven so often--- I long to see Him face to face---just like I do Jesus.**

In heaven there will be the fulfillment of our worship of the Triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus in regard to God as Father, as to each other member the trinity, there will be fullness of prayer and praise for which earthly prayers to God have been but preparation.

Your longing to see the Father face to face will be granted.

Praise His glorious name!