

WHERE CHRISTIANS DISAGREE

20 major questions of faith explored

Bible, salvation, church, Spirit, Israel, the end times and eternity



GERARD FELLER

— FELLER BOOKS —

WHERE CHRISTIANS DISAGREE

20 major questions of faith explored

Bible, salvation, church, Spirit, Israel, the end times and eternity

Gerard Feller

Feller Books

Copyright

Where Christians Disagree

20 major questions of faith explored

© Gerard Feller

Published by Feller Books.

All rights reserved.

First Feller Books publisher's edition.

English translation of the supplied Dutch edition. The source's editorial proposals and examples remain identified as proposals and examples. Biblical quotations are English renderings of the wording supplied in the Dutch text. Hebrew terms appear in transliteration where needed for legibility.

Dedication

For everyone who has discovered that sincere Christians can read the same Bible and nevertheless reach different conclusions.

And for everyone who did not stop searching afterwards.

Motto

“Test everything. Hold on to what is good.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21

Foreword

Anyone discovering for the first time how many different Christian churches and movements exist may feel thoroughly confused. This book does not seek to win twenty arguments, but to investigate why Christians think differently, which biblical passages prove decisive and how these differences arose historically. Six traditions are regularly compared: evangelical, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist, and charismatic or Pentecostal. Important internal differences exist within every tradition. We therefore compare arguments rather than labels alone.

Three questions recur throughout: What does the text say? What does it mean? How have Christians reached different conclusions from the same Scriptures?

How to Read This Book and Its Method

The twenty chapters can be read separately, but together they form a single argument. The book's own emphasis is the classical evangelical conviction that Scripture is the decisive standard for faith and life, and that salvation rests entirely on God's grace in Jesus Christ. At the same time, each tradition is described, as far as possible, through its own primary sources.

One important rule governs study of the original languages: a dictionary definition is not yet exegesis. The meaning of a Hebrew or Greek word depends on its sentence, paragraph, biblical book and historical context. Understanding is also different from agreeing. A position is first presented as fairly as possible, after which its arguments are weighed.

Contents

WHERE CHRISTIANS DISAGREE	2
Copyright	3
Dedication	4
Motto	5
Foreword	6
How to Read This Book and Its Method	7
AUTHORITY, SALVATION AND GRACE	12
Who Has the Final Word?	13
How Is a Person Saved?	18
Does God Choose Us, or Do We Choose God?	23
Can You Lose Your Salvation?	27
Who Should Be Baptised?	31
CHURCH, SACRAMENT AND HOLY SPIRIT	37
What Happens at the Lord's Supper?	38
What Is the True Church?	43
Who May Lead?	47

Does God Still Speak Directly Today?	52
Are Tongues and Miraculous Gifts Still for Today?	56
HEALING, ISRAEL, CHRIST'S RETURN AND ETERNITY	63
Does God Still Heal Today?	64
What Place Does Israel Have?	68
What Happens Before Christ Returns?	73
What Is the Millennium?	77
What Happens Immediately After Death?	81
JUDGEMENT, MARY, CREATION AND CHRISTIAN LIFE	88
Is Hell Eternal?	89
Does Purgatory Exist?	95
What Place Do Mary and the Saints Have?	99
How Should We Read Genesis?	104
How Does the Bible Shape Our Ethics?	109
MAJOR TIMELINE: 2,000 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCES	116
CONCLUDING REFLECTION	121
AFTERWORD	124

FINAL WORD	125
GLOSSARY OF HEBREW AND GREEK TERMS	126
KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES BY CHAPTER	132
SOURCES AND FURTHER STUDY	134
SOURCE APPARATUS	136
I. PRIMARY SOURCES	136
II. THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS	137
III. REFORMATION SOURCES	138
IV. REFORMED CONFESSIONS	138
V. ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SOURCES	138
VI. EASTERN ORTHODOX SOURCES	139
VII. BAPTIST SOURCES	140
VIII. PENTECOSTAL SOURCES	140
IX. IMPORTANT SECONDARY LITERATURE	141
X. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY	141
XI. HOLY SPIRIT AND CHARISMATA	141
XII. END TIMES AND REVELATION	142
XIII. CREATION AND SCIENCE	142
XIV. EXAMPLE OF A NOTES APPARATUS	142
XV. SOURCE FRAMEWORK FOR EACH CHAPTER	144

XVI. EDITORIAL RULE FOR SOURCES 144

XVII. MAIN BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS 144

XVIII. SOURCES FOR THE SIX TRADITIONS 145

XIX. AN IMPORTANT EDITORIAL CORRECTION 145

XX. CONCLUSION OF THE SOURCE APPARATUS 146

PART I

AUTHORITY, SALVATION AND GRACE

CHAPTER 1

Who Has the Final Word?

Scripture, Tradition and Church Authority

Central question

When two Christians read the same Bible but reach different conclusions, who ultimately determines which interpretation is correct?

This question underlies almost every difference discussed in this book: baptism, the Lord's Supper, Mary, election, spiritual gifts, Israel and the end times.

The same fundamental question keeps returning: Where does supreme authority for Christian faith and life reside?

1. Scripture as God-inspired

Paul writes:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

2 Timothy 3:16

The key word is θεόπνευστος, *theopneustos*. Literally: God-breathed. The word combines *theos*, God, and *pneō*, to blow or breathe.

According to Paul, Scripture therefore has a unique origin. This provides an important basis for the high view of Scripture held by almost all classical Christian traditions.

The difference does not begin with asking whether the Bible matters. It begins with asking whether the Bible is the only infallible standard.

2. Sola Scriptura

The Reformation formulated the principle Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone.

In its classical form, this does not mean that tradition is worthless. Nor does it mean that every individual Christian may interpret the Bible however he wishes.

It means that no church tradition, council, theologian or office-holder possesses the same ultimate authority as inspired Scripture.

Traditions can be useful. Confessions can function authoritatively. Church Fathers can help. Yet they remain open to examination.

3. The Bereans

Acts 17 praises the Bereans because they examined the Scriptures daily to assess whether Paul's preaching agreed with God's Word.

For Protestants, this is a powerful example: even apostolic preaching is connected in the narrative with examining Scripture.

4. Jesus and human traditions

In Mark 7, Jesus criticises religious leaders for placing human traditions above God's command.

This is an important warning. A tradition may be ancient, religious and followed by many generations. Age alone does not make it true.

5. Yet Paul also speaks about tradition

Alongside this stands 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Paul calls believers to hold to the traditions they received either orally or by letter.

The Greek word is παράδοσις, *paradosis*: transmission or tradition. Catholic and Orthodox theology therefore rightly observes that the New Testament does not automatically use tradition negatively.

The decisive question is: Which tradition is genuinely apostolic?

6. The Roman Catholic view

In Roman Catholic theology, Scripture and apostolic Tradition are not intended as two competing revelations. They belong to one transmitted deposit of faith.

The Church's teaching authority, the Magisterium, has the task of authentically preserving and interpreting revealed truth.

For Protestants, this raises the question: Who ultimately checks the teaching authority?

Catholics raise the reverse question: Who safeguards correct interpretation when everyone appeals only to an individual reading of the Bible?

7. The Eastern Orthodox view

Orthodox Christians are less inclined to describe Scripture and Tradition as two separate sources. Scripture lives within Holy Tradition.

This includes Scripture, liturgy, the early councils, the Church Fathers and the prayer life of the Church. The Bible cannot therefore be detached from the community of faith in which it was received and handed on.

8. The evangelical view

Evangelical Christians generally emphasise personal reading of Scripture, conversion, preaching, Bible study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This has great strength, but also carries a risk. When historical theology receives little attention, people may assume their own interpretation is obviously “simply biblical”. Evangelical Bible reading therefore needs church history too.

9. The Baptist perspective

Baptists also strongly emphasise Scripture as the highest standard. The local congregation often bears significant responsibility. No bishop or pope necessarily stands between Christ and the local community of faith.

At the same time, Baptist traditions possess confessions and strong theological inheritances.

10. The Pentecostal and charismatic perspective

Pentecostal Christians usually share the Protestant high view of Scripture. They also emphasise the Holy Spirit's present guidance. This establishes an important boundary: a prophecy, impression, vision or spiritual experience must never be placed above Scripture.

Discernment becomes especially necessary when someone says, “God told me...”

Comparison for Chapter 1

Tradition	Highest authority	Place of tradition	Interpretation
Evangelical	Scripture	Valuable but subordinate	Scripture, Spirit, congregation
Reformed	Scripture	Confessions as a secondary standard	Scripture interprets Scripture
Roman Catholic	Scripture and apostolic Tradition within one deposit of faith	Constitutive	Magisterium
Eastern Orthodox	Scripture within Holy Tradition	Central	Church, councils, Fathers, liturgy
Baptist	Scripture	Subordinate	Scripture and local congregation
Pentecostal/charismatic	Scripture	Usually subordinate	Scripture and present guidance of the Spirit

Timeline

1st century: Apostolic preaching and the emergence of New Testament writings.

2nd-4th centuries: Growing recognition and delimitation of the canon.

4th-5th centuries: Major councils and further development of church teaching authority.

1054: Traditional marker of the division between East and West.

16th century: Reformation and forceful formulation of Sola Scriptura.

16th century: Catholic response and further formulation of Scripture and Tradition.

17th century: Further development of Protestant and Baptist traditions.

20th century: Growth of Pentecostal and charismatic movements.

Conclusion

The first disagreement shapes almost all the others.

Who determines what a biblical passage means? The individual believer? The local congregation? The historic Church? A council? The Magisterium? Scripture interpreting itself?

The answer largely determines how the following nineteen questions are answered.

CHAPTER 2

How Is a Person Saved?

Grace, Faith, Works and Sacraments

Central question

What must happen for a sinful person to be reconciled to God?

Must that person believe, perform works, be baptised, receive sacraments or repent? Or does God do everything?

1. The problem of sin

Romans 3:23:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The Greek word ἁμαρτία, hamartia, means sin.

In the Bible, sin is more than a collection of wrong actions. It affects humanity's relationship with God. People therefore need more than improvement. They need redemption.

2. Charis: grace

A central word is χάρις, charis: grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 connects salvation with grace and faith:

“For by grace you have been saved, through faith...”

The initiative lies with God. The gospel begins not with what human beings must do for God, but with what God has done for them.

3. Pistis: faith

Depending on context, πίστις, pistis, can carry meanings such as faith, trust and faithfulness.

Biblical faith is therefore more than intellectually accepting that God exists. It is trusting Christ.

4. Justification

The verb δικαιόω, *dikaioō*, means to justify. Related to it is δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiosynē*: righteousness.

The Reformation placed these concepts at the centre. How can a sinner stand righteous before a holy God?

The Reformation answer was: by God's grace, on the basis of Christ, received through faith.

5. Sola gratia and sola fide

Two familiar Reformation expressions are *sola gratia*, by grace alone, and *sola fide*, by faith alone.

In this view, good works do not cause justification. They result from genuine faith.

The sequence is therefore not good works leading to salvation, but grace, faith, salvation, and a renewed life bearing good works.

6. James

Then James writes:

“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

This appears to contradict Paul directly. Yet the contexts differ. Paul challenges reliance on human works as the basis of justification. James challenges dead faith that produces no fruit.

The classical Protestant formulation is therefore: We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies does not remain alone.

7. The Catholic view

A caricature must be avoided: “Protestants believe in grace and Catholics in works.”

This does not do justice to Catholic doctrine. Catholic theology also teaches that God's grace comes first. Human beings cannot simply earn their initial justification.

Yet justification is more closely connected with inner renewal and sacramental life. Baptism, Eucharist and other sacraments function within the life of grace.

8. The Orthodox view

Orthodox theology often has a different emphasis. Salvation is described as healing, restoration, union with God and participation in God's life.

An important concept is *θέωσις*, theōsis: deification. This does not mean that a person becomes God in essence. It means participation in God's life through grace. Second Peter 1:4 speaks of sharing in the divine nature.

9. Being born again

Evangelical Christians emphasise Jesus' words in John 3: “You must be born again.”

The Greek *ἀνωθεν*, anōthen, can mean both again and from above. New birth is therefore not human self-improvement. New life comes from God.

10. Six traditions

Tradition	Emphasis in salvation	Works	Sacraments
Evangelical	Grace through personal faith in Christ	Fruit of faith	Varying emphasis
Reformed	Justification by faith alone	Necessary as fruit	Signs and seals of grace
Roman Catholic	Grace that forgives and renews	Response to grace	Essential within sacramental life
Eastern Orthodox	Healing and theosis	Cooperation within grace	Central
Baptist	Conversion, faith, new birth	Fruit of new birth	Usually ordinances
Pentecostal/charismatic	Conversion, new birth, life by the Spirit	Fruit of the Spirit	Depends on church background

Historical timeline

1st century: Paul, James and apostolic preaching.

4th-5th centuries: Augustine and debates about grace and the human will.

16th century: Luther and the Reformation place justification at the centre.

1545-1563: Council of Trent.

17th century: Further Protestant debates about grace and election.

18th-19th centuries: Revival movements strongly emphasise personal conversion.

20th century: Worldwide growth of Pentecostalism.

Conclusion

The major Christian traditions do not say that human beings save themselves.

The difference primarily concerns how God's grace justifies, renews, is received through faith, functions in sacraments and becomes visible in good works.

CHAPTER 3

Does God Choose Us, or Do We Choose God?

Election, Predestination and Free Will

Central question

If two people hear the same gospel and only one believes, why does one believe and the other not?

Does the decisive difference ultimately lie in God's election or in the human response?

1. Eklegomai: choosing

The Greek verb ἐκλέγομαι, eklegomai, means to choose or select.

Ephesians 1 says that God chose believers in Christ before the foundation of the world.

2. Proorizō: predestining

Προορίζω, proorizō, means to determine beforehand. Paul uses it in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1, among other passages.

The debate is not whether the word occurs in the Bible. It concerns what people are predestined for, on what basis, individually or corporately, and how this relates to human responsibility.

3. Augustine and Pelagius

An early major debate arose between Augustine and Pelagius. Pelagius was accused of emphasising human ability to obey so strongly that the necessity of grace was undermined.

The Church rejected the idea that people can save themselves without prior divine grace.

This matters. The later debate between Calvinists and Arminians is not simply the same as Augustine versus Pelagius. Arminianism is not Pelagianism.

4. Reformed teaching on election

The Reformed tradition emphasises God's sovereign initiative. Because of sin, human beings are not neutral. Unless God intervenes graciously, nobody comes.

Election therefore does not ultimately rest on human merit. Salvation is grace from beginning to end.

5. John 6

Jesus says: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

The Greek verb ἐλκύω, *helkyō*, means to draw. Reformed interpreters often see an effective divine drawing here. Arminian interpreters stress that God's grace is genuinely necessary, but ask whether that drawing must be irresistible.

6. Arminius

Jacobus Arminius and later Arminian theology sought to preserve both God's grace and human responsibility.

People do not save themselves. God takes the initiative. Yet in many Arminian models, God's prevenient grace makes a genuine human response possible. Grace can then be resisted.

7. Romans 9

Romans 9 is central: Jacob and Esau, the potter and the clay, and God's mercy.

Reformed theology sees powerful support here for God's sovereign election.

Other interpreters emphasise that Romans 9-11 also concerns Israel, the nations, salvation history, and the place of Jews and Gentiles. Romans 9 must therefore not be read apart from Chapters 10 and 11.

8. The universal invitation

Alongside this stand passages such as John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9 and Revelation 22:17.

The gospel invitation is proclaimed widely. Every model of election must therefore also do justice to God's call: Come.

Two classical Protestant models compared

Question	Reformed	Arminian
Who takes the initiative?	God	God
Is grace necessary?	Yes	Yes
Can people save themselves?	No	No
Election	Unconditional	Often related to foreknowledge and a response made possible by grace
Saving grace	Effective in God's calling	Can be resisted
Human choice	Real within God's sovereignty	Real through prevenient grace
Basis of salvation	Christ alone	Christ alone

Timeline

1st century: New Testament texts on election and responsibility.

5th century: Augustine and Pelagius.

16th century: Calvin and Reformed development.

c. 1560-1609: Life and work of Jacobus Arminius.

1610: The Remonstrance. 1618-1619: Synod of Dort.

18th century: John Wesley and further development of Arminian soteriology.

20th century: Strong Arminian influence within many Pentecostal traditions.

Conclusion

The Bible speaks powerfully about God's election, God's initiative, human responsibility and the call to faith.

A system that simply makes one of these disappear fails to do justice to the tension in the text.

Paul ultimately concludes his extensive treatment of the subject with worship rather than confident speculation:

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”

CHAPTER 4

Can You Lose Your Salvation?

Assurance, Apostasy and Perseverance

Central question

Can someone truly be born again and later be lost for ever?

1. No one will snatch them out of my hand

John 10 contains some of the strongest passages about assurance. Jesus gives his sheep eternal life. Nobody will snatch them out of his hand.

Assurance therefore rests primarily not in the strength with which the sheep holds on to the Shepherd. The Shepherd holds on to the sheep.

2. Romans 8

Paul writes: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Later comes the magnificent climax: nothing can separate believers from God's love in Christ. This forms a powerful basis for Christian assurance.

3. Perseverance of the saints

The Reformed tradition speaks of the perseverance of the saints. This does not simply mean that once a prayer has been said, a person is eternally secure regardless of the rest of life.

The classical understanding is that whoever has truly been born again by God will ultimately persevere in faith through God's preserving grace. God keeps his children.

4. Hebrews 6

Then come the difficult warnings. Hebrews 6 describes people who have been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, shared in the Holy Spirit and subsequently fallen away.

The verb *παραπίπτω*, *parapiptō*, means to fall away.

Arminian interpreters see a real possibility here that genuine believers may fall away. Reformed interpreters reply that people may participate deeply in the visible covenant community without inwardly having been definitively born again.

5. Hebrews 10

Hebrews 10 also contains serious warnings. The question is whether warnings are hypothetical, descriptive or genuinely conditional.

One Reformed answer may be: God uses the warnings themselves as a means through which his children persevere. A warning's effectiveness does not make it unreal.

6. John 15

Jesus speaks of the vine and branches. A branch bearing no fruit is taken away.

Arminian interpreters see a warning of genuine apostasy. Reformed interpreters distinguish outward connection with the visible community from a real living connection with Christ.

7. First John 2:19

John writes of people who left the community: "They went out from us, but they were not of us."

This is an important passage for the Reformed interpretation. In this view, apostasy may reveal that the earlier profession of faith did not correspond to genuine new birth.

Six traditions

Tradition	Can final apostasy occur?	Emphasis
Evangelical	Divided	Assurance and a call to persevere
Reformed	Those truly born again ultimately persevere	God's preserving grace
Roman Catholic	Grace can be lost through serious sin	Perseverance, sacraments, reconciliation
Eastern Orthodox	Apostasy is genuinely possible	Continuing participation in God's life
Baptist	Varied	From eternal security to conditional security
Pentecostal/charismatic	Classical Pentecostal traditions often affirm the possibility	Persevering faith

Timeline

- 1st century: Promises and warnings alongside each other in the New Testament.
- 4th-5th centuries: Debates about grace and perseverance.
- 16th century: Reformation and Catholic response.
- 1618-1619: Dort and the formulation of perseverance of the saints.
- 18th century: Wesleyan emphasis on the real possibility of falling away.
- 20th century: Both models within the worldwide evangelical movement.

Pastoral significance

Two mistakes must be avoided. The first is constant fear that every sin immediately destroys salvation. The second is complacency because an earlier faith decision automatically guarantees everything.

The New Testament combines assurance with perseverance. God preserves. And: remain in Christ.

Conclusion

Perhaps promise and warning should not be played off against each other. Believers may rest in Christ. Yet that very rest leads them to remain with Christ.

CHAPTER 5

Who Should Be Baptised?

Infant Baptism and Believer's Baptism

Central question

Should baptism be given to believers and their children, or only to people who personally profess faith?

1. Baptizō

The Greek verb βαπτίζω, baptizō, means to baptise, immerse or wash.

Baptism has belonged to the Christian community from the beginning. Jesus commands his followers to make disciples and baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. The pattern in Acts

In Acts we regularly see proclamation, faith, repentance, and baptism.

At Pentecost: “Repent and let each of you be baptised.”

The Ethiopian official hears the gospel and is baptised. Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit and are baptised. The jailer in Philippi is baptised.

For Baptists, this forms a powerful pattern: faith first, then baptism.

3. Credobaptism

The term comes from credo, I believe. Believer's baptism presupposes a personal profession of faith.

Baptism symbolises, among other things, union with Christ, death and resurrection, washing, new life and entry into the community of faith.

4. Household baptism

The New Testament mentions several occasions when an entire οἶκος, oikos, a house or household, was baptised. Supporters of infant baptism point out that a household in the ancient world could include children.

Baptists reply that the texts nowhere explicitly state that babies were present. Household baptism passages therefore cannot simply settle the debate.

5. The covenant argument

For Reformed supporters of infant baptism, the strongest argument usually lies not in an explicit baptism of a baby in Acts, but in the covenant.

In the Old Testament, children received the covenant sign. Abraham received circumcision, and so did his sons.

The question then becomes: If children belonged to God's visible covenant community under the old covenant, where does the new covenant explicitly exclude them?

6. Colossians 2

Paul brings circumcision and baptism together in one passage. Paedobaptists see support here for covenant continuity.

Baptists reply that Paul speaks of a circumcision without hands, and that the New Testament community is characterised precisely by personal faith.

Here too, broader covenant theology shapes interpretation.

7. Acts 2:39

Peter says: “For the promise is for you and for your children...”

Supporters of infant baptism hear clear covenant language. Baptists point to what follows: “...and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Both sides therefore use the same passage.

8. The Roman Catholic view

Within Roman Catholic tradition, baptism is a sacrament of Christian initiation.

Baptism is associated with forgiveness, new birth, incorporation into Christ and admission into the Church.

Children too are baptised because God's grace precedes the human capacity to understand it intellectually.

9. The Orthodox view

The Orthodox Church also baptises children. Immersion is traditionally important.

Baptism, chrismation and participation in the Eucharist are closely connected elements of initiation.

Orthodox practice therefore differs markedly from many Western Protestant models, in which a child waits years after baptism before participating in the Lord's Supper.

10. Reformed infant baptism

Reformed infant baptism must not be confused with the idea: “This child has been baptised, so personal salvation is automatically guaranteed.”

Baptism functions as a sign and seal of God's covenant. The baptised child is later personally called to faith and repentance.

11. The Baptist objection

The Baptist replies that under the new covenant, the sign should be given to those who have themselves become disciples.

The sequence should therefore be gospel, faith, baptism.

In this view, baptism without a personal profession of faith fails to match the New Testament pattern.

12. How much water?

There is a second difference: immersion, pouring or sprinkling?

Baptists emphasise that immersion fits Romans 6 particularly well: buried with Christ and raised to new life.

Other traditions point out that the theological meaning of washing and cleansing need not depend on the quantity of water.

Comparison

Tradition	Who is baptised?	Meaning
Evangelical	Often believers, in some traditions children too	Faith, discipleship, incorporation
Reformed	Believers and their children	Covenant sign and seal
Roman Catholic	Adults and children	Sacramental new birth and incorporation
Eastern Orthodox	Adults and children	Sacramental initiation
Baptist	Professing believers	Obedience and a sign of faith/union with Christ
Pentecostal/charismatic	Usually professing believers	Testimony of faith and new life

Timeline

1st century: Baptism central to missionary preaching.

2nd-3rd centuries: Further development of baptismal instruction. Historical evidence of infant baptism becomes visible.

4th century: Baptism deeply embedded in ecclesiastical and social Christianity.

16th century: Reformers largely retain infant baptism.

16th century: Anabaptists reject infant baptism and emphasise believer's baptism.

17th century: Development of the Baptist movement.

20th century: Pentecostalism generally adopts believer's baptism.

The deepest question

The debate ultimately concerns more than water. What is the Church? Who belongs to the covenant? What does a sacrament do? What place does personal faith have? How do Old and New Testaments relate? It is therefore difficult to resolve baptism without first examining one's understanding of church, covenant and salvation.

OVERVIEW OF PART I

Chapter	Main question	Decisive theological difference
1	Who has the final word?	Scripture and Tradition
2	How is a person saved?	Justification, grace and sacrament
3	Who chooses whom?	Election and free will
4	Can salvation be lost?	Assurance and perseverance
5	Who is baptised?	Covenant and personal faith

Timeline of Part I

1st century: Apostolic preaching, Scripture, conversion, faith, baptism and the formation of congregations.

2nd-5th centuries: Formation of the canon, Church Fathers, sacramental development and debates about grace.

Augustine: Major influence on Western ideas about sin, grace, election and baptism.

1054: East and West move decisively further apart institutionally.

1517 and afterwards: The Reformation makes scriptural authority, justification and sacraments central disputed issues.

16th century: Anabaptists radicalise debate about church and baptism.

1618-1619: Dort, election, grace and perseverance.

17th century: Baptist traditions develop further.

18th-19th centuries: Revival movements strongly emphasise personal conversion and the decision of faith. 20th century: Pentecostal and charismatic movements bring renewed emphasis on experience of the Holy Spirit.

Central conclusion of Part I

The first five differences prove closely connected. Those who define authority differently read the doctrine of salvation differently. Understanding salvation differently changes views of election and free will. This then affects perseverance. All these questions meet again in baptism.

One of this book's most important lessons becomes apparent: Christian doctrines rarely exist in isolation. They form a network. Change one fundamental conviction, and other convictions often move with it.

Before asking which tradition is right, we must therefore understand the theological framework through which each tradition reads the Bible.

PART II

CHURCH, SACRAMENT AND HOLY SPIRIT

CHAPTER 6

What Happens at the Lord's Supper?

Symbol, Real Presence and Eucharist

Central question

When Jesus takes bread and says, “This is my body”, what does he mean?

Is the bread primarily a memorial sign? Is Christ truly present spiritually? Or do bread and wine truly become his body and blood?

1. The institution

The institution of the Lord's Supper is described in the Synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians 11.

Jesus takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it to his disciples.

The Greek verb εὐχαριστέω, eucharisteō, means to give thanks. The word Eucharist is related to it.

2. “This is my body”

The Greek wording is τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου, touto estin to sōma mou: “This is my body.”

The word ἐστιν, estin, means is.

Yet this does not automatically resolve the debate. Language can function literally, symbolically, sacramentally or metaphorically.

The question is therefore: In what way is the bread Christ's body?

3. Koinōnia

First Corinthians 10 uses another important word: κοινωνία, koinōnia, fellowship, sharing or participation.

Paul speaks of participation in Christ's blood and body. For Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Reformed interpreters, this is an important reason not to reduce the Lord's Supper to a purely intellectual recollection.

4. First Corinthians 11

Paul gives a serious warning against unworthy participation. Whoever eats and drinks unworthily sins against the Lord's body and blood. Paul even connects abuse with illness and death within the congregation. This underlines the seriousness of the Lord's Supper. Yet the traditions explain that seriousness differently.

5. John 6

Jesus speaks of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Catholic and Orthodox interpreters see strong Eucharistic resonances here.

Others emphasise that John 6 takes place before the institution of the Lord's Supper and primarily concerns faith in Christ.

The question is whether Jesus speaks directly about the Eucharist, or uses language later receiving sacramental expression in the Lord's Supper.

6. The early Church

The Lord's meal assumed a central place early in Christian congregational life. Early Christian texts sometimes speak strikingly realistically about body and blood.

Yet caution is necessary. Later scholastic concepts must not simply be projected backwards onto every early formulation.

7. Transubstantiation

Roman Catholic tradition uses the term transubstantiation. According to this teaching, the deepest reality, the substance, of bread and wine changes into Christ's body and blood, while their observable properties remain.

This does not mean that Christ is crucified again. The Eucharist is understood in relation to Christ's one, unique sacrifice.

8. Orthodox mystery

The Orthodox Church likewise confesses Christ's real presence. Bread and wine are truly received as his body and blood.

Yet the Orthodox approach traditionally feels less need to explain the mystery exhaustively through scholastic philosophical categories.

It remains *mysterion*: mystery.

9. Luther

Martin Luther rejected the idea that the Lord's Supper is merely a memorial meal. He took the words "This is my body" very seriously. Christ is truly present.

Lutheran sacramental theology must not simply be reduced to the popular term consubstantiation. That term does not always represent Luther's own formulations accurately.

10. Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli placed greater emphasis on the Lord's Supper as remembrance, confession, communal meal and sign. The famous dispute between Luther and Zwingli shows that the Reformation itself produced no uniform doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

11. Calvin

John Calvin did not simply choose between Rome and a purely symbolic interpretation. He spoke of real spiritual communion with Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit, believers are truly nourished with Christ. Christ need not be bodily enclosed in bread and wine for this to happen.

12. The Baptist approach

In many Baptist congregations, the emphasis lies on remembrance, proclamation of Christ's death, fellowship and obedience.

Yet symbol does not necessarily mean unimportant. A symbol can powerfully represent a reality.

Comparison

Tradition	Bread and wine	Christ's presence
Evangelical	Usually remembrance/sign	Varied
Reformed	Sign and seal	Real spiritual communion
Roman Catholic	Eucharistic gifts become body and blood	Real sacramental presence
Eastern Orthodox	Truly body and blood in mystery	Real
Baptist	Primarily remembrance and proclamation	Usually not bodily/sacramental
Pentecostal/charismatic	Often evangelical-symbolic, depending on church background	Varied

Timeline

1st century: Institution by Jesus, 1 Corinthians.

2nd-5th centuries: Eucharist central to church life.

Middle Ages: Further systematisation of Eucharistic theology.

1215: The terminology of transubstantiation receives important ecclesiastical formulation in the West.

1529: Marburg Colloquy, Luther and Zwingli.

16th century: Calvin develops a distinct Reformed approach.

20th-21st centuries: Ecumenical conversations again seek agreements and differences.

Conclusion

All traditions take the Lord's Supper seriously, but differ over what truly happens.

The discussion touches Christology, church, sacrament, sign and reality, body and spirit, and once again church authority.

CHAPTER 7

What Is the True Church?

Congregation, Institution and Apostolic Succession

Central question

Jesus said, “I will build my Church.” Yet thousands of church bodies exist today. Where, then, is that one Church?

1. Ekklēsia

The Greek word ἐκκλησία, *ekklēsia*, means assembly, congregation or church.

In the New Testament, it can refer to a local congregation, several congregations or Christ's universal community.

The Church is therefore primarily a community, rather than a building.

2. Christ is the Head

The New Testament calls the Church Christ's body. Christ is the Head. This provides an important corrective to every church structure. No pope, patriarch, bishop, synod, minister, apostle or elder can replace Christ.

3. Peter and the rock

Matthew 16 is central. Jesus says to Peter: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.”

In Greek: Πέτρος, *Petros*, and πέτρα, *petra*.

Interpretations differ. The rock is Peter, Peter's confession of faith, Christ, or Peter as a confessing apostle. This interpretation has major consequences for debate about the papacy.

4. The Catholic view

Catholic theology sees Peter as bearing a special apostolic responsibility. Matthew 16, Luke 22 and John 21 are among the passages considered.

Peter receives the keys. Jesus prays especially for him. He is commanded to feed the sheep.

Within this tradition, the bishop of Rome is associated with the continuation of Peter's office.

5. The Protestant objection

Protestants acknowledge Peter's important role. Yet they ask where the New Testament teaches that Peter's special position must be passed to a permanent succession of Roman bishops possessing universal authority.

Moreover, Paul confronts Peter in Galatians 2. James also plays an important role in Acts 15. The apostolic Church therefore has more than one important leader.

6. Apostolic succession

Catholic and Orthodox churches emphasise apostolic succession. Bishops stand within a historical continuity of ordination and church life reaching back to the apostolic Church.

The Reformation placed the emphasis differently. For many Protestants, true apostolicity consists primarily in faithfulness to apostolic teaching.

An unbroken line of office has little value if the content of the apostolic gospel is lost.

7. East and West

Orthodox Christians affirm apostolic succession and the historic episcopate. Yet they do not accept the same universal papal jurisdiction that the Roman Catholic Church attributes to the bishop of Rome.

This subject particularly demonstrates why Catholic and Orthodox cannot be merged into one tradition.

8. Marks of the true Church

The Reformation frequently asked how to recognise the true Church. Many Protestant formulations emphasise the pure preaching of God's Word, the proper administration of sacraments and, in some traditions, church discipline.

9. The local congregation

Baptist ecclesiology strongly emphasises the local congregation of believers. Christ is the Head. The congregation bears significant responsibility for membership, discipline, office-holders, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Congregations can cooperate without necessarily requiring a hierarchical episcopal structure.

10. Visible and invisible Church

Many Protestants distinguish the visible Church from the invisible Church.

Not everyone who formally belongs to a church necessarily belongs inwardly to Christ. Genuine believers may be found within different visible church bodies.

Comparison

Tradition	Church structure	Apostolicity
Evangelical	Highly varied	Faithfulness to gospel and apostolic Scripture
Reformed	Elders/ministers, synodical variants	Apostolic teaching
Roman Catholic	Pope, bishops, priests	Teaching and historical succession
Eastern Orthodox	Bishops, patriarchal/synodical structure	Historical succession and Holy Tradition
Baptist	Congregational	Apostolic Scripture and local congregation
Pentecostal/charismatic	Local, denominational or network	Usually teaching, calling and spiritual gifting

Timeline

- 1st century: Apostles, elders, overseers and deacons.
- 2nd-3rd centuries: Growth of episcopal structures.
- 4th-5th centuries: Major patriarchal centres and councils.
- 1054: Deep institutional division between East and West.
- 16th century: Protestant church models develop.
- 17th century: Baptist congregational development.
- 20th century: Strong growth of independent evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Conclusion

The question of the true Church ultimately concerns continuity, authority, ministry, community, truth and sacraments.

Yet above every structure stands the New Testament confession: Christ is the Head of the Church.

CHAPTER 8

Who May Lead?

Apostles, Bishops, Priests, Elders and Women in Ministry

Central question

Who may teach and lead the congregation? And may women hold the same church offices as men?

1. Apostolos

Ἀπόστολος, apostolos, means one who is sent.

The Twelve hold a unique place. Paul calls himself an apostle. Yet in some contexts the word can also be used more broadly for messengers or delegates.

This raises a contemporary question: Do apostles still exist in the same sense as Peter and Paul?

Many Christians answer no. Other charismatic movements use the title, often in the broader sense of pioneering or translocal leadership.

2. Episkopos

Ἐπίσκοπος, episkopos, means overseer. The word bishop developed from it.

Catholic and Orthodox churches see biblical roots of the episcopate here. Protestants ask whether the later office of bishop has exactly the same institutional form as the New Testament episkopos.

3. Presbyteros

Πρεσβύτερος, presbyteros, means elder.

In some New Testament passages, *presbyteros* and *episkopos* appear to overlap considerably. This matters to Protestant churches without a separate episcopal rank.

4. Diakonos

Διάκονος, *diakonos*, means servant. From it comes deacon.

Romans 16 uses the word for Phoebe. She therefore plays an important role in discussions of women and church offices.

5. Man and woman as God's image

Genesis 1 says that God created humanity in his image: male and female. There is therefore no basis for considering women less human, less spiritual or less valuable.

Discussion of offices must never become a discussion about human worth.

6. Ezer

Genesis 2 calls the woman *ezer*: helper.

This word does not automatically mean subordinate assistant. The Old Testament also uses *ezer* for God as his people's Helper. The term by itself therefore proves no inferiority.

7. Two main models

Complementarianism: Men and women have equal worth, but certain church roles are ordered differently. Many complementarians reserve the office of elder or minister for men.

Egalitarianism: Men and women have equal worth and can fulfil the same church leadership functions on the basis of calling and gifting.

Both models generally affirm that men and women have equal worth. The difference concerns whether equal worth also means complete interchangeability in church offices.

8. Galatians 3:28

Paul writes: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Egalitarian interpreters see a fundamental breakthrough of old status boundaries. Complementarians reply that the context primarily concerns equal standing in Christ, not necessarily the organisation of church offices.

9. Women who prophesy

First Corinthians 11 assumes that women pray and prophesy.

This matters when interpreting 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul calls women to silence in a particular context. An absolute prohibition on every female voice in the gathering would be difficult to reconcile with Chapter 11.

The question therefore becomes which form of speaking Chapter 14 restricts.

10. First Timothy 2

This is one of the most important passages for the complementarian position. Paul also connects his argument with Adam and Eve.

Complementarians therefore consider it difficult to treat the instruction exclusively as a temporary local cultural rule.

Egalitarian interpreters point, among other things, to the situation in Ephesus and the rare verb ἀuthεντέω, authenteō. Its precise nuance is disputed.

11. Priscilla

Priscilla and Aquila take Apollos aside and explain God's way more accurately.

This shows, at least, that women could actively participate in theological instruction. Yet the text does not explicitly identify which formal church office Priscilla held.

12. Phoebe

Paul calls Phoebe diakonos of the congregation in Cenchreae.

The question is whether this means servant or deacon as a formal office. The text certainly shows that Phoebe played an important role in the early Church.

13. Junia

Romans 16 mentions Junia. Many contemporary interpreters understand the name as female.

The further question concerns the wording about apostles: prominent among the apostles, or well known to the apostles? Even if the first reading is chosen, the sense in which apostle is used remains a further question.

Six traditions

Tradition	Women in the highest pastoral/priestly office
Evangelical	Divided
Reformed	Depends on denomination
Roman Catholic	Priesthood reserved for men
Eastern Orthodox	Priesthood reserved for men
Baptist	Divided
Pentecostal/charismatic	Women pastors and ministries relatively common, but not uniform

Timeline

1st century: Women active in prayer, prophecy, service and mission.

Early Church: Development of ministerial structures.

Middle Ages: Male priesthood in East and West.

16th century: Protestant reorganisation of ministries.

19th-20th centuries: Growing debate about women in preaching and office.

20th century: Various Pentecostal movements give women important missionary and evangelistic roles early on.

20th-21st centuries: Denominations reach differing conclusions about ordination.

Conclusion

The discussion cannot be settled simply by saying: “One side loves women and the other does not.”

Both sides appeal to biblical arguments. The real questions are: Which offices does the New Testament recognise? Which passages are universal? Which are contextual? How do gift and office relate? And how should creation and new creation be read together?

CHAPTER 9

Does God Still Speak Directly Today?

Scripture, Prophecy and the Guidance of the Holy Spirit

Central question

When someone says, “God said to me...”, what does that mean? And how can we know whether it genuinely comes from God?

1. God has spoken

Hebrews begins by saying that God formerly spoke in many ways through the prophets and, in these last days, has spoken through the Son.

Christian faith is therefore based on revelation. God is not a silent God. He has made himself known.

2. The unique place of Christ and Scripture

Present-day spiritual guidance must therefore be distinguished from the foundational revelation in Christ and the apostolic witness.

No modern prophecy can bring a new gospel. No vision can correct Christ. No spiritual impression can set Scripture aside.

3. Prophēteia

The Greek word is προφητεία, prophēteia: prophecy.

First Corinthians 12-14 discusses prophecy as a gift within the congregation. Paul even says: “Pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.”

The question is therefore not whether prophecy occurred in the New Testament Church. It is whether this gift continued functioning after the apostolic period.

4. Cessationism

Cessationists believe that certain extraordinary revelatory and sign gifts had a special foundational function around the apostles and the Church's first phase.

This does not mean that God no longer performs miracles. A cessationist can strongly believe in answered prayer, God's providence, guidance, healing and supernatural intervention.

The question primarily concerns the continuation of certain gifts as a regular ministry.

5. Continuationism

Continuationists believe that New Testament spiritual gifts remain available in principle until Christ returns. They can include prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, discernment and words of knowledge.

6. “When the perfect comes”

First Corinthians 13 speaks of prophecy and tongues ceasing when τὸ τέλειον, to teleion, the perfect, comes.

Some cessationist interpretations have connected this with completion of the canon or the Church's maturity.

Many other interpreters point out that Paul speaks of seeing face to face. This sounds strongly eschatological.

The passage alone therefore does not simply settle the entire cessationism debate.

7. Test everything

First Thessalonians 5 perhaps provides the best balance: Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Immediately afterwards: Test everything; hold on to what is good. This prevents two extremes: believing everything and rejecting everything in advance.

8. “God said...”

Pastoral caution is particularly necessary here. The statement “God told me that you...” can create enormous spiritual pressure, especially concerning marriage, money, medical decisions, calling or church obedience.

A safer formulation might be: “I received a strong impression during prayer. Would you test it?”

This leaves room for human fallibility.

9. How should we test?

A spiritual impression should be tested against Scripture, the character of Christ, the fruit it produces, wisdom, other mature believers, reality and facts.

A prophecy that manipulates people or makes a leader untouchable deserves particular suspicion.

Comparison

Tradition	Present-day special guidance/prophecy
Evangelical	Divided
Reformed	Often cautious, with some continuationist streams
Roman Catholic	Special/private revelations possible, subordinate to the deposit of faith
Eastern Orthodox	Room for spiritual experience, with strong emphasis on discernment
Baptist	Both cessationist and continuationist groups
Pentecostal/charismatic	Prophetic gifting generally affirmed

Timeline

1st century: Prophecy functions in New Testament congregations.

2nd century: Debates over prophetic movements and church authority.

Reformation: Strong emphasis on Scripture's sufficient authority.

18th-19th centuries: Revivals and renewed emphasis on spiritual experience.

1901-1906 and afterwards: Early modern Pentecostal movement.

20th century: Charismatic renewal within historic churches.

Present: Cessationism and continuationism coexist within evangelical Christianity.

Conclusion

A closed canon need not mean a silent God. Yet a living God does not mean either that every inner thought is revelation.

The New Testament balance remains: be open, and test.

CHAPTER 10

Are Tongues and Miraculous Gifts Still for Today?

Charismata, Cessationism and Continuationism

Central question

Are the supernatural gifts in Acts and 1 Corinthians intended for the whole of church history? Or did they primarily serve a special function during the apostolic period?

1. Charisma

The Greek word χάρισμα, charisma, plural χαρίσματα, charismata, is related to χάρις, charis: grace.

A spiritual gift is therefore fundamentally a gift of grace. It is not an achievement, a status symbol or proof that someone is more important than another believer.

2. First Corinthians 12

Paul mentions, among other things, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, workings of miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, different tongues and interpretation of tongues.

The same Spirit distributes them.

3. One body

Immediately after the list of gifts, Paul speaks about the body. An eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you.”

Spiritual gifts are therefore never intended to create an elite. A gift exists for the other person.

4. Does everyone speak in tongues?

Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions: Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?

The expected answer is no. This matters for debate over whether every believer must necessarily speak in tongues.

5. Pentecostal theology and initial evidence

Within various classical Pentecostal traditions, tongues became associated with the first visible evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Other charismatic Christians strongly believe in tongues without necessarily making this connection. Pentecostal and charismatic must therefore not be treated as completely identical either.

6. Acts 2

At Pentecost, the disciples speak in other languages. People from different regions hear them in their own language. Recognisable languages are clearly involved.

The Greek γλῶσσα, glōssa, can mean tongue or language.

7. First Corinthians 14

The situation in Corinth is more complex. Tongues must be interpreted in the gathering. Without interpretation, the speaker must remain silent in the congregation and speak to himself and God. Some interpreters conclude that the same kind of human languages is involved as in Acts 2.

Others see room for a form of prayer language that those present cannot understand without special interpretation.

8. Order

Paul's solution to abuse is striking. He does not say to prohibit all gifts. He says to let everything happen appropriately and in order.

Prophecies are evaluated. Public tongues are limited and interpreted. The Spirit is therefore not placed in opposition to order.

9. The surpassing way

Between 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 stands Chapter 13: love. This is no accidental interruption.

According to Paul, people may have impressive spiritual experiences and still fall short spiritually. Without love, even spectacular tongues become clanging metal.

10. The cessationist argument

An important cessationist argument comes from Ephesians 2. Apostles and prophets are associated with the Church's foundation. A foundation is not laid repeatedly.

Signs and wonders also played a special role in confirming apostolic preaching. Cessationists therefore conclude that certain gifts were not intended as a permanent norm for every century.

11. The continuationist reply

Continuationists reply that nowhere does the New Testament clearly say that the gifts will disappear before Christ returns. On the contrary, Paul says: “Do not forbid speaking in tongues.”

When Scripture prescribes a gift and nowhere explicitly announces its ending, this view places the burden of proof on those claiming it has disappeared.

12. Experience is not the standard

A continuationist may say, “I have experienced healings and prophecies.” A cessationist may say, “I have never seen anything reliable of that kind.”

Neither experience settles the biblical question. Theology must assess experience. Theology must also not become artificially blind to reality.

13. False miracles

The Bible itself warns about deceptive signs. “It is supernatural” is therefore not yet the same as “It comes from God.”

Biblical testing also asks: Who is glorified? What is the message? What fruit appears? Is there truth, love and holiness?

14. Money and power

Particular caution is necessary when spiritual gifts are linked to personal prestige, financial pressure, fear and unaccountable leadership.

A ministry in which nobody may examine the leader because he is supposedly anointed stands in tension with Paul's instruction to evaluate prophecy.

Cessationism and continuationism compared

Question	Cessationist	Continuationist
Does the Holy Spirit work today?	Yes	Yes
Can God perform miracles?	Yes	Yes
Prophecy as a current ministry?	Usually no	Yes
Tongues?	Usually not a continuing gift	Yes
Prayer for healing?	Yes	Yes
Gift of healing?	Usually not a continuing ministry	Yes
Scripture the highest standard?	Yes	Yes
Test experiences?	Yes	Yes

Six traditions

Tradition	Characteristic position
Evangelical	Divided
Reformed	Historically often cessationist, but not exclusively
Roman Catholic	Room for charismatic gifts within ecclesiastical discernment
Eastern Orthodox	Miracles and gifts possible, but different terminology and strong ascetic discernment
Baptist	Strongly divided
Pentecostal/charismatic	Explicitly continuationist

Timeline

Pentecost: Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

1st century: Charismata in apostolic congregations.

Early Church: Testimonies of miracles alongside growing institutional structure.

Reformation: Emphasis on Scripture and criticism of miracle claims.

19th century: Holiness and revival movements.

Early 20th century: Emergence of modern Pentecostalism.

From the 1960s: Charismatic renewal spreads within historic churches.

Late 20th-21st centuries: Strong worldwide growth of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity.

Pastoral discernment

Where spiritual gifts genuinely function, they should ultimately contribute to Christ's centrality, truth, love, the building up of the congregation, humility, holiness and service.

Warning signs are personality cults, manipulation, fear, greed, unchecked claims, spiritual superiority and inability to tolerate criticism.

Conclusion

Paul offers a striking balance. He neither tells us to believe every spiritual manifestation nor to prohibit everything that appears supernatural.

His approach is: Pursue love. Do not despise prophecy. Test. Preserve the good. Let everything happen in order.

This yields a principle that both cessationists and continuationists should take seriously: Spirit and truth belong together.

OVERVIEW OF PART II

Chapter	Main question	Central difference
6	What happens at the Lord's Supper?	Symbol, spiritual or sacramental presence
7	What is the true Church?	Institution, congregation and apostolic succession
8	Who may lead?	Office, gender and church structure
9	Does God still speak directly?	Special guidance and prophecy
10	Are miraculous gifts still for today?	Cessationism and continuationism

Timeline of Part II

1st century: The Lord's Supper, apostles, elders, deacons, prophecy and charismata function in the early congregations.

2nd-5th centuries: Church structures, episcopate, sacramental theology and liturgy develop further.

1054: Eastern and Western church structures become permanently separated.

16th century: The Reformation reopens fundamental questions about church, office and sacrament. 17th century: Baptist and congregational church models develop further.

19th century: Revival and holiness movements renew emphasis on personal experience and ministry.

20th century: Pentecostalism and later charismatic renewal make debate about charismata globally relevant again.

Central conclusion of Part II

These five subjects again prove interconnected. A sacramental understanding of the Lord's Supper usually brings a different understanding of ministry. Those considering apostolic succession essential understand church authority differently from a Baptist congregation.

Those recognising present-day prophecy must explain its relationship to scriptural authority. Those recognising tongues and healing gifts must also develop criteria distinguishing true from false claims.

Beneath these differences ultimately lies the same question: How does the risen Christ work today through his Church and the Holy Spirit?

The Protestant answer strongly emphasises through the Word. The sacramental answer adds through the Church's sacramental life. The charismatic answer emphasises the Spirit's present working and gifts.

These emphases need not oppose each other absolutely at every point. Yet whenever a practice or teaching claims divine authority, the decisive command remains: "Test everything; hold on to what is good."

PART III

HEALING, ISRAEL, CHRIST'S RETURN AND ETERNITY

CHAPTER 11

Does God Still Heal Today?

Miracles, Prayer, Medical Care and the Gift of Healing

Central question

Almost all classical Christian traditions believe that God can heal. The harder question is what God has promised that we may expect today.

Why does one sick person recover after prayer, while another believer remains ill despite intense prayer?

1. Jesus as Healer

Healing occupies a prominent place in the Gospels. Jesus heals people who are blind, paralysed, leprous, deaf or chronically ill. He frees people from demonic powers. He even raises the dead.

These miracles are more than demonstrations of power. They are signs that God's Kingdom is breaking through. Where Christ comes, God's ultimate intention for his creation becomes visible.

2. The apostles

Acts also describes healings. Peter and John meet a man at the temple who has been unable to walk since birth. In the name of Jesus Christ, he stands up.

Special signs likewise accompany Paul's ministry.

3. Gifts of healings

First Corinthians 12 uses a striking phrase: *χαρίσματα ιαμάτων*, *charismata iamatōn*, literally gifts of healings.

Both gifts and healings are plural. This may suggest that healing is not necessarily a permanent power that a particular healer can exercise at will. The gift remains dependent on God.

4. James 5

James gives a concrete pastoral command. When someone is ill, that person should call the congregation's elders. They should pray, anoint with oil and act in the Lord's name.

Prayer for healing clearly belongs within Christian congregational life.

5. The prayer of faith

James speaks strongly about the prayer of faith. Some healing movements have concluded that sufficient faith guarantees physical healing. Yet that conclusion must be tested against the whole New Testament.

6. Paul's thorn

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of a thorn in the flesh. Its precise nature is not specified. We must therefore not be more definite than the text.

We do know that Paul prayed three times for this burden to disappear. God did not remove it. The answer was: "My grace is sufficient for you."

Unanswered prayers therefore do not automatically prove that someone has too little faith.

7. Trophimus remained ill

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul writes that he left Trophimus ill in Miletus.

This is striking. The same apostle who experienced miraculous healings apparently could not end every illness whenever he wished. Healing was not a technique.

8. Timothy and practical care

Because of Timothy's stomach and recurring ailments, Paul recommends a practical remedy.

This too matters. Prayer and practical medical care are not natural enemies.

9. “By his wounds”

Isaiah 53 plays a major role in healing debates. Matthew 8 connects Isaiah's language with Jesus' physical healings. First Peter 2 uses the same passage in the context of sin and returning to the Shepherd.

We must therefore distinguish the total redemption Christ ultimately brings from the question of when all its effects become fully visible.

10. Already and not yet

God's Kingdom has already come, but is not yet fully complete.

Christ has conquered death, yet Christians still die. Christ brings bodily restoration, yet Christians still become ill. The Holy Spirit has been given, yet creation still awaits full redemption. This tension helps explain why Christians can pray boldly for healing without claiming that every believer must be healed before Christ returns.

11. Faith is not a technique

Biblical faith is trust in God, not a spiritual method for compelling him.

Jesus himself prays in Gethsemane: “Not my will, but yours be done.”

This is no lack of faith. It is perfect trust.

12. Medical care

Christians need not choose between praying and seeing a doctor. Medical knowledge can be understood as part of human care, wisdom and stewardship.

When someone claims supernatural healing from a demonstrable condition, medical verification is also wise. A miracle does not become less miraculous when carefully verified.

Comparison

Tradition	Does God heal today?	The gift of healing today?
Evangelical	Yes	Divided
Reformed	Yes	Often cautious about a continuing gift
Roman Catholic	Yes	Prayer, sacrament and charismatic gifts possible
Eastern Orthodox	Yes	Healing within prayer and sacramental life
Baptist	Yes	Divided
Pentecostal/charismatic	Emphatically yes	Usually yes

Pastoral conclusion

Sick people must never be burdened further with: “If you are not healed, you apparently do not believe enough.”

Sometimes God heals. Sometimes he works through medical treatment. Sometimes he gives strength to bear illness.

Ultimately, the Christian's complete healing lies in resurrection.

CHAPTER 12

What Place Does Israel Have?

Israel, Church and Covenant

Central question

After Christ's coming, does the people of Israel still have a special place in God's plan of salvation? Or are all promises now fully fulfilled in Christ and his Church?

1. Berit: covenant

A central Hebrew concept is berit: covenant.

The Bible describes several covenants, including those with Noah, Abraham, Israel at Sinai and David. Jeremiah then speaks of a new covenant.

2. Abraham

God calls Abraham and promises land, descendants and blessing. Yet from the beginning the promise has a universal horizon: all families of the earth will be blessed in Abraham.

Israel's election is therefore connected with God's purpose for the nations.

3. The new covenant

Jeremiah 31 speaks of a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

At the Last Supper, Jesus connects his blood with the new covenant. Hebrews quotes Jeremiah's prophecy extensively.

An important question arises: How do Israel and the Church relate within this new covenant?

4. Replacement theology

The term replacement theology often denotes the idea that the Church has simply replaced Israel. Yet the term can be too crude.

Not every covenant theologian says that God first dealt with Israel and then discarded it. Many Reformed models prefer to speak of one continuing people of God, whose promises find their centre in Christ.

5. Romans 9-11

Romans 9-11 is indispensable to this discussion. Paul explicitly wrestles with Israel's position. Has God's Word failed? His answer is no.

6. The olive tree

Romans 11 uses the image of an olive tree. Some natural branches are broken off; wild branches are grafted in.

Yet Paul warns Gentile believers not to boast over the branches. The Church must therefore never use its position to justify contempt for Jews.

7. “All Israel”

Romans 11:26 says: “And so all Israel will be saved.”

Interpretations differ. Israel here can mean the entire people of God, all elect Jews throughout history, or a future widespread conversion of the Jewish people.

The last interpretation is not confined to modern dispensationalism.

8. Covenant theology

Covenant theology emphasises the unity of God's redemptive plan. There is ultimately not one way for Jews and another for Gentiles. Christ is the centre.

Within this model, the Church is not an emergency solution because Israel supposedly failed.

9. Dispensationalism

Dispensational theology generally distinguishes more clearly between Israel and the Church. Old Testament promises to Israel thus retain a stronger future national significance.

This affects interpretation of prophecy, the great tribulation, the millennium, Jerusalem and Christ's return.

10. Progressive dispensationalism

Progressive dispensationalists preserve a future significance for Israel, but generally emphasise more strongly the present fulfilment of promises in Christ and the unity of God's saving plan.

On certain points, this view therefore stands between classical dispensationalism and covenant theology.

11. One way of salvation

Whichever view is chosen, the New Testament offers no basis for believing that ethnicity by itself saves anyone. Paul proclaims Christ to Jew and Gentile alike. Romans 10 centres on faith in Christ.

The difference therefore concerns not two different saviours, but the continuing significance of God's promises to Israel.

12. Biblical Israel and a modern state

An important distinction is necessary. Biblical Israel and any particular political government or state in modern history must not be completely equated without further argument.

A theological conviction about Israel therefore does not automatically settle every contemporary political or military question. Conversely, criticism of particular government decisions does not in itself establish someone's view of biblical Israel.

Theology and current politics intersect, but are not identical.

Comparison

Tradition/model	Israel and Church
Covenant theology	Strong continuity of one people of God in Christ
Classical dispensationalism	Clear distinction between Israel and Church
Progressive dispensationalism	Distinction and greater salvation-historical coherence
Roman Catholic	Special bond with the Jewish people, salvation centred in Christ
Eastern Orthodox	Strong Christological/ecclesial reading of Old Testament promises
Evangelical/Baptist/Pentecostal	Multiple models present

Timeline

Abraham: Covenant promise.

Sinai: Israel as covenant people.

David: Royal promise.

Jeremiah: Promise of a new covenant.

Jesus: New covenant in his blood.

Pentecost: Jewish origins of the Church; the gospel spreads to the nations.

Romans 9-11: Paul addresses Israel and the nations.

Church history: Differing views of Israel.

19th-20th centuries: Development and spread of modern dispensationalism.

Conclusion

Romans 11 ends with worship rather than a scheme. The history of Israel and the nations ultimately brings Paul to: “From him and through him and to him are all things.”

CHAPTER 13

What Happens Before Christ Returns?

Rapture, Great Tribulation and Antichrist

Central question

Does Christ return visibly once, or does a separate rapture of the Church occur first? And when does the great tribulation take place?

1. Parousia

A central Greek word is παρουσία, parousia: coming or presence.

The New Testament uses it for Christ's future coming. Early Christian hope was more than “I will go to heaven someday.” It was: Christ is coming back.

2. The rapture

First Thessalonians 4 says that living believers, together with the raised believers, will be caught up to meet the Lord.

The Greek verb is ἀρπάζω, harpazō: to seize, snatch away or take up. Through the Latin translation tradition, this gave rise to the term rapture.

The biblical debate therefore does not concern whether 1 Thessalonians describes a rapture. It concerns when it happens.

3. Apantēsis

Another interesting word is ἀπάντησις, apantēsis: meeting or going out to meet.

The word could describe people going out to greet an arriving dignitary. Some interpreters see the image of believers going to meet the coming King and, as it were, accompanying his arrival.

This closely connects 1 Thessalonians 4 with the visible return. Pretribulationist interpreters consider the word alone insufficient to establish the destination and entire chronology.

4. One coming or two phases?

Here lies the fundamental difference.

Pretribulationism: Christ takes the Church away before the great tribulation. His visible coming in glory follows later.

Posttribulationism: The rapture and visible return belong to the same great event after the tribulation. Variants exist between these positions.

5. Matthew 24

Jesus speaks of great tribulation. He then says, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days...”, and describes the coming of the Son of Man and gathering of the elect.

Posttribulationists see a clear sequence. Pretribulationists may reply that the elect mentioned there are not necessarily identical with the Church already taken up.

6. Preterism

Preterist interpretations emphasise that many prophetic statements concern events surrounding the early centuries and Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70.

Moderate preterism does not thereby necessarily deny the future bodily return, resurrection or final judgement.

7. Futurism

Futurist interpreters regard much prophecy in Daniel, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians and Revelation as still future.

This model strongly influences evangelical and Pentecostal expectations of the end times.

8. Antichristos

Strikingly, the word ἀντίχριστος, antichristos, does not occur in Revelation. It appears in John's letters.

John even says that many antichrists have appeared. At the same time, he refers to the expectation that the Antichrist is coming. The concept thus has both present and future dimensions.

9. The man of lawlessness

Second Thessalonians 2 speaks of a figure traditionally called the man of lawlessness.

The passage also contains the mysterious element of someone or something restraining him. Different explanations have been proposed throughout history. The text itself does not unambiguously identify the restrainer. This should make us cautious about confident schemes.

10. The beast

Revelation 13 describes the beast. Several interpretive frameworks exist. It may be read with emphasis on the Roman imperial context, a future anti-Christian world power, or recurring political and religious powers demanding absolute loyalty.

These readings can partly overlap.

11. Four main approaches to Revelation

Preterist: Strong emphasis on fulfilment in early church history.

Historicist: Revelation as a panorama of church history.

Futurist: Many events remain future.

Idealist: Revelation describes recurring spiritual patterns in the struggle between God's Kingdom and evil.

Some interpreters combine elements from several models.

End-times models compared

Model	Rapture	Tribulation	Return
Pretribulationist	Before tribulation	Church usually not on earth	Visible coming after tribulation
Midtribulationist	Around the midpoint	Church partly present	Visible coming afterwards
Pre-wrath	Before God's decisive wrath	Church experiences much tribulation	Closely connected with final phase
Posttribulationist	At the return	Church experiences tribulation	Rapture and coming together
Classical amillennialist	Meeting Christ at his coming	Church experiences tribulation in history/final phase	One decisive return

What do we know?

Amid all these schemes, broad classical agreement remains: Christ will return. The dead will be raised. Evil will not win. Christ will reign. God will establish justice.

Paul therefore does not finish explaining the rapture by saying, “Now draw a complicated timeline.” He says: “Comfort one another with these words.”

CHAPTER 14

What Is the Millennium?

Premillennialism, Amillennialism and Postmillennialism

Central question

Revelation 20 repeatedly speaks of a thousand years. Should this period be understood literally? When does it occur? And does Christ then reign bodily on earth?

1. Millennium

The word comes from mille, thousand, and annus, year.

In Revelation 20, Satan is bound and Christ reigns with his saints. After the thousand years comes a final rebellion and ultimately judgement.

2. Chilia

The Greek word for a thousand is χίλια, chilia. A literal expectation of a future thousand-year period is therefore also called chiliasm.

3. Must a thousand be literal?

Revelation uses many symbolic numbers. Amillennialists therefore ask why a thousand in particular must necessarily be exactly literal.

Premillennialists reply that symbolism does not mean the period cannot denote a real future historical phase.

4. Historic premillennialism

Historic premillennialism holds that Christ returns before a future period of his royal rule.

This view must be distinguished from modern dispensationalism. For example, a historic premillennialist need not accept a separate pretribulation rapture.

5. Dispensational premillennialism

This model generally combines a future significance for Israel, a great tribulation, Christ's return and a concrete future messianic kingdom.

Many variants also connect this with a rapture before the tribulation, but premillennialism and pretribulationism are not the same concept.

6. Amillennialism

The name can mislead. Amillennialism does not mean that there is no millennium at all.

The thousand years are understood as a symbolic description of the present or eschatological reign of Christ and his saints between Christ's first and second coming.

At the end follow the decisive confrontation, Christ's return, resurrection, judgement and new creation.

7. How can Satan be bound now?

This is a common objection. If Satan is bound, why does so much evil exist?

Amillennialists reply that the binding may mean a specific restriction, for example that Satan can no longer prevent the nations from receiving the gospel in the same way.

He is bound in a particular respect, not entirely powerless.

8. Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism expects the gospel to gain increasingly deep influence over the world before Christ returns. Afterwards, Christ returns.

Here too, the thousand years need not mean exactly a thousand calendar years.

9. Matthew 13

Jesus' parables are applied differently. The mustard seed and yeast can be read as signs of the growth of God's Kingdom. At the same time, the wheat and weeds show good and evil coexisting until the consummation.

Different end-times models therefore stress different aspects of the same Kingdom passages.

10. Revelation 19 and 20

A fundamental interpretive question asks whether Revelation is strictly chronological.

If Chapter 20 simply follows Chapter 19, a future reign after Christ's return seems natural.

Amillennialists reply that Revelation regularly describes events again from fresh perspectives. This is called recapitulation. Chapter 20 then need not chronologically follow everything in Chapter 19.

Comparison

View	Return	Millennium	Satan
Premillennialism	Before millennium	Future period of reign	Future decisive binding
Amillennialism	At end of present age	Symbolic present/esc hatological reign	Already bound in a limited sense
Postmillennialism	After prolonged Kingdom influence	Period of strong gospel influence	Increasing restriction of influence

Six traditions

Tradition	Common position
Evangelical	Premillennialism prominent, alongside other views
Reformed	Often amillennialist, sometimes post- or premillennialist
Roman Catholic	Usually no classical dispensational millennium
Eastern Orthodox	Usually no dispensational end-times structure
Baptist	Multiple positions, premillennialism strongly represented
Pentecostal/charismatic	Historically often premillennialist

No date-setting

Jesus warns against human certainty about the day and hour.

Christians should therefore be cautious about secret codes, speculative calculations, declaring each new conflict the definitive end-times sign, confidently identifying every new technology as the beast's mark, or naming every world leader as the Antichrist.

Watchfulness is biblical. Sensationalism is not.

Conclusion

The central end-times question is ultimately not whether I possess the perfect scheme, but whether I am ready to meet Christ.

CHAPTER 15

What Happens Immediately After Death?

Soul, Intermediate State, Heaven and Bodily Resurrection

Central question

When a Christian dies today, where is that person? Consciously with Christ? Asleep until resurrection? And if already in heaven, why is bodily resurrection still necessary later?

1. Nephesh

The Hebrew nephesh is often translated soul. Yet it can also mean life, person, living being or self.

Genesis 2 does not simply describe a body into which a separate soul is then inserted. The human being becomes a living being. This underlines human unity.

2. Psychē

The Greek ψυχή, psychē, likewise has a broad range of meaning: soul, life, person or self.

Here too, a later philosophical concept of soul must not automatically be read into every passage.

3. Pneuma

Πνεῦμα, pneuma, can mean spirit, breath or wind.

Depending on context, it can refer to the Holy Spirit, the human spirit or spiritual reality.

4. Sheol

Sheol is an Old Testament term for the realm of the dead. It is therefore careless to translate every occurrence of Sheol simply as the final hell.

5. Hades

The Greek ᾗδης, Hadēs, often renders Sheol in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Hades too is therefore not simply identical with the final lake of fire. Revelation 20 even says that death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire.

6. Paradise

Jesus says to the criminal beside him: “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

The Greek word παράδεισος, paradeisos, also occurs elsewhere in the New Testament.

For most Christian traditions, this text supports conscious presence with Christ after death.

7. The comma in Luke 23

The earliest Greek manuscripts did not use modern punctuation. Some defenders of soul sleep therefore propose punctuating the sentence differently: “Truly, I tell you today: you will be with me in paradise.”

Today would then belong with I tell you. The traditional reading is:

“Truly, I tell you: today you will be with me in paradise.”

The broader grammatical and narrative context must therefore be considered. A comma alone should not carry an entire doctrine.

8. Paul and Christ

Philippians 1 contains an important passage. Paul desires to depart and be with Christ, which for him is far better.

Second Corinthians 5 also appears in debate over leaving the body and being with the Lord. For many Christians, these passages support a conscious intermediate state.

9. Soul sleep

Yet the Bible often calls death sleep. Daniel uses this imagery. Jesus uses it of Lazarus. Paul uses it for deceased believers.

Some Christians therefore believe that the dead are unconscious until resurrection. Others reply that sleep primarily denotes the temporary nature of bodily death: as someone awakens from sleep, the dead will rise.

10. Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes says that the dead know nothing. Supporters of soul sleep consider this important.

Other interpreters point to Ecclesiastes' perspective: life under the sun. The passage then primarily describes the disappearance of human participation in present earthly existence.

Here too, literary context must be considered.

11. The intermediate state

Most historical Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions have affirmed a conscious condition between death and resurrection. We call this the intermediate state.

Yet the intermediate state is not the final goal.

12. Anastasis

The ultimate Christian hope is *ἀνάστασις*, anastasis: resurrection.

This is fundamental. The Christian gospel promises more than the survival of an immortal soul. It proclaims the resurrection of the dead.

13. First Corinthians 15

Paul makes bodily resurrection essential to the gospel. If the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.

Yet Christ has been raised as firstfruits. His resurrection therefore begins what will happen to his people.

14. Sōma pneumatikon

Paul speaks of σῶμα πνευματικόν, sōma pneumatikon: a spiritual body.

This does not mean no body. The word remains sōma: body.

The contrast is between present perishable existence and the future body, fully suited to life in God's coming world and governed by God's Spirit.

15. Heaven is not the final destination

A popular Christian picture sometimes says that we die and go to heaven for ever. This is incomplete.

Revelation ends with a new heaven and a new earth. The new Jerusalem descends. God dwells with humanity.

The biblical ultimate hope is therefore not eternal escape from creation, but renewal of God's creation.

16. The sequence

Christian majority view:

Earthly life; death; conscious intermediate state with Christ; Christ's return; bodily resurrection; judgement; new heaven and new earth.

Soul-sleep model:

Earthly life; death/sleep; Christ's return; awakening in resurrection; judgement; new creation.

Comparison

Tradition	Intermediate state	Ultimate hope
Evangelical	Usually consciously with Christ	Bodily resurrection
Reformed	Conscious communion with Christ	Resurrection and new creation
Roman Catholic	Conscious state and particular judgement, with possible purification	Bodily resurrection
Eastern Orthodox	Conscious state awaiting consummation	Bodily resurrection
Baptist	Usually consciously with Christ, minority views exist	Resurrection
Pentecostal/charismatic	Usually consciously with Christ	Resurrection and new creation

INTEGRATED TIMELINE OF SALVATION HISTORY

Creation: God creates heaven and earth.

The Fall: Sin and death enter human history.

Abraham: Covenant, descendants, land and blessing for the nations.

Israel: Sinai, Law, tabernacle and priesthood.

David: Promise of kingship. Prophets: Judgement and expectation of restoration, Messiah and new covenant.

Jesus Christ: Incarnation, Kingdom, cross and resurrection.

Pentecost: Outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Church and worldwide proclamation: Gospel to Jew and Gentile.

Present age: Kingdom already present, but not yet complete.

Christ's return: Christ appears in glory.

Resurrection: The dead are raised.

Judgement: God establishes final justice.

New creation: New heaven and new earth, God dwelling with humanity.

OVERVIEW OF PART III

Chapter	Main question	Central difference
11	Does God heal today?	Healing, gift and God's sovereignty
12	What place does Israel have?	Israel, Church and covenant
13	When does the rapture occur?	Timing of rapture and tribulation
14	What is the millennium?	Pre-, a- and postmillennialism
15	What happens after death?	Conscious intermediate state or soul sleep

CONNECTIONS WITHIN PART III

These five subjects are interconnected too. A sharp distinction between Israel and Church more readily leads to a dispensational end-times model. A less marked distinction more often leads to an amillennial interpretation.

Those reading Revelation primarily chronologically may order Chapters 19 and 20 differently from those recognising recapitulation.

Those strongly viewing humanity as a unity of body and soul will place greater emphasis on resurrection rather than heaven alone.

Healing ultimately finds its completion at precisely the same point: the resurrection of the body.

CENTRAL CONCLUSION OF PART III

Christian hope ultimately exceeds healing, an end-times scheme, political or national expectation, and even going to heaven.

The ultimate promise is: Christ returns. The dead rise. Evil is judged. Creation is renewed. God dwells with his people.

The Bible therefore does not end with humanity escaping earth. It ends with God's words:

“Behold, I make all things new.”

PART IV

JUDGEMENT, MARY, CREATION AND CHRISTIAN LIFE

CHAPTER 16

Is Hell Eternal?

Eternal Punishment, Destruction and Universal Reconciliation

Central question

Few Christian doctrines evoke as much emotion as hell. Can a God of love punish people eternally? Does eternal punishment mean conscious suffering without end? Are the lost ultimately destroyed? Or will God's redeeming love eventually reach every person?

Three major models stand at the centre: eternal conscious punishment, conditional immortality or annihilationism, and Christian universalism.

To compare them fairly, we must first investigate the meaning of biblical words.

1. Sheol

The Hebrew Sheol is sometimes rendered hell in older translations. This can mislead.

In the Old Testament, Sheol usually refers to the realm of the dead, the grave or the condition of the departed. It therefore does not automatically mean the final place of eternal punishment.

2. Hades

The Greek ᾍδης, Hadēs, partly functions as a counterpart to Sheol.

Revelation 20 makes clear that Hades is not the final lake of fire: death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. This distinction matters exegetically.

3. Gehenna

Jesus regularly uses γέεννα, geenna: Gehenna.

The name is connected with the Valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem. The Old Testament associates this area with serious idolatry and child sacrifice.

In later Jewish and New Testament language, Gehenna develops into a powerful image of divine judgement.

A popular explanation claims that the valley continually functioned as a burning rubbish dump in Jesus' time. Historically, that picture is insufficiently secure to serve as an unquestioned interpretive starting point.

4. Tartarus

Second Peter 2 uses a verb related to Tartaros. The context concerns sinning angels. This term too must therefore not be treated, without further explanation, as a general synonym for every biblical reference to hell.

5. The lake of fire

Revelation uses another image: the lake of fire.

It is associated with the beast, false prophet, devil, death, Hades and ultimately those not found in the book of life.

Revelation also calls it the second death. The question is precisely what this second death entails.

6. Model 1: Eternal conscious punishment

The traditional majority view across large parts of Western Christianity holds that the ultimate punishment of the lost is conscious and unending.

Matthew 25:46 is among its most important passages: “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The same adjective qualifies punishment and life. Defenders therefore argue that if eternal life is unending, it is natural to understand the punishment as unending too.

7. Aiōnios

The Greek word is αἰώνιος, aiōnios, related to αἰών, aiōn: age or era.

Some universalist interpreters therefore stress that aiōnios need not automatically mean endless in every conceivable context.

That linguistic point is valid in itself. Yet etymology alone does not settle interpretation. The particular context determines a word's function.

In Matthew 25, eternal punishment and eternal life stand directly opposite each other. This makes the passage especially important for the traditional view.

8. The worm does not die

Mark 9 speaks of the worm that does not die and the fire that is not quenched. Jesus draws on Isaiah 66.

Supporters of eternal conscious punishment see continuing judgement here. Annihilationists reply that Isaiah describes dead bodies entirely given over to destruction.

The imagery is serious, but the question remains whether it describes an eternal process of suffering or the irreversibility of God's judgement.

9. Model 2: Conditional immortality

According to conditional immortality, human beings do not necessarily possess indestructible immortality inherently. Eternal life is God's gift.

The ultimate punishment of the lost is therefore final destruction or death. This is often called annihilationism.

10. Apollymi

Matthew 10:28 says that God can ἀπόλλυμι, apollymi, both soul and body in Gehenna.

The word can mean destroy, lose or ruin.

Annihilationists see strong support for ultimate destruction. Defenders of the traditional view reply that apollymi does not mean ceasing to exist in every context. Here too, one dictionary definition does not settle the debate.

11. “The wages of sin is death”

Romans 6:23 contrasts death with eternal life.

Conditional immortality therefore asks a fundamental question: If eternal life is God's gift to the redeemed, why must the lost continue consciously for ever?

The traditional view replies that death in Scripture can also denote separation and a state of judgement, not necessarily non-existence.

12. Model 3: Christian universalism

Christian universalism expects God's judgement ultimately to serve a restorative purpose and all human beings eventually to be reconciled to God.

Frequently cited passages speak of God becoming all in all, all things gathered together in Christ, every knee bowing and the reconciliation of all things.

13. The universalist argument

Universalists ask whether Christ's victory can truly be complete if part of humanity remains eternally lost.

They emphasise passages about the universal scope of Christ's work. Critics reply that expressions such as all and all things must always be interpreted in context. Universal language about Christ's rule need not necessarily mean universal salvation.

14. Revelation 14 and 20

For the traditional view, these rank among the most difficult passages for annihilationism and universalism.

Revelation uses exceptionally serious language about fire, sulphur, smoke, day and night, and the lake of fire.

At the same time, Revelation is highly symbolic apocalyptic literature. Symbolic does not mean unreal, however. The question is which reality the symbol denotes.

15. The Catholic view

Roman Catholic doctrine fundamentally distinguishes hell from purgatory. Purgatory concerns those ultimately saved. Hell concerns final lostness.

Purgatory is therefore neither a temporary division of hell nor a second chance for those definitively rejecting God.

16. Orthodox emphases

Orthodox theology contains different ways of speaking about final judgement. Some theologians strongly emphasise that nobody escapes God's presence and that people may experience that presence differently.

Yet it is too simplistic to say, "The Orthodox Church simply teaches that heaven and hell are exactly the same place." Orthodox tradition is richer and less uniform than this slogan suggests.

Comparison

View	Ultimate condition of the lost	Important arguments
Eternal conscious punishment	Continuing conscious judgement	Matthew 25:46, Mark 9, Revelation 14 and 20
Conditional immortality	Final death/destruction	Matthew 10:28, Romans 6:23, language of death and destruction
Christian universalism	Ultimate restoration of everyone	Universal reconciliation and "all" passages

Pastoral conclusion

No Christian should speak with pleasure about lostness. Jesus weeps. Paul speaks sorrowfully about those outside Christ. The cross simultaneously shows that sin is serious and God's saving love is unimaginably great.

The doctrine of judgement must therefore never become an instrument of human superiority.

God is the Judge. As Abraham asked: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

CHAPTER 17

Does Purgatory Exist?

Purification After Death and Prayer for the Departed

Central question

If a Christian dies in God's grace but remains imperfect, is further purification necessary before living fully in God's holy presence?

1. What purgatory is not

Official Roman Catholic teaching is not that people receive a second chance after death to choose Jesus. Nor is it that Christ's cross was insufficient and people must pay the remainder themselves.

The doctrine concerns those destined for eternal salvation who, in this view, still need purification.

2. Holiness

Hebrews 12 connects seeing the Lord with holiness. Revelation 21 says nothing impure enters God's city.

The Catholic argument therefore runs: If a genuinely saved person dies while sanctification remains incomplete, God completes that purification.

The Protestant replies: Yes, God completes our sanctification, but this requires no separate state of purgatory.

This states the actual difference more accurately.

3. First Corinthians 3

Paul describes people building on the one foundation: Jesus Christ.

Fire tests their work. Some work survives; other work burns. The person may suffer loss, yet be saved, as through fire.

Catholic interpreters have seen support here for purification after death.

4. The Protestant reply

The context concerns building on Christ and the quality of the work. The passage does not explicitly say that the soul resides in purgatory after death.

Protestants therefore see an eschatological assessment of works, not necessarily a doctrine of purification after death.

5. Second Maccabees 12

This chapter describes prayer and actions on behalf of the dead.

A more fundamental difference appears: the canon. Roman Catholic Bibles include 2 Maccabees as a deuterocanonical book. Many Orthodox canonical traditions also receive it, although exact lists vary within the Orthodox world.

Protestants do not include it in the Old Testament canon. The disagreement about purgatory thus directly touches Chapter 1 of this book.

6. Prayer for the departed

Prayers for deceased Christians occur early in church history. This does not mean that the fully developed medieval doctrine of purgatory existed in exactly the same form from the beginning.

Practice and theological explanation developed over the centuries.

7. Orthodoxy

Orthodox Christians pray for the departed. Yet they do not simply adopt the Roman Catholic scholastic formulation of purgatory.

Calling the Orthodox view purgatory without distinction is therefore incorrect.

8. The Reformation

The Reformation strongly opposed purgatory, partly against the background of late medieval indulgence practices.

The deeper theological question became whether Christ's work is sufficient for the believer's complete justification. Protestants answer emphatically yes.

9. Hebrews 10

Through his one sacrifice, Christ accomplished decisive and complete redemption.

Protestants therefore reject every picture requiring further payment after death to settle sin's debt. Catholic theology replies that the purification intended is itself a work of grace, not a replacement for Christ's sacrifice.

Six traditions

Tradition	Purgatory	Prayer for the departed
Evangelical	No	Usually no
Reformed	No	No
Roman Catholic	Yes, final purification of the saved	Yes
Eastern Orthodox	No identical Latin doctrine of purgatory	Yes
Baptist	No	Usually no
Pentecostal/charismatic	Protestant forms usually no, Catholic charismatics follow Catholic teaching	Depends on tradition

Timeline

Early Church: Prayers for the departed occur.

Augustine: Further reflection on prayer and purification after death.

Middle Ages: Western doctrine develops more systematically.

13th-15th centuries: Ecclesiastical formulations concerning purification after death in the West.

16th century: Reformation rejects purgatory, Trent confirms Catholic teaching.

Present: An important continuing difference between Catholic and Protestant theology.

Conclusion

The purgatory debate ultimately concerns four foundations: canon, justification, sanctification and Tradition.

This teaching can therefore hardly be discussed apart from earlier chapters.

CHAPTER 18

What Place Do Mary and the Saints Have?

Veneration, Intercession and the One Mediator

Central question

When Catholic or Orthodox Christians ask Mary or a saint to pray for them, is this idolatry? Or is it comparable to asking another Christian for intercession?

1. Mary in the Bible

Mary undeniably has a special place. Elizabeth calls her blessed among women. Mary says: “From now on, all generations will call me blessed.”

Protestants therefore need not ignore Mary to remain Protestant. The Bible itself speaks respectfully of her.

2. *Kecharitōmenē*

In Luke 1, Gabriel greets Mary with a word related to grace: *κεχαριτωμένη*, *kecharitōmenē*, a perfect passive participle of *charitoō*.

It may be rendered highly favoured or she who has received grace. Catholic and Protestant interpreters differ over how much Mariological significance may be drawn from this one word.

3. *Theotokos*

A famous title is *Θεοτόκος*, *Theotokos*: God-bearer, usually translated Mother of God.

The title does not mean that Mary originates God's divine nature. The Son is eternal.

The point is Christological: the one Mary bore is truly God the Son, become human.

4. Ephesus

In the early Church, Theotokos became particularly important in Christological disputes over Christ's identity.

The ultimate question was whether the one born of Mary is one Person who is truly God and truly human.

A Protestant can therefore affirm the original Christological intention of Theotokos without accepting every later Marian dogma.

5. Perpetual virginity

Catholic and Orthodox traditions traditionally teach that Mary remained always a virgin.

Many modern evangelical and Baptist Christians consider this unnecessary on scriptural grounds. References to Jesus' brothers and sisters play an important role. Other traditions interpret these family terms differently.

6. The Immaculate Conception

This teaching is often confused with Jesus' virgin birth. Yet the Immaculate Conception concerns Mary.

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, special divine grace preserved Mary from original sin from her own conception.

Orthodox and Protestants do not share this particular dogmatic formulation in the same way.

7. Mary's Assumption

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that after her earthly life, Mary was taken body and soul into heavenly glory.

Orthodox tradition knows the Dormition, the falling asleep of the Mother of God, with related but not entirely identical theological formulations.

Protestants again ask for sufficient scriptural grounding.

8. One Mediator

First Timothy 2:5 says: “There is one God and one Mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus.”

The Greek μεσίτης, mesitēs, means mediator.

This is a central Protestant passage against invoking saints.

9. The Catholic and Orthodox reply

The reply is: Christ is the unique Mediator of redemption. Yet this does not prevent Christians praying for each other.

When I ask a friend to pray for me, I do not make him a second Redeemer. The saints' intercession is understood similarly.

10. The Protestant counterquestion

The discussion thus moves to a more precise issue: Where does the New Testament teach Christians on earth to address deceased believers and ask for their prayers?

Protestants acknowledge that deceased believers live with Christ, but find insufficient biblical grounds for addressing them directly.

11. Revelation and heavenly prayers

Revelation 5 and 8 connect heavenly reality with the saints' prayers.

Catholic and Orthodox interpreters see room here for heavenly participation in the prayers of God's people.

Protestants reply that these passages do not directly prescribe praying to a deceased saint and asking that saint to pray for you.

12. Hagioi

The Greek ἅγιοι, hagioi, means saints, God's holy ones or holy people.

Paul regularly uses the word for ordinary Christian congregations. In the New Testament sense, all believers are therefore saints. Catholic and Orthodox traditions do not deny this, but also officially recognise particular Christians as special examples and intercessors.

13. Worship and veneration

Catholic theology distinguishes latreia, worship belonging to God alone; douleia, veneration of saints; and hyperdouleia, special veneration of Mary.

A linguistic qualification is necessary. The New Testament word douleia itself has meanings around servitude or slavery. The later technical threefold distinction is theological terminology, not simply a dictionary distinction directly found in that form in the New Testament.

14. Icons

For Orthodox Christians, icons may hold an important place in worship and spirituality. The image is not worshipped as God. Honour is directed towards the one depicted.

Protestants, especially Reformed Christians, fear that in practice this distinction inadequately protects against religious image veneration.

Six traditions

Tradition	Mary	Invocation of saints
Evangelical	Honoured as Jesus' mother and example of faith	No
Reformed	Honoured biblically	No
Roman Catholic	Special veneration and Marian dogmas	Yes, for intercession
Eastern Orthodox	Very strong veneration as Theotokos	Yes
Baptist	Example of faith	No
Pentecostal/charismatic	Protestant forms usually evangelical, Catholic charismatics follow Catholic teaching	Depends on tradition

Marian timeline

1st century: Mary in the New Testament.

431: Council of Ephesus and affirmation of Theotokos in a Christological context.

787: Second Council of Nicaea and defence of icons.

1854: Roman Catholic dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception.

1950: Roman Catholic dogmatic definition of Mary's Assumption.

Conclusion

The difference ultimately is not between respecting Mary and insulting her. All Christians can call her blessed.

The deeper difference concerns the communion of saints, the state after death, mediation, church authority, Scripture and Tradition.

CHAPTER 19

How Should We Read Genesis?

Creation, the Age of the Earth and Evolution

Central question

Are the six creation days ordinary days? Is the earth relatively young? Can a Christian accept evolution? And were Adam and Eve historical people?

1. Bereshit

The Bible opens with bereshit: “In the beginning...”

Genesis does not begin with a defence of God's existence. God is presupposed. He is the Creator.

2. Bara

Bara means to create.

Genesis' first fundamental declaration is therefore theological: the cosmos is creation. The world is not God. It does not exist independently of God. It owes its existence to him.

3. Yom

The Hebrew yom usually means day, but can denote a broader period depending on context.

Young-earth creationists rightly point to the combination of evening and morning and numbered days. This supports an ordinary-day reading.

Other interpreters ask whether Genesis 1's strongly structured form also has a literary or analogical function.

A dictionary alone therefore cannot settle the debate.

4. Young-earth creationism

This model generally understands the creation days as ordinary days. In this view, the earth is relatively young.

A world containing millions of years of animal death before Adam is also often considered theologically problematic. Romans 5, after all, connects sin and death with Adam.

5. The question of death

Careful reading is necessary here. Romans 5 explicitly speaks of death spreading to all people. The passage primarily concerns human sin and human death.

Young-earth creationists often connect this with a broader absence of animal death before the Fall. Old-earth creationists consider that further conclusion unnecessary from Romans 5.

6. Old-earth creationism

Old-earth creationists accept the great age of cosmos and earth without necessarily accepting biological evolution fully.

Some believe in separate divine creative acts spread over long periods.

7. Evolutionary creation

Evolutionary creationists or theistic evolutionists broadly accept common descent and evolutionary processes.

Yet they reject the philosophical conclusion that God therefore does not exist. For them, evolutionary processes can be instruments of God's providential creative work.

8. Science and naturalism

Two concepts must therefore be distinguished: methodological investigation of nature and philosophical naturalism. Science investigates natural processes. The metaphysical conclusion that only nature exists does not automatically follow.

9. Raqia

Genesis 1 uses *raqia*, often translated firmament, vault or expanse.

The concept reminds us that Genesis was written in an ancient world. This raises an interpretive question: How does God use the language and conceptual world of the original hearers to communicate theological truth?

10. Adam

Depending on context, the Hebrew *adam* can mean human being, humanity or the name Adam.

There is also a wordplay with *adamah*: ground. The earthly human being is taken from the earth.

11. The historical Adam

Paul uses Adam in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 in relation to Christ. This makes Adam's historicity theologically important for many Christians.

Adam and Christ form a contrast: through one man come sin and death; through Christ come justification and life.

A wholly fictional Adam is therefore problematic for many evangelical and Reformed interpreters.

Other Christian models seek to connect a historical Adam with a larger early human population.

12. God's image

Genesis says that humans are created according to tselem Elohim: the image of God.

This is fundamental to Christian anthropology. Human dignity is not earned through intelligence, health, usefulness, independence or achievement. It is connected with God's creative action.

13. Augustine

Long before modern geology and Darwin, Christian interpreters already existed who did not read Genesis at every point as a simple chronological account. Augustine is an important example.

Yet calling him a modern evolutionist would be equally anachronistic. He obviously did not know Darwin's theory.

History chiefly shows that debate over the exact nature of creation days predates modern evolutionary theory.

14. Darwin

The publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 profoundly changed the discussion.

Christians did not all respond alike. Some rejected evolutionary theory; others tried to connect it with belief in creation.

In the twentieth century, young-earth creationism again became strongly influential in parts of evangelical Christianity.

Models compared

Model	Days	Earth	Evolution	Adam
Young-earth creationism	Usually 24 hours	Young	Largely rejected	Historical
Old-earth creationism	Periods or otherwise interpreted	Old	Varied, often limited	Usually historical
Evolutionary creation	Not necessarily chronological 24-hour days	Old	Largely accepted	Multiple models
Literary/framework approach	Literary structure central	Not decided by text alone	Separate question	Depends on theologian

Six traditions

None of the six traditions can be reduced entirely to one scientific model.

Different creationist models exist in evangelical, Reformed, Baptist and Pentecostal circles. Roman Catholic tradition permits evolutionary science within theological boundaries. Multiple approaches also exist within Orthodoxy.

This matters: the debate cuts across denominations.

Conclusion

Christians may differ deeply over the earth's age. Yet the classical Christian confession of creation says:

God is Creator. Creation is good. Humanity bears God's image. Sin is real. Creation has a purpose.

Ultimately, the Creator will renew his creation.

CHAPTER 20

How Does the Bible Shape Our Ethics?

Marriage, Sexuality, Life and Death, War, Money and Society

Central question

How do we move from a biblical passage in an ancient culture to a responsible Christian decision today?

1. Commands are not all applied alike

Christians do not offer animal sacrifices. Most do not keep Old Testament food laws as covenant obligations. At the same time, they consider many moral commands permanently relevant.

Christian ethics therefore involves more than finding an isolated verse supporting my position. We must understand a command's place within the whole of salvation history.

2. Jesus at the centre

Jesus summarises God's law as love for God and love for one's neighbour.

The Greek ἀγάπη, *agapē*, is strongly associated with self-giving love.

Yet in the New Testament, love does not mean approving every choice. Love and truth belong together.

3. Law and gospel

Reformed traditions have used different distinctions to understand the continuing significance of God's law.

Roman Catholic ethics also closely connects Scripture and Tradition with natural law. Orthodox ethics often strongly emphasises the formation and healing of the human person.

Pentecostal and evangelical traditions additionally stress sanctification and obedience to the Spirit.

4. Hagiasmos

The Greek *ἁγιασμός*, *hagiasmos*, means sanctification.

Christian ethics is therefore not exclusively a list of prohibitions. Its aim is a life increasingly shaped according to God's character.

5. Conscience

Συνείδησις, *syneidēsis*, means conscience.

Paul takes conscience seriously. Yet conscience is not automatically infallible. It needs formation. A person may be sincere yet judge wrongly.

6. Marriage

Jesus refers back to Genesis in teaching about marriage. Classical Christian tradition has therefore historically connected marriage with the union of man and woman.

At the same time, contemporary Protestant denominations contain differing interpretations of marriage and relationships.

These differences are connected with interpretations of Genesis, Jesus' teaching, Paul's letters, the role of historical context and broader hermeneutics.

7. Sexual ethics and pastoral care

Sexual ethics must distinguish what a church considers morally normative from how people receive pastoral care.

A Christian conviction must never excuse humiliation, hatred, violence or dehumanisation. At the same time, respecting people does not automatically require every tradition to abandon its moral interpretation.

Truth in love is particularly necessary here.

8. Divorce

Jesus speaks strictly about divorce. Yet Christians differ over exceptions and remarriage.

Issues discussed include adultery, abandonment, covenant-breaking and abuse.

No marriage ethic may require someone to remain in immediate danger. Safety and protection of vulnerable people must be taken seriously.

9. The beginning of human life

Christian tradition has strongly connected human dignity with creation in God's image, God's knowledge of humanity, care for the vulnerable and the prohibition of unjust killing.

Debates about pregnancy and unborn life then concern questions such as: When does individual human life begin? What moral significance does biological development have? What responsibilities exist towards mother and unborn child? How should serious medical emergencies be handled?

Traditions do not always formulate the details identically, but the dignity of human life remains an important Christian starting point.

10. The end of life

Dying also raises complex questions.

Intentionally causing death must be distinguished from not continuing disproportionate or futile treatment. Not every technically possible treatment is morally obligatory.

Good palliative care seeks to reduce pain, preserve dignity, avoid abandoning the dying person, and neither unnecessarily hasten death nor artificially deny it.

11. War and peace

Christians have differed profoundly here.

Pacifist tradition: Jesus' teaching on loving enemies, turning the other cheek and making peace is understood as a call to principled nonviolence. Just-war tradition: Other Christians hold that under very strict conditions, force may be justified to protect innocent people and resist grave injustice.

The just-war tradition seeks precisely to place moral boundaries around violence.

12. Money

Strikingly, Christian ethics may devote great attention to sexual issues while Jesus speaks extensively about money, possessions, greed, the poor and generosity.

James strongly condemns economic exploitation.

A complete Christian ethic must therefore also ask: How do we earn money? How do we treat employees? How much do we really need? What do we do with abundance? Who bears the consequences of our consumption?

13. The prosperity gospel

In parts of modern Christianity, material prosperity is closely associated with faith.

Serious biblical objections exist. Jesus was not rich. The apostles suffered. Paul knew both need and abundance.

The New Testament promises no universal formula of more faith equalling more money.

God may bless materially, but wealth is no reliable thermometer of spiritual maturity.

14. Technology and AI

New technology confronts Christians with questions biblical writers could not directly address in modern terms.

Consider artificial intelligence, genetic manipulation, digital identity, deepfakes, algorithmic influence, privacy and human-machine relationships.

Christian ethics therefore needs principles, including truth, human dignity, responsibility, justice, stewardship, protection of vulnerable people, and limits to power.

15. Not everything is equally clear

Romans 14 shows that Christians may sometimes hold different conscientious convictions.

Paul does not say that truth does not exist. He makes clear that not every disagreement has the same status. This is an essential lesson for the whole book.

Six traditions and ethical method

Tradition	Characteristic sources/emphases
Evangelical	Scripture, prayer, wisdom and community
Reformed	Scripture, covenant, creation and law
Roman Catholic	Scripture, Tradition, teaching authority and natural law
Eastern Orthodox	Scripture within Tradition, virtue, ascetic practice and spiritual healing
Baptist	Scripture, conscience, local congregation and responsibility
Pentecostal/charismatic	Scripture, sanctification and the Spirit's guidance

Why ethics ultimately concerns discipleship

Christian ethics asks more than, “What can I just get away with?”

The deeper question is, “Whom do I want to resemble?”

The aim of discipleship is conformity to Christ. Christian ethics therefore includes more than prohibitions. It includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control.

Ethics then becomes formation of character by the Spirit.

OVERVIEW OF PART IV

Chapter	Main question	Central difference
16	Is hell eternal?	Eternal punishment, destruction or ultimate restoration
17	Does purgatory exist?	Purification after death and prayer for the departed
18	What place do Mary and saints have?	Veneration, intercession and mediation
19	How do we read Genesis?	Creation days, age, evolution and Adam
20	How do we determine Christian ethics?	Biblical interpretation and application

MAJOR TIMELINE: 2,000 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN DIFFERENCES

c. AD 30-100: Apostolic period

Emergence of New Testament writings and the first congregations.

2nd-3rd centuries

Development of church structures, liturgy and early theological formulations.

325: Nicaea

Debate about Christ leads to a foundational confession of faith.

381: Constantinople

Further formulation of Trinitarian doctrine.

431: Ephesus

Theotokos becomes important in defending Christ's unity.

451: Chalcedon

Christ confessed as truly God and truly human.

5th century: Augustine

Major influence on Western theology concerning sin, grace and church.

787: Nicaea II

An important council in the debate about icons.

1054: East-West division

Traditional marker of the separation between Rome and Constantinople.

1517 and afterwards: Reformation

Scriptural authority, justification, sacraments and church discussed anew at a fundamental level.

16th century: Radical Reformation

Baptism and the nature of the congregation questioned anew.

1545-1563: Trent

Roman Catholic response and reform.

1618-1619: Dort

Grace, election and perseverance.

17th century: Baptist movement

Believer's baptism and congregationalism acquire new institutional forms.

18th century: Revival movements

Personal conversion and sanctification strongly emphasised.

1859: Darwin

A new phase in Christian debate about Genesis and natural science.

19th-20th centuries

Dispensationalism becomes highly influential in parts of evangelical Christianity.

Early 20th century: Pentecostal movement

Tongues, healing and spiritual gifts again become central themes.

From the 1960s: Charismatic movement

Charismatic spirituality spreads within existing denominations.

21st century

New debates about ethics, secularisation, medical technology, sexuality, genetics and artificial intelligence.

THE TWENTY QUESTIONS AT A GLANCE

No.	Question	Central concept
1	Who has the final word?	Authority
2	How is a person saved?	Grace
3	Does God choose, or do we choose?	Election
4	Can salvation be lost?	Perseverance
5	Who should be baptised?	Covenant
6	What happens at the Lord's Supper?	Presence
7	What is the true Church?	Church
8	Who may lead?	Office
9	Does God speak directly today?	Prophecy
10	Are miraculous gifts for today?	Charismata
11	Does God heal today?	Healing
12	What place does Israel have?	Covenant
13	When does the rapture occur?	Christ's return
14	What is the millennium?	Kingdom
15	What happens after death?	Resurrection
16	Is hell eternal?	Judgement
17	Does purgatory exist?	Purification
18	What place do Mary and saints have?	Intercession
19	How do we read Genesis?	Creation

No.	Question	Central concept
20	How do we determine our ethics?	Discipleship

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Where Differences Really Begin

After twenty chapters, a pattern emerges. Christians often differ not because one group possesses the Bible and another does not, but because they answer differently the questions preceding the final conclusion.

What is authority? How do we interpret Scripture? What place does Tradition have? How do Old and New Testaments relate? What does a sacrament do? What is the Church? How does the Holy Spirit work? How do we read prophecy? Which texts are literal, symbolic or typological? How do we distinguish universal norms from culturally specific applications?

Simply quoting another biblical verse is therefore sometimes insufficient in a debate. We first need to discover the interpretive lens through which we read that passage.

Three levels of difference

Not every difference carries the same weight.

Level 1: The centre

These convictions historically belong to the heart of Christian faith: God, Christ, cross, resurrection, grace, faith and God's ultimate victory.

Level 2: Major church differences

Examples include baptism, the Lord's Supper, church structure, office and spiritual gifts.

Such differences may explain why Christians gather in different churches. Yet they need not automatically imply that the other person cannot be a Christian.

Level 3: Differences allowing broad diversity

Examples include many details of end-times schemes, the earth's age and certain practical applications.

Convictions may be strong here too. Yet not every difference deserves the same intensity.

Truth and love

Unity does not mean pretending differences do not exist. Love does not mean making truth unimportant.

Yet truth without love may become pride. Love without truth may become relativism.

The New Testament asks something harder: speaking truth in love.

The final test

This book's motto is: "Test everything. Hold on to what is good."

Both parts are necessary. Test everything: think, investigate, compare, ask questions, examine traditions, test experiences and examine your own convictions too.

Then hold on to what is good. Do not doubt endlessly. Do not become cynical. Do not believe truth is unattainable.

Investigation should ultimately lead to conviction, humility, worship and obedience.

The question above all questions

Jesus did not ultimately give his disciples an examination on twenty denominational differences. He asked: "But who do you say that I am?"

Peter replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

There lies this book's centre. Christians may differ over much, but Christian faith ultimately stands or falls with Jesus Christ.

Our denomination is not the Saviour. Neither is our systematic theology, end-times scheme, church history or knowledge of Hebrew and Greek.

Christ.

Theology may therefore be profound, but never arrogant. It may be persuasive, but never loveless. It may name differences, but Christ must remain greater than the difference.

AFTERWORD

Disagreeing Without Losing One Another

This book did not seek to win twenty debates. It sought to make twenty conversations fairer.

We therefore tried to avoid caricatures, investigate the original texts, consider history, understand traditions in their own words and repeatedly return to Scripture.

From an evangelical perspective, the central conviction remains that Scripture is the decisive standard and salvation rests entirely on God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Yet precisely a high view of Scripture requires humility. *Sola Scriptura* does not mean my interpretation is infallible. Ultimately it means even my interpretation must be brought under God's Word again.

One Lord

Christ is not the possession of Rome, Constantinople, Geneva, Wittenberg, Canterbury, a Baptist congregation, an evangelical movement or a Pentecostal church.

The Church belongs to him.

Christians can therefore correct one another, learn from one another and sometimes disagree sharply, yet acknowledge together: Jesus Christ is Lord.

FINAL WORD

Where Scripture speaks clearly: obey.

Where interpretations differ: investigate.

Where history can teach something: listen.

Where human knowledge remains limited: be humble.

Where another Christian thinks differently: love.

In everything: look to Christ.

Ultimately, our denomination is not glorified. Neither is our scheme or our being right.

God is.

Soli Deo Gloria.

GLOSSARY OF HEBREW AND GREEK TERMS

Hebrew

Adamah

Meaning: ground, earth. Chapter 19. Related to the wordplay surrounding Adam.

Adam

Meaning: human being, humanity; in context also Adam. Chapter 19.

Bara

Meaning: to create. Chapter 19.

Berit

Meaning: covenant. Chapter 12.

Bereshit

Meaning: in the beginning. Chapter 19.

Yom

Meaning: day, or a broader time designation depending on context. Chapter 19.

Nephesh

Meaning: life, person, living being, soul. Chapter 15.

Ezer

Meaning: helper, help. Chapter 8.

Raqia

Meaning: firmament, vault, expanse. Chapter 19.

Sheol

Meaning: realm of the dead, grave-like sphere of the departed.
Chapters 15 and 16.

Tselem Elohim

Meaning: image of God. Chapter 19.

Greek

Αγάπη: agapē

Meaning: love. Chapter 20.

Αἰών: aiōn

Meaning: age, era. Chapter 16.

Αἰώνιος: aiōnios

Meaning: eternal, belonging to the age; precise nuance depends on context. Chapter 16.

Ἀνάστασις: anastasis

Meaning: resurrection. Chapter 15.

Ἀντίχριστος: antichristos

Meaning: antichrist. Chapter 13.

Ἀπάντησις: apantēsis

Meaning: meeting, going out to meet. Chapter 13.

Ἀπόλλυμι: apollymi

Meaning: to lose, destroy, ruin. Chapter 16.

Ἀπόστολος: apostolos

Meaning: one sent, apostle. Chapter 8.

Ἀγιασμός: hagiasmos

Meaning: sanctification. Chapter 20.

Ἅγιοι: hagioi

Meaning: saints, holy people. Chapter 18.

Ἀμαρτία: hamartia

Meaning: sin. Chapter 2.

Ἀρπάζω: harpazō

Meaning: seize, snatch away, take up. Chapter 13.

Αὐθεντέω: authenteō

Meaning: exercise authority; a rare word whose precise nuance is debated. Chapter 8.

Βαπτίζω: baptizō

Meaning: baptise, immerse, wash. Chapter 5.

Γέεννα: geenna

Meaning: Gehenna, image/term for divine judgement. Chapter 16.

Γλῶσσα: glōssa

Meaning: tongue, language. Chapter 10.

Διάκονος: diakonos

Meaning: servant, deacon. Chapter 8.

Δικαιοσύνη: dikaiosynē

Meaning: righteousness, justice. Chapter 2.

Δικαιόω: dikaiōō

Meaning: justify. Chapter 2.

Ἐκκλησία: ekklēsia

Meaning: assembly, congregation, church. Chapter 7.

Ἐκλέγομαι: eklegomai

Meaning: choose, select. Chapter 3.

Ἐπίσκοπος: episkopos

Meaning: overseer, later bishop. Chapter 8.

Εὐχαριστέω: eucharisteō

Meaning: thank, give thanks. Chapter 6.

Θέωσις: theōsis

Meaning: deification, participation in God's life through grace. Chapter 2.

Θεοτόκος: Theotokos

Meaning: God-bearer, Mother of God. Chapter 18.

Θεόπνευστος: theopneustos

Meaning: God-breathed/inspired. Chapter 1.

Κοινωνία: koinōnia

Meaning: fellowship, sharing, participation. Chapter 6.

Μεσίτης: mesitēs

Meaning: mediator. Chapter 18.

Οἶκος: oikos

Meaning: house, household. Chapter 5.

Παράδοσις: paradosis

Meaning: transmission, tradition. Chapter 1.

Παράδεισος: paradeisos

Meaning: paradise. Chapter 15.

Παραπίπτω: parapiptō

Meaning: fall away. Chapter 4.

Παρουσία: parousia

Meaning: coming, presence. Chapter 13.

Πίστις: pistis

Meaning: faith, trust, faithfulness. Chapter 2.

Πνεῦμα: pneuma

Meaning: spirit, breath, wind. Chapter 15.

Πρεσβύτερος: presbyteros

Meaning: elder. Chapter 8.

Προορίζω: proorizō

Meaning: determine beforehand. Chapter 3.

Προφητεία: prophēteia

Meaning: prophecy. Chapter 9.

Συνείδησις: syneidēsis

Meaning: conscience. Chapter 20.

Χάρις: charis

Meaning: grace. Chapter 2.

Χάρισμα: charisma

Meaning: gift of grace, spiritual gift. Chapter 10.

Χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων: charismata iamatōn

Meaning: gifts of healings. Chapter 11.

Ψυχή: psychē

Meaning: life, soul, person, self. Chapter 15.

KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES BY CHAPTER

Ch.	Theme	Principal passages
1	Scripture and Tradition	Mark 7; Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:15
2	Salvation	John 3; Romans 3-5; Ephesians 2:1-10; James 2
3	Election	John 6; Romans 8-11; Ephesians 1; 1 Timothy 2; 2 Peter 3
4	Perseverance	John 10; John 15; Romans 8; Hebrews 6; Hebrews 10; 1 John 2
5	Baptism	Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2; Acts 8; Acts 10; Acts 16; Romans 6; Colossians 2
6	Lord's Supper	Matthew 26; John 6; 1 Corinthians 10-11
7	Church	Matthew 16; Acts 15; Ephesians 1-4; Galatians 2
8	Office	Genesis 1-2; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 11; 1 Corinthians 14; Galatians 3; 1 Timothy 2-3
9	Prophecy	Hebrews 1; 1 Corinthians 12-14; 1 Thessalonians 5
10	Charismata	Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 2
11	Healing	Isaiah 53; Matthew 8; 2 Corinthians 12; James 5; 1 Peter 2
12	Israel	Genesis 12; Jeremiah 31; Romans 9-11; Hebrews 8
13	Christ's return	Matthew 24; 1 Thessalonians 4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13
14	Millennium	Matthew 13; Revelation 19-20
15	Death/resurrection	Luke 23; 1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5; Philippians 1; Revelation 21-22
16	Hell	Isaiah 66; Matthew 10; Matthew 25; Mark 9; Revelation 14; Revelation 20

Ch.	Theme	Principal passages
17	Purgatory	1 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 10-12; Revelation 21; 2 Maccabees 12
18	Mary/saints	Luke 1-2; Romans 16; 1 Timothy 2; Revelation 5; Revelation 8
19	Creation	Genesis 1-3; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15
20	Ethics	Genesis 1-2; Matthew 5-7; Matthew 19; Romans 12-14; Galatians 5; James

SOURCES AND FURTHER STUDY

Bible and original text

For original-language study, standard editions of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are preferable, supplemented by reliable lexicons and grammars.

Dutch Bible translations can be compared to reveal where translation choices already contain interpretive decisions.

Early Church

Didache: Important for early Christian baptismal practice, the Lord's Supper and congregational life.

Ignatius of Antioch: Important for the development of the episcopate, church unity and Eucharistic language.

Irenaeus: Important for apostolic tradition, combating heresy and salvation history.

Augustine: Important for grace, free will, church, baptism and eschatology.

Reformation

Martin Luther: Particularly relevant to justification, scriptural authority and the Lord's Supper.

John Calvin: Relevant to Scripture, election, church, sacraments and perseverance.

Ulrich Zwingli: Important for the Protestant development of teaching on the Lord's Supper.

Jacobus Arminius: Essential for later debate about election, grace and human responsibility.

Reformed confessions

For the eventual publisher's edition, sources to consult include the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and Westminster Confession of Faith.

These allow Reformed positions to be presented through their own documents.

Roman Catholic primary sources

Important categories include the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Dei Verbum, Lumen Gentium, Council of Trent documents, Vatican II documents and relevant official texts on Eucharist, Mary, church, revelation, and ecumenism.

Eastern Orthodox sources

Particular caution is needed for Orthodox tradition. Orthodox theology has no single central teaching authority fully comparable to the Roman Catholic Magisterium.

Ecumenical councils, liturgical tradition, Church Fathers and representative Orthodox theologians must therefore be combined.

Baptist sources

Historical Baptist confessions and representative works on believer's baptism, the local congregation, religious liberty and discipleship are important.

Pentecostal and charismatic sources

For this section, classical Pentecostal documents must be distinguished from the broader charismatic movement.

Important themes include baptism in the Holy Spirit, tongues, prophecy, healing, charismata and discernment.

SOURCE APPARATUS

Accounting for the Sources

Source selection is particularly important in a comparative book like this.

A Roman Catholic teaching should preferably be described through official Roman Catholic documents. A Reformed position through Reformed confessions and representative theologians. A Baptist position through Baptist confessions. A classical Pentecostal position through that movement's own statements of faith.

Only then comes secondary literature. This edition therefore distinguishes primary from secondary sources.

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. The Bible

The Bible is the primary text against which all twenty chapters are ultimately tested.

The definitive edition will consistently identify the Dutch translation or translations used.

Different Dutch translations can be compared, while standard Hebrew and Greek texts are consulted for original-language study.

B. Hebrew and Greek original text

For the Old Testament: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia / Biblia Hebraica Quinta.

For the New Testament: Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece, and United Bible Societies, Greek New Testament.

These texts provide the basis for discussing words such as berit, nephesh, yom, theopneustos, pistis, charis, aiōnios, parousia and anastasis.

C. Early Christian sources

Didache: Important for investigating baptism, fasting, the Lord's Supper, congregational practice and early Christian discipleship. Particularly interesting is its mention of different practical possibilities for administering baptism. This makes it relevant to Chapter 5.

Ignatius of Antioch: His letters matter for the episcopate, church unity, Eucharist and development of church structures. Ignatius is therefore particularly relevant to Chapters 6-8.

Justin Martyr: His descriptions of Christian gatherings provide important information about baptism, Eucharist, worship and Scripture reading.

Irenaeus of Lyons: Important for apostolic tradition, apostolic succession, opposition to Gnosticism, the unity of Old and New Testaments, and salvation history. His work is therefore especially relevant to Chapters 1, 7 and 12.

Augustine of Hippo: One of this book's most important historical theologians. His influence is considerable in discussions of sin, grace, free will, election, baptism, church, the end times and Genesis. He therefore appears in several chapters.

II. THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

Nicaea, 325: Christ's identity was central. The Son is not an exalted creature. He truly belongs to divine reality.

Constantinople, 381: The confession of faith develops further and the confession concerning the Holy Spirit receives fuller formulation.

Ephesus, 431: Important for Christological debate and the title Theotokos for Mary. The original concern is primarily: Who is Jesus Christ?

Chalcedon, 451: Christ confessed as truly God and truly human. Divine and human natures are neither confused nor separated.

Nicaea II, 787: Highly important for debate about icons, images and veneration. This council therefore plays an important role in Chapter 18.

III. REFORMATION SOURCES

Martin Luther: Important works and themes include justification by faith, scriptural authority, the Christian's freedom, bondage of the will and the Lord's Supper. Especially relevant to Chapters 1-3 and 6.

John Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Calvin systematically addresses knowledge of God, Scripture, Christ, the Holy Spirit, justification, election, church, sacraments and Christian life.

The Institutes therefore form an important primary source for the Reformed position throughout almost the entire book.

IV. REFORMED CONFESSIONS

Belgic Confession: Important for Scripture, canon, Trinity, Christology, church, sacraments and the end times.

Heidelberg Catechism: Important for sin, redemption, gratitude, justification, baptism, the Lord's Supper and Christian life.

Canons of Dort: Essential to Chapters 3 and 4. Themes include election, human depravity, the efficacy of grace and perseverance.

Westminster Confession of Faith: Important for Scripture, God, providence, covenant, free will, justification, perseverance, church, sacraments and eschatology.

V. ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SOURCES

Catechism of the Catholic Church: A central source for the official Catholic position.

Particularly relevant are sections on revelation, Scripture and Tradition, justification, sacraments, church, Mary, saints, purgatory, hell and resurrection.

Catholic teaching describes Scripture and apostolic Tradition as closely connected within one transmitted deposit of faith. The Magisterium has a particular task in its authentic interpretation.

Dei Verbum: Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. Important for Chapter 1. Subjects include revelation, inspiration, Scripture, Tradition, interpretation and church teaching authority.

Lumen Gentium: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Important for understanding the Church, bishops, pope, laity, holiness, and Mary. Especially relevant to Chapters 7, 8 and 18.

Council of Trent: Particularly important for justification, sacraments, Eucharist, purgatory and the response to the Reformation. Relevant to Chapters 2, 5, 6 and 17.

VI. EASTERN ORTHODOX SOURCES

Orthodox theology requires a somewhat different approach to sources.

There is no exact equivalent of one universal modern Orthodox catechism functioning in the same way as the Roman Catholic Catechism.

Different kinds of sources must therefore be combined: Scripture, ecumenical councils, Church Fathers, liturgy and representative Orthodox theologians.

Athanasius: Important for incarnation, redemption and participation in God's life.

Basil the Great: Important for the Holy Spirit, Trinity and Christian life.

Gregory of Nazianzus: Important for Trinity, Christology and incarnation.

John Chrysostom: Important for biblical interpretation, preaching, church life and ethics.

John of Damascus: Important for Orthodox dogmatics, icons and Christology.

Kallistos Ware: For modern readers, his works provide an accessible introduction to Orthodox understanding of church, Tradition, prayer, theosis and spirituality.

VII. BAPTIST SOURCES

London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689: Important for historical Reformed Baptist theology.

Themes include Scripture, covenant, justification, church, baptism, the Lord's Supper and perseverance. Baptist Faith and Message: This confession represents an important contemporary Baptist stream.

For baptism, it emphasises the immersion of a believer. It describes the Lord's Supper as a symbolic act of remembrance and obedience. This makes it particularly relevant to Chapters 5-7.

VIII. PENTECOSTAL SOURCES

Assemblies of God, Statement of Fundamental Truths: An important primary source for classical Pentecostal Christianity.

It affirms Scripture as the authoritative rule for faith and life, personal salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, tongues, divine healing and Christ's return.

Within this classical Pentecostal tradition, baptism in the Holy Spirit is distinguished from new birth, and tongues are associated with its initial physical evidence.

This matters because not every charismatic Christian shares that particular formulation.

IX. IMPORTANT SECONDARY LITERATURE

Church history

Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: A broad overview of Christianity's development.*

Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church: Important for the early Church.*

Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years: A very broad historical overview.*

X. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Alister E. McGrath: Relevant to Christian theology, Reformation and the historical development of doctrines.

Millard J. Erickson: Representative evangelical systematic theology.

Wayne Grudem: Influential evangelical systematic theology, with clear positions on Scripture, election, gifts, church and the end times, among other matters.

When used, it must remain clear that Grudem represents one influential evangelical position rather than the evangelical position.

Michael Horton: Important representative work from Reformed theology.

XI. HOLY SPIRIT AND CHARISMATA

Gordon D. Fee: Important for Paul, the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians and charismata.

Fee is particularly valuable for combining thorough New Testament exegesis with a Pentecostal background.

Stanley M. Horton: Representative of classical Pentecostal theology.

XII. END TIMES AND REVELATION

Chapters 13-16 should deliberately draw on literature from different eschatological models: not only premillennial, but also amillennial, postmillennial, preterist, futurist and idealist.

This prevents a timeline silently determining which interpretation readers must accept.

XIII. CREATION AND SCIENCE

Chapter 19 should represent literature from at least three models: young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism and evolutionary creation.

Scientific arguments, biblical exegesis, philosophical conclusions and theological consequences must always be distinguished.

XIV. EXAMPLE OF A NOTES APPARATUS

The definitive chapters can receive endnotes in this form:

Chapter 1: Sample notes

1. Second Timothy 3:16-17. For *theopneustos*, see standard Greek lexicons.
2. Second Thessalonians 2:15. Greek *paradosis* may function positively or negatively depending on context.
3. *Dei Verbum*, sections 7-10, for the Roman Catholic relationship between Scripture, Tradition and teaching authority.
4. Catechism of the Catholic Church, sections 74-100.
5. Belgic Confession, Articles 3-7, for Reformed teaching on Scripture and canon.

Chapter 2: Sample notes

1. Romans 3-5 provides a foundational Pauline context for justification.

2. Ephesians 2:8-10 connects salvation by grace with the good works following it.
3. James 2:14-26 addresses faith without works.
4. Council of Trent, Decree on Justification.
5. Heidelberg Catechism, particularly Lord's Days 23-24.

Chapter 3: Sample notes

1. Ephesians 1:3-14.
2. Romans 8:28-30.
3. Romans 9-11 should be read as a literary unity.
4. Canons of Dort, Chapters I-II.
5. For Arminian tradition: writings of Jacobus Arminius and the Remonstrance of 1610.

Chapter 5: Sample notes

1. Matthew 28:18-20.
2. Acts 2:38-41.
3. Romans 6:1-4.
4. Belgic Confession, Article 34.
5. Baptist Faith and Message, Article VII.

Chapter 6: Sample notes

1. Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
2. First Corinthians 10:16-17 for *koinōnia*.
3. Council of Trent for Roman Catholic Eucharistic formulations.
4. Calvin, Institutes, Book IV, for Reformed sacramental theology.

5. Baptist Faith and Message, Article VII, for the Baptist memorialist formulation.

XV. SOURCE FRAMEWORK FOR EACH CHAPTER

From now on, each chapter will end with a small section:

Further reading. Bible: The principal scriptural passages.

Historical source: One or two primary texts.

Tradition sources: The relevant catechism, confession or statement of faith.

Further study: Two or three representative theological works.

This keeps the main text accessible while allowing interested readers to study further independently.

XVI. EDITORIAL RULE FOR SOURCES

For the definitive edition:

No tradition is described solely by its opponents. No controversial position is represented through one isolated quotation. Primary sources take priority. Internal differences within traditions are acknowledged. Original-language words never serve as simple proof-words. Historical development is distinguished from the original biblical text. Later dogmatic formulations are not projected back into the first century without evidence.

XVII. MAIN BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DIVISIONS

The eventual bibliography will be organised as follows: A. Bible editions and original texts.

B. Lexicons and language aids.

C. Apostolic Fathers and Church Fathers.

D. Ecumenical councils.

- E. Roman Catholic documents.
- F. Orthodox sources.
- G. Reformers and Reformed confessions.
- H. Baptist sources.
- I. Pentecostal and charismatic sources.
- J. Systematic theology.
- K. Church history.
- L. Eschatology.
- M. Creation and science.
- N. Christian ethics.

XVIII. SOURCES FOR THE SIX TRADITIONS

At least one primary reference source is maintained for each tradition.

Tradition	Primary/representative foundational source
Evangelical	Evangelical statements of faith and representative theology
Reformed	Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Dort, Westminster
Roman Catholic	Catechism, Vatican II, Trent
Eastern Orthodox	Councils, liturgy, Fathers and representative Orthodox theology
Baptist	Historical Baptist confessions and Baptist Faith and Message
Pentecostal	Statement of Fundamental Truths and classical Pentecostal theology

XIX. AN IMPORTANT EDITORIAL CORRECTION

In comparison tables, expressions such as the Catholic view or the evangelical view should be used only where a sufficiently uniform position genuinely exists.

Otherwise we use formulations such as: “in many evangelical churches”, “within classical Pentecostal traditions”, “in various Reformed churches”, “official Roman Catholic doctrine”, or “different emphases exist within Orthodox tradition”.

This considerably increases the whole book's scholarly reliability.

XX. CONCLUSION OF THE SOURCE APPARATUS

Theological differences do not become fairer when we make them smaller than they are.

Nor do they become fairer when we first simplify another person's position so that we can refute it easily.

A Christian book about differences should therefore aim at something harder: understanding the strongest version of another person's argument before assessing it. This is not relativism. It is intellectual honesty.

For a Christian, intellectual honesty ultimately belongs to the same calling as all other truth:

“Test everything; hold on to what is good.”



Why do sincere Christians reach different conclusions?

This book explores twenty major questions of faith on which Christians disagree. It examines decisive biblical passages, the historical development of these differences, and the arguments of six traditions: evangelical, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist, and Pentecostal or charismatic.

The aim is to understand rather than win arguments. What does Scripture say? What does it mean?

Why have sincere Christians reached different conclusions?

Arguments are presented fairly and weighed in their historical context.

20 MAJOR QUESTIONS OF FAITH EXPLORED

- Biblical authority
- Salvation and election
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper
- The Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts
- Israel and the Church
- The end times and the millennium
- Heaven, hell and eternity
- Six traditions compared
- Biblical passages and tables
- Timelines and historical context
- Study of the original languages
- Sources and further reading
- Accessible, balanced analysis

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gerard Feller writes accessible, in-depth books about Christian faith, the Bible and contemporary issues.

Through Feller Books he seeks a deeper understanding of the richness, diversity and unity of the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ.



**FELLER
BOOKS**

