

**EVANGELICAL
FORMOSAN
CHURCH
FAITH · BYLAW · PRACTICE
BOOK I FAITH**

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Preface

Isaac Chen, Chief Editor

Why have we compiled this book, entitled “The Faith, Bylaws, and Practices of EFC”? Christians are the people of God, who are marked with grace, and shoulder the responsibility of carrying out the Great Commission of evangelism, while living out a life of love for one another. This love is an envious thing to the world, and enables the world to see what type of people make up the disciples of Jesus Christ. However, throughout the past two thousand years, God’s people, and the churches they have gathered in, have had many disputes due to differences in the realization and perception of their beliefs. Consequently, the power of the Christian witness has been greatly diminished, which is very unfortunate.

“The Faith, Bylaws, and Practices of EFC,” as a book, is the result of contemplation and reaffirmation of beliefs by the EFC pastors in response to the times we are living in. Our hope is to clearly express “who are we?” in this day of globalization, pluralism and secularization, and to answer the following important questions: a. What do we believe in? b. What do we do? c. How do we do it? d. Why do it this way and not a different way?

We hope that this book will not only reflect the diversity and the inclusiveness of Christian backgrounds within EFC, but will also function to regulate and define our church and believers, while bringing foresight, openness, and guidance. In other words, this book is clear enough to explain who we are, but also vague enough for us to reflect on and accommodate the differences and diversity within the current EFC denomination. We believe that an organization and its structure must have stability, but at the same time must allow room for flexible application. The tension between these two is both real and undeniable. Thus, upon implementation, we must be humble and

unbiased, and we need to move forward with prayer, wisdom, patience, and love.

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We hope that readers will benefit from this book and have a deeper understanding of what kind of church EFC is, what kind of a Christian an EFC member is, and what kind of faith group an “EFC’er” belongs to. We also hope that, after knowing and accepting what it means to be a “EFC’er”, we can then obey, practice, commit, and remain united, so that EFC will be a church pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ and prepared for His second coming.

VOL. I FAITH

Introduction	Verse 7	55
EFC Faith Proclamations	1. The Realization of Salvation	55
Verse 1	2. Consequences of Salvation	59
1. Revelation	Verse 8	64
2. Inspiration	Verse 9	64
3. Biblical Infallibility	1. Work Done by the Holy Spirit	64
4. The Authority of the Bible	2. Believer's Life	71
5. Interpretation of the Bible	Verse 10	76
6. The Importance of the Bible	Verse 11	76
7. Meditation on the Bible	1. The Nature of the Church	76
8. Returning to the Bible	2. Church's Functions	82
Verse 2	3. Church's Organization and	
1. God's Nature	Responsibilities	87
2. The Triune God	4. Sacred Ceremonies	91
Verse 3	Verse 12	95
1. God's Creation	1. Interpretation of Prophecies	95
2. God's Providence	2. Depictions of the End Time	99
Verse 4	3. Ending into the Eternity	103
1. God's Image		
2. Sin		
Verse 5		
1. The Foundation of Salvation		
2. The Provision of Salvation		
Verse 6		
1. Christ's Deity		
2. Christ's Humanity		
3. The Relationship between Christ's Deity		
and Christ's Humanity		
4. Christ's Work		

INTRODUCTION

Peter Chen, Secretary General

Christian faith is not only a personal belief, stored in the depth of one's heart, but also a public proclamation to the whole world that Jesus is God's begotten Son, died for our sins and is our LORD. Faith proclamation like this is called "Creeds".

EFC inherited the fruition of early church's Ecumenical Creeds along with abundant spiritual heritage from the church history over the past two thousand years. When standing at this particular moment of the history, facing different time and space situations, in order for the Gospel to spread rightfully and local churches to get established healthily, EFC's founding leaders wrote down twelve "creeds" in 1970 to serve as our faith proclamation for EFC's evangelical movement.

After 40 years of development, due to the increasing number of local churches and church members, EFC Movement is becoming a development of a denomination. As a budding denomination, a responsible attitude has led us to clearly separate our twelve creeds into twelve verses and expound on each so that believers can know more the truth that we believe in not only in its entirety but also in its details; doing so we can refute heresies and maintain our commonly acknowledged belief.

Systematic Theology usually groups doctrines conveyed in the Bible into nine

categories: Bibliology, Trinity, Christology, Pneumatology, Anthropology, Soteriology, Sanctification, Ecclesiology and Eschatology. Instead of exploring EFC Creeds based upon these categories, here in this book (EFC Faith and Order – Volume 1: Faith) we will take a different approach: we will follow the order in EFC's twelve Creeds to analyze, explain and discuss each creed from the perspectives of Systematic Theology, Historical Theology, Hermeneutics Theology, and Applied Theology.

It's our hope that this book will trigger another trend in EFC's development. Through reading, believers can develop a deeper hunger for Bible study, get more interested in exploring church doctrine, and cherish more the spiritual heritage left from church history. In so doing, our rationality can turn more toward God's truth, our legalism more toward God's righteousness, our virtue more toward God's holiness. Thus, EFC people may move closer toward the image and likeness of "LORD Jesus", and at the same time, perform our part of necessary reflection and contribution on the inherited Ecumenical Creeds from this particular point that our generation is standing at.

EFC Faith Proclamations

✠ 1. That the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired and infallible Word of God, the necessary and complete revelation of His Will for the salvation of men, and is the ultimate authority for Christian faith and life.

✠ 2. In the one true and living God, eternally existing in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

✠ 3. That the Triune God is the Creator, the Sustainer and Ruler of the Creation, but is prior to, and distinct from the Creation.

✠ 4. That the first man, Adam, was created by God in His image, but fell from his original state by sinning against God, and hence incurred upon himself and all his posterity the guilt of sin, condemnation, and death; therefore, all mankind are in need of salvation, but are totally incapable of saving themselves.

✠ 5. That after the Fall, God, in His mercy and love, made provision for men's redemption through the establishment of the covenant of grace with His people by the promise and the actual giving of the Savior Jesus Christ, whom to believe is justification and life.

✠ 6. That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent by the Father, begotten by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary; that He lived a sinless and obedient life, suffered and died on the cross vicariously for the sins of His people who believe in Him; that God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him both as Lord and Christ, and gave Him the promise of the Holy Spirit for His Church.

✠ 7. That men are saved by grace through faith in Christ in response to the Gospel preached, or otherwise presented, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through whom ransomed sinners became the sons of God and heirs of eternal life. That Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men; through Him and only through Him the believer has access to the Father.

✠ 8. That every believer is a new creature in Christ, and is called to walk in the Spirit, to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness, and thereby manifest the fruit of the Spirit, conforming himself to the image of Christ; that good works are the fruit of the Christian life, and are not ways of justification.

✠ 9. That God alone is the LORD of our conscience, and that the believers are free from the commands of men which are contrary to, or in addition to, the Scriptures in matters of faith and conduct.

✠ 10. That the church, consisting of all true believers, being Christ's own and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is the Body of Christ, the invisible church; that the church is holy, universal and one in Christ; that the invisible church manifests itself in the visible church, the local congregations consisting of all who profess to believe in Christ and are baptized; that as the people of God and a kingdom of priests, the church is called to grow unto the stature of the fullness of Christ and to fulfill her missionary work through the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in worship, sacraments, fellowship, discipline, and services.

✠ 11. In the priesthood of all believers, and the parity of the ministers and the laity.

✠ 12. That in the last day, as the consummation of redemption, Christ will come again personally and visible to the earth to judge the living and the dead; that there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead, of the believers through the Holy Spirit unto the inheritance of eternal life, and the unbelievers unto condemnation; and that a new heaven and a new earth will be ushered in.

Verse 1

That the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, is the inspired and infallible Word of God, the necessary and complete revelation of His Will for the salvation of men, and is the ultimate authority for Christian faith and life.

1. Revelation

We believe Christian belief is a belief of revelation, that is to say our belief is based on revelations from God, instead of on our assumption about God. It is true that formation of doctrine (i.e. contents of our belief) is through human's rational thinking and human's belief experiences. However, all these human factors are exerted upon interpretations of the revelations, having nothing to do with the foundation of our belief, much less the absolute authority.

(1) The Necessity of Revelation

From the ancient time, all human religions have their own perspective of god. If we compare these views we will see that there are huge differences among them. The reason of huge difference is not hard to understand: all these perspectives are formed through mankind's life experience and their observation of the surrounding matters and things. People, who are situated in different cultures, and live in different areas of the world, naturally will come up with different points of view about god, because of the difference in their environments. Ancient societies mostly held polytheism and their deemed gods quite obviously had human like nature. All this shows that their view of god is just a conjecture based on human's own nature. If so, human's belief toward divinity is just a projection of human nature itself.

For humans to know God, God must take the initiative to reveal himself. Revelation

is God's manifesting his own nature and how man can establish relationship with Him. Although people argue if the supreme God can indeed be known by mankind, Bible clearly indicates that man not only can know God, but furthermore, should know God. John 17:3 says "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". Evidently, knowing God and having eternal life share same meaning; revelation is essential for us to know God.

(2) The Nature of Revelation

Revelation must be from God; otherwise it's not a revelation. "Revelation" is a terminology used in theology and differs from what is commonly used by people. For example, people may say: "This article gives me great revelation." Here, "revelation" actually means "Inspiration". In theology, "Revelation" is what God manifests for Himself or His Will after He takes the initiative to do so; it's not a thought that occurred in people's mind.

We have to be clear about the differences among "Reveal", "Enlighten", and "Move". "Move" has to do with a feeling in one's heart that urges him to do something, or it is a thought. This kind of sensation can be driven by God; or it can be just a man's subjective feeling and cannot be considered as a revelation coming from God. "Enlighten" is when the Holy Spirit applies an existing and objective revelation (usually words from Bible) to an individual's specific situation. "Enlighten" although is a work by the Holy Spirit, cannot be deemed as a revelation because it doesn't add to our objective understanding about God; it

just makes the objective truth become subjective.

(3) Ways of Revelation

Revelation can be categorized into general revelation (or common revelation) and special revelation. Common revelation can be known and understood by everybody; on the other hand, special revelation is for certain predestined people through whom the revelation is brought to others.

General Revelation has two main ways to come through. First is the Nature. Roman 1:19-20 “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” God, using the Nature, makes recognizable His existence, his omnipotence, along with his grace toward the created beings. Psalm 19:1 also says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” Generations after generations, there are always people who use their observations of the nature to infer that there indeed is a Master who created the heaven and earth.

Another means of general revelation is by conscience. Roman 2:14-15 says, “Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” The so-called “A heart that knows right and wrong” is man’s conscience or his intuitive goodness and is man’s morality. God puts moral rules in man’s heart, letting him know what He requires of him morally.

The existence of general revelation implies that Non-Christian may also know some

part of the truth. Since ancient time, all human races have their own religious nature and moral nature. Furthermore, all their moral standards share some commonalities. Therefore, when people point out similarities between Christian’s many moral teachings and Chinese culture’s teachings, we shouldn’t be surprised. All this can be viewed as a result of general revelation.

One issue with general revelation is that it’s not direct or clear enough. Understanding God’s nature through the Nature requires some inferring; besides, man’s conscience is also deeply influenced by the environment and the culture. What’s more important is that man’s sinful nature will deceive man’s interpretation of general revelation. Roman 1: 21-32 points out that man may treat a created object that is to manifest God’s nature, as God himself and worship that object. This kind of twisted view of revelation is directly related to man’s sinful life and acts. Conscience is the same. If man habitually sins, his conscience will lose ground and can no more work its intended functions. Because of this, general revelation has no effect on salvation; special revelation is precisely intentioned for man’s salvation.

There are also two main means for special revelation: Bible and Christ. Both are called “God’s Word”. Bible is the way God reveals using literature; Christ is the way God came to the world and incarnated to live out the Way. Both manifest God’s salvation decree, letting man find the way to salvation.

In the Book of John, Chapter 1 declares that Christ is God’s Way and has been there in the beginning (John 1: 1); He is the light for man (John 1: 3), and is the glory of God’s only begotten son; He manifests God who was never seen by men before. Hebrews Chapter 1 also has similar discourse. God, in the past, has revealed many times through prophets, and the pinnacle is the revelation through His son (Hebrews 1: 1-2). “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrew 1:3).

Theologian Karl Barth points out that if Christ is God's perfect revelation, He must be God himself. We can also say it from the opposite angle that Christ is God and He is the utmost revelation from God. However, incarnation is a historical incidence and cannot be repeated; it has to be carried through literature in order to remain forever. Not only so, the significance of the historical event also requires interpretation. Therefore literature revelation is essential and Bible is God's way of revelation by literature.

Besides Christ and Bible, there are some other means for special revelations, such as dreams (Genesis 20:3, 31:24; Joel 2:28), visions (Isaiah 1:1, Ezekiel 1:3), appearances (Genesis 16:7-14; Exodus 3:2, Second Samuel 24:16, Zechariah 1:12), messages by angels (Daniel 9:20-21; Luke 2: 10-11), direct revelations to prophets (2 Samuel 23:2, Zechariah 1:1, Ephesians 3:5), etc. Likewise, all these revelations are incidents that happened, with each being experienced by just a few people at a certain place, and at a certain moment. If there were no literature recording, these revelations would only be made for a small group of people and wouldn't become general revelations.

In discussions on spiritual gifts, there is a controversial topic: nowadays, do we still have special revelation such as visions, dreams, and prophets? One issue with this topic is: if we still have special revelation, is its authority equal to that of Bible? If the answer is not equal, then while both are God's revelations, why don't they have the same absolute authority from God? Does it mean that so-called "revelation" doesn't completely belong to God? Revelations that are not entirely from God are not revelations at all; they are just man's subjective spiritual experience, having no objective authority. As a matter of fact, this may well be the reality of what's has been claimed as revelation at the present time: just some personal subjective experience. However, if these special experiences are indeed revelations coming from God, can they be

accepted and added into the Bible? Doing so violates directly the conviction that the canonization of the Bible has already been completed. (Jude 3).

We believe if people nowadays receive revelation from God, its authority cannot be compared with that of the Bible due to the lack of canonization attribute; besides, the audience is limited to just one particular person or a small number of people. Revelations, if not recorded through Word of God and not interpreted, cannot have universal authority as Bible has. This leads to doctrines regarding Word of God.

(4) The Canonization of the Bible

"Canon" is from Greek word, kanōn, which means "measuring ruler" or "standard". Throughout Jewish and Christian histories, there are many written religious books, but not all are Word of God. Therefore not all these books are included in the Biblical canon.

The most important factor in determining if a book is in the canon of the Bible is the authority of the book itself. For the Old Testament the process of canonization is not the same as that of the New Testament; nevertheless the authority of the book itself is still the most important deciding factor. The canon of the Old Testament includes books that are written across a timeline of over one thousand years and the process of canonization is very complicated; not all histories can be clearly traced. But, from the perspective of Christian faith, the Old Testament has been accepted by the New Testament. Based on records in the New Testament, Jesus Christ and His apostles all affirmed that Old Testament is Word of God. Therefore, as long as we can accept the canon of the New Testament, it shouldn't be a problem for us to accept the Old Testament as the canon of Bible.

The Canon of the Old Testament

Among the 39 books in the Old Testament, 20 of them have known authors. As for the books that do not have their author names, some have commonly-agreed-upon author names according to the tradition. Ever since the earliest Jewish tradition in their history there already is the concept of canon of Bible. Pentateuch records that Moses gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD: "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you (Deuteronomy 31:26). This Book of the Law is to be read to people every year from then on. Also in later history books many kings such as Saul, Solomon, Jeroboam, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, and Hezekiah were mentioned for their using (or lack of using) this Book of the Law. According to Jewish tradition, all existing Hebrew Old Testament canon were confirmed during the era of Ezra and Nehemiah at the holy temple rebuilding conference around 520 B.C. (Ezra 7:23-26) Jewish Historian Flavius Josephus testified that during his time (1st century AD that is the same era as Jesus' apostles) there was publicly recognized canon of Bible.

The Canon of the New Testament

The canonization of New Testament is simpler than that of the Old Testament. The most important authority of the New Testament is the revelation received by the apostles. Although a few books were not written by the apostles, they are publicly acknowledged as being approved with apostles recognition. Examples are: the book of Luke is approved by Paul and the book of Mark by Peter. Peter in Second Peter 3:15-16 mentioned Paul's letters: "Bear in mind that our LORD's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these

matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction." Peter referred to Paul's letters and "the other Scriptures" in parallel; from this passage we can see how apostles viewed the authority of the books written by other apostles.

After the era of apostles, church started to sense the need to confirm the canon of the Bible. There were two factors involved. First is an external factor that is the severe prosecution of Christians; they not only had to risk being captured and killed at any moment, their books could also be destroyed; for this reason, they had to be careful saving revelations that were from God. In another word, the early church laid down their own lives in order to keep the contents of the Gospel; they had to be rest assured which books were worthy of their lives and which were not.

The second aspect was an internal factor of the church that was to face the challenge of heresies. Since heresies also referred to scriptures, early church had to recognize which books have the absolute authority. Therefore as early as the 2nd century, there came some so-called list of the scriptures. The earliest one we know of as of today was done by Marcion. Despite the fact that Marcion was a heretic who regarded the Old Testament as non-biblical and the God in the Old Testament a secondary God, his contempt of the Old Testament drove him to a much higher appreciation of the New Testament. Marcion's list includes 9 epistles by Paul and the book of Luke. Some scholars believe Marcion's short list could have been made at a time when he wanted to remove books he didn't agree upon from a much longer list.

Besides Marcion, the earliest formal book list for the New Testament can be found in "Muratorian Fragment" which was also a historical document from the 2nd century. Muratorian Fragment includes all the four Gospel Books, Acts, all 13 epistles by Paul, Jude,

two epistles by John, the first Peter and the Revelation; It also includes two books that later were not included in the canon of the Bible: “Shepherd of Herma” and “Wisdom of Solomon”. Among other early lists, the four Gospel Books, Acts and the 13 epistles by Paul were all publicly recognized in general; First John and First Peter were also widely accepted; Hebrews and Revelation were accepted by the majority of the churches; Jude had some acceptance, and Second Peter could be considered the least circulated. At the time of the 4th century, Athanasius’ list is the same as what we have now.

Generally speaking, a common belief that biblical canon was determined through church leader’s conference was not true. A few centuries before Ecumenical Council officially recognized the biblical canon, all local churches already knew for sure that these books were revelations from God. But due to communication difficulties in the ancient time, not all local churches had all the books; Ecumenical Council was just there to gather all church leaders in one place and collectively approved the already respected canon of the Bible and to make sure that all local churches use the same list.

2. Inspiration

Inspiration is a word that has to do with the holy media that brings about the existence of the Bible. It is when God, using his spirit to guide, control and influence the authors to make them accurately record what God reveals to His people. It can also be revelation that God gives us by means of word. However, the former kind, i.e. preservation of the inspiration is more important. “Inspiration” comes from Second Timothy 3:16. Most Chinese theologian terminologies refer “inspiration” to Greek theopneustos, mainly because of the inheritance from translation of NIV. As a matter of fact, 默示 (the Chinese translation of “inspiration”) doesn’t clearly convey the idea of God-breathed as in the original word. In English

“Inspire” is from Latin inspirare (breathing) and has been inherited by KJV and other modern day translation versions. Some Chinese theology books replace “默示” with “靈感” (which literally means “Inspired by the Holy Spirit” in Chinese) for the purpose of its theological meaning, declaring that Bible is written through “the inspiration by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21).

(1) The Scope and the Degree of Inspiration

Some believers believe that words in the Bible are intended and given by God and every single word is from God who is the author; people who were in total submission to His purpose and will, wrote down the Bible. This perspective is called Verbal Inspiration. Some believers believe Bible is when the time was ripe, under God’s providence, God worked in people’s heart and made them write down the Bible; this is called Plenary Inspiration. This point of view emphasizes that the entire Bible is God’s inspiration, but they put no emphasis on choices of word, unlike Verbal inspiration does. Yet some other believers believe in Dynamic Inspiration as they emphasize more on the live interactions between God and men; they believe when writing the Bible, God inspired and guaranteed that the message contents of the salvation were concise and non-mistaken, but they don’t believe it is necessary to use specific word to convey the message.

Inspirations must be verbally communicated and cannot be held at conceptual level or as a thought. Therefore, inspiration is wordy. Bible authors didn’t mechanically record what God had spoken to them; instead their mind and thoughts were guided by God but they were given liberty to choose words and form expressions. This is so when authors clearly called themselves authors and used first person’s point of view to write and sometimes even used result of their own research, or referred to other people’s results.

Additionally different authors display different writing styles.

Because of this, the concept of inspiration is a concept of “dual-authors” in that Bible is men’s word and at the same time God’s word, having attributes that it is co-authored by God and men. Or, we can say, Bible has dual attributes, one from God and the other from man. Inspiration is when Bible authors, guided by the Holy Spirit, through their personalities and thoughts, write down what God intends to inspire, which is God’s word written by man’s hands. Thus, we can say that Bible indeed is God’s word. Christianity accepts Bible as Christian faith’s supreme authority, not because Bible is inspiring, but because Bible is inspired by God.

God’s inspiration is complete, covering the entire Old Testament and New Testament. Church’s proclamation is the same; it has to cover the entire Bible, mold believers toward faithfulness (Galatians) and deeds (James). We proclaim that sins cannot be forgiven without blood being shed (Hebrews 9:22); at the same time we proclaim that justice rolls on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24)

(2) The Biblical Foundation for Inspiration

Inspiration is biblically based. First of all, in the above we referred to a passage in Second Timothy Chapter 3, to bring out the difference between the deceptive way of thinking that came up at the End Time and what Timothy had learned from the Bible ever since he was young. The emphasis is that the entire Bible came into existence because “God breathed”. “God breathed” means Bible came from the inner being of God; it also means “God spoke” (speaking is a movement of breathing out). “All Scriptures” means every part of the Bible. Of course, what Timothy had learned ever since he was young was the Hebrew Bible which is the same as our Old Testament. But we have reasons to believe that early church already

considered New Testament books, including Paul’s epistles as “biblical”. (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Paul, in Second Corinthians 2:10-16 pointed out that inspiration about Christ is not from man’s wisdom, but rather it is from God, manifested to apostles through the Holy Spirit; what they spoke about was instructional language taught by the Holy Spirit to manifest that God’s revelation is conveyed through language, i.e. words to people; furthermore, all these words were instructed by the Holy Spirit.

As to how Holy Spirit “instructs” revealing word, we can understand it from Second Peter 1:21, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” “carried along” means “driven” or “moved” that is to say, Holy Spirit touched and moved prophets and apostles to speak what God intended to speak in the same way camels or donkeys carry loads from one place to another; or like a fire burning in one’s heart; or like a hammer strikes stones trying to shatter it; or like wind blows leaves or sailboats floating on water. Sometimes it may be as certain as a trance; other times there may be no complete certainty like, “I think that I too have the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 7:40)

Word inspired by God comes from God and is driven by the Holy Spirit to be spoken out or written down by man as God’s word; and this inspiration includes the whole Bible. For this reason, we can say that Bible is indeed God’s word.

3. Biblical Infallibility

Bible’s infallibility is inseparable from God’s inspiration. Our recognition that Bible is infallible comes directly from our perspective of God’s inspiration. If Bible is God’s inspiration and is “God’s Word”, then all proclamations in the Bible must be truths. Negating that Bible is Infallible is equal to negating that Bible is God’s Word and is to consider that there is a possibility that God can say things that are

incorrect, or the keeping or conveying of the inspiration may not be entirely accurate.

(1) Disputes over Biblical Infallibility

For Chinese expression “without mistake”, there are two different English theologian terms “Inerrant” and “Infallible”. The former has a stronger meaning than the latter; both are advocated by people from Evangelical denomination. Because of these two different views, there have been fierce disputes and divisions in Evangelical denomination internally. Furthermore, each of the two views may mean different things at different times; sometimes they may even share same standpoint but just use different terms. Briefly speaking, EFC’s Chinese faith proclamation is based on translation of the English faith proclamation and the “Infallible” is the word for “without mistake” and that is EFC’s standpoint.

Infallibility can be translated into (Chinese) “no mistake” or “reliable” and refers to the reliability of the Bible. Amidst Evangelical denomination believers, some consider “reliable” and “no mistake” as synonyms, others consider the two as having opposite standpoints. Although inerrancy and infallibility both emphasize that God’s word is completely reliable, and has absolute authority, the latter emphasizes more on that the authority is not based on understanding and investigation of the Bible verses, rather it is based on the witness by the Holy Spirit; furthermore, although Bible has some questionable verses, the Holy Spirit that resides in believers’ hearts makes known that what Bible says is entirely reliable and Bible has absolute authority over our faith and practice. Infallibility is chosen over inerrancy because inerrancy’s intended focus is more on resolving questionable verses than on the witnessing work by the Holy Spirit.

(2) The Meaning of Bible’s Infallibility

When we say Bible is God’s word, we mean Bible is God’s authentic word. God is real and God’s word will never contradict God’s true self; God never lies, God is reliable and so is God’s word true and reliable. All these are anchoring on God’s relationship with man, not on satisfying modern people’s requirement of scientific accuracy.

There are a few things we need to clarify about Bible’s infallibility. First of all, Bible indeed is not a scientific or a history book; therefore we don’t have to insist that Bible’s infallibility has to meet the “factual” standard that is required of scientific or history books. That is to say Bible’s infallibility is affirmed as long as it meets a common phenomenon standard. For example, given “five cubits high and thirty cubits round” (2 Chronicles 4:2), we cannot say Bible is incorrect because scientific accuracy requires $\pi = 3.14159\dots$, which would have made 31.4159 cubits round. Also, usually people say that sun rises from the east which has no scientific bearing since scientifically speaking, sun doesn’t rise; instead it is the earth that is moving. Despite all this, we don’t consider it’s wrong to say “sun rises from the east”, (unless it’s in a scientific discussion) because it’s in line with common phenomenon standard. There are some similarities concerning historic facts. Generally speaking, Bible has different literature styles; poetic style requires an interpretation method that is totally different from that of epistle style; wisdom literature and revelation literature require different interpretation methods. To examine whether a literature article has any mistake, we have to first interpret it correctly before we can evaluate it. Therefore, Bible’s infallibility has to be confirmed based on correct interpretation, instead of trying to understand it from modern men’s pure scientific point of view.

Another important point to clarify is that all existing Bible books came from manuscript; especially the Old Testament went through various stages of oral account of history. In spite of the fact that there are different manuscripts and translations may not always retain the original meaning, all existing original Bible texts have been handwritten and copied with extreme care. There might have been some errors, but the accuracy is extraordinarily high. Bible manuscripts far outnumber any ancient historic documents in China or overseas. Because of this, Bible's textual criticism has good confidence in Bible's reliability. The original Greek New Testament that is referenced in this book is from the 3rd edition of what was published in 1975 with an introduction that says "There are over 500 corrections made in this edition."

4. The Authority of the Bible

There are three different views about where Bible's authority came from. First view says that Bible has the authority because Bible is the most original and historical document of Christianity's origin. Second view says that Bible has the authority because Bible is a product of church, having apostles' teaching and heritage. Third view says that Bible has the authority because Bible is the vessel of the Holy Spirit; through the Bible, Holy Spirit speaks to man's heart, calling people to get salvation and to build churches; it judges sins; it carries all the church tradition, theology, practice and organization. Spirit has the potency of word, and word is a format of the spirit's power; therefore Bible is God's word, having the authority that comes directly from God.

If Bible is God's word, then it has God's authority that is the absolute authority. By absolute authority we mean there is no other writing, creeds, ideology or proclamation that can have authority higher than that of the Bible. All doctrines and creeds that are based on Bible have their specific authority, but none can exceed Bible or replace Bible. The foundation

of the faith is established on the authority of the Bible; all faith related proclamations have to be reviewed according to the Bible and be based on the Bible in order to be "biblical". Similarly, Christian's life and deeds should not be against Bible's teachings.

It's true that most of the so-called "faith in accordance with the Bible" and "Bible's teaching on believers' life" don't come directly from Bible verses, but rather are propositions derived from explanations of verses in the Bible. These propositions or creeds cannot be held as absolute; when questioned, we have to go back to the Bible and discuss the matter from there; all parties engaged in the dispute have to show their correct understanding and application of the Bible verses.

5. Interpretation of the Bible

Quite often in Bible Study Group we find an interesting phenomenon: a passage may have many explanations that are contradictive to each other; even more interesting is that all members in the group accept Bible's inspiration, acknowledge Bible's authority, and believe they all have been guided by the Holy Spirit to understand the verses. For this, we cannot help but ask, can one Holy Spirit guide two persons to come up with different and contradictive explanations on the same Bible passage? Given more thoughts, it's not hard to understand that simply believing in Bible's inspiration and authority, and Holy Spirit's guidance is not sufficient; Bible readers also have to be equipped with basic skills in interpreting the Bible; if we lack the skills, often we will have personal and subjective deviation when interpreting the Bible.

Why do we have to interpret Bible? Surely some may consider Bible interpretation not that important; after all, Bible is God's word; as long as we read it we should be able to understand it, for the true meaning of the verses are already clearly expressed in the words verbally; we only have to read it and to believe in it and we will be fine.

This approach can be right for some verses, for example, when LORD Jesus says “love your enemy”; it is correct that Jesus means that. However, even for verses that are so straightforward and clear, we still cannot avoid the process of interpreting the Bible. We need to determine what are referred to when Jesus said “enemy” and “love”, given the context of culture that He was in and the language that He used. If we try to explain literally what Jesus said about “do not throw your pearls to pigs”, we actually cannot quite grasp its meaning; but if we don’t interpret it verbally it becomes even more difficult. It’s in this circumstance that principles of exegesis become indispensable.

When discussing fundamental exegesis, we have to pay attention to three things:

First of all, we have to be alert and have control over our personal bias and purpose. We all have our personal background, experience, education, and individual theologian perspective when studying the verses; we are not pure like a piece of white paper; we all carry our individual point of view, understanding, ideas and senses, all of which can stain our interpretation of the Bible. Although we cannot totally avoid the individual subjectivity which is part of our being, at least we can sense its presence and put them under control. By doing this we can avoid severe distortion on the true meaning of the verses.

Second, when we study the Bible we sometimes have an attitude of treating the end as the beginning, that is, we use verses to serve our own purposes; our mind first came up with a thought, and the verses are there to vindicate our thought. This approach of proof-text is a wrong way to study the Bible, for Bible reading is no more exegesis which is to read out the meaning of the verse, instead we are reading our conspired meaning into the verses. Bible reading is for searching for passage background, information, insight, and inspiration, not for searching for support toward ideas that are already in one’s mind.

Third, we have to put emphasis on the entirety of the neighboring passages. In another word, every passage has to be thought over (in the aspects of linguistics, style, history, literature, and theology) in light of passages before and after it; every factor that could have influenced life and feeling of the original author and audience has to be examined carefully, just like Charles Kraft said (Charles Kraft, 1979) when an event happened at the first century not now, in Palestine not in America, in Hebrew culture situation not today’s American culture, in order to understand the significance of that event then and now, we have to analyze and understand thoroughly the text before and after that event.

Therefore when we are doing exegesis, in order to understand the meaning contained in a passage, we have to responsibly go back to the time and space of the passage to understand the past by studying, researching, dialogs and responses. Needless to say this is not what all Bible readers can do, but at least there are some experts, scholars or some trained persons who can do this type of work on our behalf. Through hard work like this, ignorance and arbitration about Bible may be eliminated gradually and disciples can enter the truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, this is not to say that following these steps, passages with lots of questions and passages with multiple explanations can now all have unified explanation. Rather, it means that after applying this exegesis principle, we can not only reduce places where we differ but also adjust where we differ. When we use this approach to understand verses, the verses will carry the power and the clear message that were intended for the original audience, to take care of their need, to share God’s word in their specific situation. Doing so, we can more easily avoid mistakes that are often made when interpreting Bible verses; we will not take verses literally by its superficial meaning, nor will we see different meanings of a verse, one for us today and another for the then original audience; the meaning of the verse should be

the same. The universal theological principles we learn from the Bible will never change by time or space.

6. The Importance of the Bible

Bible is the most important book in the world; Matthews 24:35 says "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Generations after generations, many great people have their lives influenced by this book and then their generations were influenced because of that. Martin Luther once said that Bible was alive and never stopped talking to him and it had legs to run with him and hands to hold him tightly. President Lincoln witnessed that he believed Bible is the best present God ever gave men, and all the good things that our Savior intends for us are explained in it; many times he was so attracted to it that he had to kneel down to receive the help from it. The Prince of Exposition C.H. Spurgeon once also said that a worn-and-torn, falling-apart Bible usually has an owner who himself is not falling-apart.

Human philosophy and wisdom sometimes can bring changes to our lives and situations, but only God's word can help us keep on walking in His will. For this reason, in our everyday busy life, we should draw near to God by studying God's word because God's word is "a lamp for my feet", "a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105) guiding our steps going forward. God's word is "more precious than gold", "sweeter than honey" (Psalm 19:10) and it can awaken our hearts and brighten our eyes. God's word is "like fire", "like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces" (Jeremiah 23:29) and it can make concealed matters known; it can enable us to "turn from evil and do good" and keep us pressing on toward our goal. God's word can "cleanse" us and make us "holy" (Ephesians 5:26). God's word is "sword of the Spirit" and it can help us "take our stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:17). God's word is "Sharper than any double-edged sword"

(Hebrews 4:12) and it can divide thoughts and ideas in one's heart. God's word can make us "grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2) and it can make whoever belongs to God perfect and equipped to do every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Through meditating on God's word we can gradually change into God's likeness.

7. Meditation on the Bible

"Devotion" is an everyday vocabulary for Christian which means nurturing one's spirituality. Christian faith greatly emphasizes man's relationship with God; only when we can keep close and intimate relationship with God, can we have good relationship with others. The vertical relationship between man and God is the foundation for the horizontal relationship between man and man; those who know how to get along with God know how to get along with others; therefore it is vital to have close relationship with God. For man to have close relationship with God, it's crucial to have disciplined devotional life. The two important supporting pillars are meditation on Bible and prayer.

To build a devotional life with meditation on Bible and Prayer, it may help the habit forming if in the initial stage we can set up some principles. We have following suggestions:

First of all, pick a time and stick with it: right after awakening in the early morning, or during noontime lunch break, or right before going to bed, or any other time that works the best for you. Many like to read Bible, pray or meditate to draw near to God in the quiet early morning, for a day's plan is done in the morning.

Second, pick a location and stick with it: prayer room in the basement, private study room at home, front yard or back yard of the house, parking lot at the workplace, or any other place, as long as it is the same place. Before long and without much thinking, that spot will become a holy spot for you to meet with God.

Third, pick a format and stick with it: hymn singing, followed by Bible study and prayer is a basic format. It begins with singing hymns which can be short hymns, soul songs or psalms; seek first the familiarity then extend the territory of song selection. It ends with prayer but prayer doesn't end the devotion; prayer on one hand awaits the LORD actively, one the other hand prepares us for response and actions; without a responsive prayer, that day's devotion is just a comma, not a period. By responsive prayer we ask God to help us to please Him in the whole day's activities. In between is Bible reading, or reading some spiritual articles; we use God's word as our daily spiritual bread.

Fourth, pick a book and stick with it: select a book from the Bible and sequentially read a passage of it each day; read through it according to one's pace and the allocated time span. When reading it, contemplate on the meaning of the passage, asking Lord to help you understand what lesson you are to learn from this passage; contemplate on how you can practically apply it in your daily life. You may use any daily devotional that is available from Christian bookstore, such as Daily Bread, Streams in the Desert, Daily with the King etc. or you can switch among these books; each day there is a lesson to learn and it works as a supplementary material for your daily devotion.

Fifth, pick a person or two and stick with them: it's not easy to find a spiritual partner, but, if you are willing to pray for this matter seriously, surely you will find one who is willing to encourage each other and to build up each other. Two or three as a group can set the schedule and contents of the devotion; sometimes the group can join together for the devotion; as a group, we can encourage one another, and oversees one another's learning. Doing so the daily devotional is less likely to discontinue and there will be more mutual and practical caring among different parts in the body of Christ.

God wants us to have intimate relationship with Him, having intimate communication. Reading Bible and prayer are ways to communicate with God; following the above methods of fixed time, fixed location, fixed format, fixed book and fixed (devotional) partners, it can help us get started with our regular devotional life. May the great psalmist David's desire, "I may have a place in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, looking on his glory, and getting wisdom in his Temple." become our life-long desire as well. Are you ready to start your daily devotion for Bible meditation and prayer? Determination + perseverance = successful devotion. Wish you success!

8. Returning to the Bible

It's not enough for a church to just have a beautiful church building; having complete church constitution and regulations will not suffice, nor does having a comprehensive co-workers organization. If there is no life in the church, what use can they be? Nehemiah 8:1-18 offers a thorough analysis on this truth:

Nehemiah knew this truth thoroughly; he led the Israelite people to return back to Jerusalem from exile, to rebuild the wall for he knew in order to build a great town, they not only needed fortified city walls, magnificent buildings, and beautiful streets, but also great people that match the great town. As for whether a person is great, it's not about how impressive his or her outside title is; rather it's about whether he or she has great inside characteristics; nevertheless, nobody can possess great characteristics unless his spirit is firmly set on God's word.

This is why Nehemiah, after leading Israelites in rebuilding the wall, put his focus on people's spiritual reconstruction. He asked Ezra to join them; Ezra was a priest specialized in Laws and had great study in God's word. Who else could be more suitable for this position? What can compare to God's word in building up people's hearts?

For individuals, families, churches and countries to get built up, the most important thing is to “return to the Bible”.

(1) Desire for God’s Word (vv. 1-8)

Verse 8:1 says, “And when the seventh month came, all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel “

The seventh month is an important month in Israelite calendar for it has three important festivals. According to Leviticus Chapter 23, the first day of the seventh month is The Festival of Trumpets which is like their New Year Day; the tenth day is The Day of Atonement when High Priest does the yearly redemption for the people. What follows is the fifteenth day for The Festival of Tabernacles which lasts for seven days after they finish gathering crops, to commemorate LORD’s grace; it is the festival that is the most joyful and that goes on for the longest period of time. Utilizing this festival period, they as one entity said to Ezra, “bring out the Book of the Law of Moses” for they hungered for God’s word.

Many people turn to God’s word only when they face danger, pressure, or emergency; some will pray to God only when they are sick or when they have family problems; in ordinary days God’s word is very unfamiliar to them.

But these Israelites were not like that; they didn’t desire God’s word just because they were facing many difficulties and dangers. At that time the wall had been repaired and the city construction was well in progress; it was all because of their pure desire for God’s word that they asked Ezra to bring out the book and to read for them; what a different request. Verse 3 even says, “All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.”

If we have a heart that desires for God’s word, God’s word will draw us near; without a

desiring heart, God’s word becomes plain and tasteless. A person who doesn’t love God will not desire for God’s word either; how much we desire for God’s word may indicate how much we love God.

Verses 4 to 6 continue to say, “Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”

Look, this is a picture depicting that from a desire for God’s word comes an uttering of awe upon hearing God’s word. I like the phrase very much “as he opened it, the people all stood up”. Today, what kind of attitude do we have toward Bible? During worship, when the chairperson opens the Bible, ready to read it, although we don’t stand up, do our hearts stand up? We do this, not to worship the Bible, but to acknowledge the position of the Bible and to accept the authority of the Bible.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Do we do likewise? Pre-school kids, kindergarten and young kids, do they have God’s word in their hearts? What about high school students or college students? Engineers, doctors, and researchers, do they have God’s word in their hearts? What about work-at-home women? Do we diligently teach God’s word to our children? At home when you sit down, do you occasionally talk about God’s word? Businessmen and office workers, when

two or three of them walk in the street or in rest area, do they sometimes communicate in God's word? When sisters get together, do they sometimes open the Bible to discuss some of the truths recorded in the Bible?

The verses besides mentioning God's people's attitude toward Bible, also mentioned the attitude of the persons who explained the Bible. In Verse 8, it says "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear". The person who is responsible for reading the Bible during the service should be well prepared so that when the congregation hears the Bible they will understand it right away. If the reader makes the preparation and get familiar with the passage in advance in order they can read the Bible clearly and fluently, then for many obvious verses reading itself can give correct explanation.

Last thing is about the attitude of the person who does the exegesis. Verse 8 says, "giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."

Why do God's Laws require further explanation? Please keep in mind that these Israelites came back from Babylon; although they had Israelite blood, they were born in Babylon, influenced by Babylonian culture and environment, and had mentality and ways of living of that of Babylonians. Now when they heard words from Hebrew Bible with their Babylonian ears, there must have been some communication gap. Therefore these trained scholars had to explain the meaning so that what they said would make sense when reaching people's ears.

In the 19th century, the famous English minister, Pastor Joseph Parker once wrote that he believed that a sermon has to be a Bible based exegesis in order to be profound and last long; any sermon made to show man's cleverness and talents is full of man's intensions and is destined to fail.

What a tremendous encouragement and warning to nowadays teacher, Sunday school teachers, especially ministers; we must

emphasize on Bible exegesis; preaching is not to use one's own imagination to build one's phantom high rise building apart from the Bible passage itself, thinking as long as it is provoking people's thinking and touching people's hearts, it must be a good sermon. No, it cannot be farther from the truth; teaching Bible is to explain the meaning of the Bible; it's not to inject our meaning onto the verses. Preaching has to base on Bible verses; it's not about saying what you want to say first, and then try to find some verses in the Bible to back you up; doing so, often you will find that the verses you found still didn't quite match what you had said. Sometimes we will hear some good and touching sermons, only to find that the message should have come with some other more suitable verses.

Preaching is not an easy ministry which requires a good amount of time to read the Bible, to meditate on it, to pray about it, to await and to read books. If someone comes to worship in the church and after hearing the message, he says, "Now I got it, I see things in the passage which I never saw before; this message is a blessing to me." What a tremendous encouragement and joy it would be to the minister!

Preaching is a long-lasting task which matters to life's momentum inside a church; whenever the church is weak and whenever the pastor is powerless in preaching, it's time for brothers and sisters to give more care and offer intercessory prayers.

(2) Trust and Obey God's Word (vv. 9-12)

Verse 9 says, "For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law". Most exegetical experts would say "They thought of those years in Babylon when they were far away from God and they thought of the past when their fathers sinned and were captured to Babylon; therefore they wept."

However, there is an exegetical scholar, Yehezkel Kaufmann whose commentary is noteworthy; he said that it is an emotional response upon hearing the words of the Law. You could imagine the situation at that time: for a long period of time they hadn't heard God's word, now, all of a sudden, Ezra came to explain the Laws; they heard the explanation and they understood things they didn't understand before; they realized they hadn't obeyed the Laws; they heard unusual explanations of the Bible; such a complicated emotion, once triggered, brought down all the tears; to be honest, they were tears of many emotions all mixed in joy.

Ezra's intension was just so: to preach God's word is not to make them weep, but to bring back the joy when they can put the words of Laws back into their lives. There were two things Ezra wanted people to do: the first thing was on the negative side and was mentioned four times (9, 10, 11) "Do not mourn or weep", "Do not grieve", "Do not grieve". The second thing was on the positive side, which is to do kind deeds in the daily living. People were able to do things on both sides for verse 12 says, "Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy". Why were they able to do so? Verse 12 explains why: "because they now understood the words that had been made known to them."

It is because in Ezra's explanation, there was a crucial message which says "for the joy of the LORD is your strength." This statement conceals a very important theology that is the theology of trust-and-obey. Israelites' theology of trust-and-obey is built upon their exodus out of Egypt which is a history of salvation; when they left Egypt, in the sea Yahweh opened up a road for them to survive; in the face of death and at the end of rope, they were given future; later Moses made a song to sing and praise with people in the joy about Yahweh's marvelous deeds; but Exodus is not the end of Yahweh's deeds, rather it's just a beginning. Now they experienced another round of Exodus when

they returned to Jerusalem from exile; they were nearly hopeless, yet were alive. Israelites should know better than others about God's faithfulness; they should be quicker than others in learning that the true joy is the joy when one abides in the Lord, and is the joy when one relies on the Lord; this is so because even in one's adversity, God is still faithful.

This explains why some people who have been sick and bed-ridden still keep their joyful hearts; some have been unemployed but still have the strength; it's so because they have already learned how to commit themselves to and look to the faithful God. Muller prayed to the Lord every morning until all his burdens and worries were left to the Lord and he became full of joy; then he could rise before the Lord to live; therefore even his load was heavy, he could still be joyful every day. Let us learn to cast all our depression, worries and burdens onto the Lord so our days in the Lord's hand can be joyful just because of the Lord, to feed on God's faithfulness, and to rejoice because we rely on God's word; the joy we get because we rely on God is our strength.

(3) Submission to God's Word (vv. 13-18)

On the second day, we saw Ezra lead a group of leaders in a small group Bible study; the focus of study was on Leviticus 23:33-43 and Deuteronomy 16:13-17 where the verses talk about how to observe the Festival of Tabernacles to commemorate Lord's redemption. When they finished reading, they applied what they had studied and put it into actions; God wanted people to pick tree branches, so they went to pick branches; God wanted them to build shelters, so they built shelters. Enemies outside the city wall must have felt funny, thinking these people were very abnormal, what would they do with those tree branches? Isn't it an eyesore to put tree branches on top of the roof? How could they build a shelter using tree branches? They were

a bunch of amateur engineers. Foreigners were all mocking and criticizing. Regardless how bizarre the act of shelter building must have been, verse 17 says, "The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them". When they did it in obedience the result was "their joy was very great".

We couldn't explain how these things happened, but when one does what he is supposed to do, he shall be happy; when he does something he shouldn't be doing, even if he makes lots of money, he will still be miserable. Isn't that so? How could the whole family who lived in a small shelter built of tree branches be happy? But, they were all very joyful because they obeyed.

Cigar is a well known name in the Horse Racing field; he was born in 1990 and at the age of three he started to make money for his owner; his horse life reached the climax between ages 5 and 6, for during those two years he broke the world record by becoming the champion for 18 consecutive times; throughout his life, he made nearly 10 million dollar worth of award which itself is a world record.

At age 6 he accidentally hurt his feet; after that, like dusk following the sunset, he retired officially in May of that year and was sent to retire in Kentucky Horse Park. One time when a horse keeper was introducing Cigar's brilliant history, a child asked her "How long will Cigar stay here?", by which he meant a special horse like him only needs to stay here for a short period of time before he can go outside again; but the horse keeper replied "Cigar will stay here for the rest of his life."

Upon hearing this, it seems sad because horse has an average life span of 25 years but Cigar was only 9 years old; it's like a person checks into a nursing home at the age of 25. But Cigar didn't look that pessimistic; when the horse master led and showed him in front of the audience, he obeyed and did every move; he still had the handsome posture he used to

have; his manner was no worse than before; although his role had changed, his faithful nature didn't change a bit; obediently he played well a different role at a different stage of his life; he displayed a joy coming from deep inside.

Our lives are like that; we are only God's work in His hand, created in Christ; one day all the outside glory will fade away and all this life's reputation and material gain will disappear like a smoke; given so, what should our purpose in this life be? To all Christians, our life's purpose is to glorify God; all we care is the building and molding of our true nature and our characters; it's God who is doing the carving on us individually. Therefore regardless of the circumstances, we all have learned to hunger for the Bible, to rely on the Bible and to obey what's said in the Bible.

Verse 2

In the one true and living God, eternally existing in three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

1. God's Nature

Since God already revealed Himself, we should get to know Him through His revelation. "God's attributes" are not what we project onto God using our own human attributes; rather it's God who reveals to man regarding His own nature; man, through God's revelation, can come to know God. "Attributes" are not different parts of God as if when all were put together, you would get the entire God. Each attribute by itself is God's entirety; God is not partly loving and partly righteous. God is entirely loving and entirely righteous.

Theologians use different approaches to categorize God's attributes; some divide them into absolute and relative; some immanent and eminent; some metaphysical and moral; some incommunicable and communicable, etc. After all, all divisions are made using human's logic structure, making it easier for us to grasp. One easier way to understand is to divide God's attributes into two major categories: greatness and goodness.

(1) God's Attributes on Greatness

God's greatness includes His being self-existent, never changing, omnipotent, all-knowing and all-present.

Self-Existence (ex nihilo)

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses asked God for his name, NIV records as follows:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."; God also said "This is what you are to say to the

Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" . God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."

Most English Bibles translate "I AM WHO I AM" directly from the original text which is "I Am". Thus God's name is "I am", "Yahweh" comes from the root of "am". In the grammar of the original text, "I am" is in imperfect tense, but in English they are translated into present tense, indicating its normalcy.

The Book of John has one very special recording: when Jesus was debating with Pharisees, Jesus said their ancestor Abraham looked to him and then the Pharisees were mocking him saying he was not even 50 years old, how could he have met Abraham; Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58) In the English translation, looking from grammar's angle, the present tense "I am" used before the past tense "Abraham was" is incorrect; but John wanted to distinguish the fact that Jesus used "I am" when answering their question which was to purposely use God's name on himself in front of the Judaism's religious leaders; no wonder they wanted to stone him upon hearing it.

Translating "I am" into "self-existent and all-present" may not be direct, but its interpretation is theologically accurate. "Self-Existent" is "existent by itself", "all-present" is "present forever"; both indicate God's attributes of being self-existent and present-forever. These two attributes of God can be considered as the most fundamental, for if God doesn't exist then there would be no other attributes to talk about.

God is self-existent, meaning His existence doesn't depend on other things or beings. "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it." (Psalm 50:10-12). "And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else." (Acts 17:25).

Immutability

God not only exists but also never changes. God's attribute of never-changing causes numerous disputes among theologians and philosophers about whether a never-changing God can associate with this changing world? The answer to this question seems simple: of course, God can associate with this world which is subject to change. But someone pointed out that the never-changing God cannot interact, not even move, because mutual interaction surely involves passiveness while passiveness and movement imply changes. Therefore, based on conjectures like this, mutually interactive and mobile God cannot be a never-changing God. Such kind of theory mainly was influenced by ancient Greek's ideology of "perfection" which they considered as static and immobile. Nevertheless, the God depicted in the Bible is not so, instead, it's a God who is capable of movement and mutual interaction. God's perfection is a dynamic perfection.

We should not expound on God's never-changing attribute from Greek's philosophy, but confirm it from biblical teachings. There are at least five aspects where God doesn't change. First, his existence never changes. Psalm 102: 25-27 says, "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never

end." God's existence never changes which is the same concept as God's being eternal. Second, God's goodness never changes. James 1:17 calls God "Father of the heavenly lights", which is the source of all goodness; "who does not change like shifting shadows". Shadow is the opposite of light; therefore here, Bible emphasizes that God's goodness never changes. Third, His choice never changes. God's calling has no regrets; through selection, God's salvation not only comes to Israel, but to the whole world (Malachi 3:6; Romans 11:29). Fourth, His plan never changes. "But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations" (Psalm 33:11). Ecclesiastes 3:14 also says, "Everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it." This means what he plans will never change. Fifth, His word never changes. God is not like us who cannot keep our own words or regret what we have said. "God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act?" (Numbers 23:19)

Omnipotence

In traditional theology, God's infinity often is expressed in three ways: omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Some like to use "nothing he is not capable of, nothing he doesn't know, and nowhere he cannot be found" to express the same concept. However, "all" and "omni" are better than the ones that use double negations; besides being more positive, it's more accurate in theology. Strictly speaking, "almighty" and "nothing he is not capable of" are not totally the same. "Nothing he is not capable of" implies "he can do whatever we can think of". But God's Omnipotence is not like this; there are evil things which are against his goodness and which are conceivable by us and doable by us but are undoable to God.

Theologian Donald Bloesch wanted to use "freedom" to explain the omnipotence; based on that, God has the freedom to do

whatever he wants to do, not to be limited due to lack of capacity. This kind of explanation has an advantage which is not to be troubled by questions such as “Is God capable of sinning?”

In Bible there are numerous places where God’s omnipotence is depicted. Psalm 68:34 says, “whose power is in the heavens” which is like Chinese expression “power as big as the heaven”. “Heaven” is the biggest object we know of, yet God’s power is above it. In Jeremiah 32:17 it says, “Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.” Because God is the LORD who created heaven and earth, in between heaven and earth there is nothing that is too difficult for Him. Isaiah 40:28 has similar proclamation “He will not grow tired or weary”. Never growing tired or weary implies his capability is infinite and will never be worn out. Furthermore, God’s omnipotence not only manifests in grand things, but also functions meticulously in people’s hearts. When the rich young man was not willing to forego all he had in order to follow Jesus and had to leave wearily, Jesus said it’s hard for rich men to enter the Kingdom of God; when asked by his disciples that if it’s so difficult, then who can be saved, Jesus replied “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthews 19:26). God’s omnipotence not only can change heaven and earth, but also human hearts which seem to be unchangeable.

Omniscience

There are also numerous places in Bible about God’s being all-knowing. Job 37:16 calls God “him who has perfect knowledge”, “perfect” means thorough and complete which is to say that God’s knowledge includes all things and matters. Psalmist proclaims “his understanding has no limit” (Psalm 147: 5); “has no limit” means not to be confined. God not only knows about all things and matters, his power to use all this knowledge also has no limit.

Foreknowledge is part of God’s all-knowing. Historically prophecy has been a topic discussed among theologians and philosophers. Some believe that God predestines everything and because of that, he surely foreknows what he predestines; some believe that God is beyond time and therefore can “see” future things; some believe what God knows includes the future; some believe that since God knows all existing things, he can precisely predict things that are due to happen in the future based on causes and consequences. Regardless of how God’s foreknowledge is explained, Bible clearly teaches us that God foreknows. (Roman 8:29, First Peter 1:2); His foreknowledge exists before the creation and we can be rest assured that what he said is to be fulfilled.

Recently some theologians in the Evangelical denomination advocate a so-called “Open Theism”. They believe God cannot foreknow what free-will will end up choosing, otherwise we human will have no real freedom; therefore God doesn’t know the future, rather future is “open”. This theory confuses foreknowledge with predestination; it also ignores the severity of negating God’s foreknowing the future; it leads to a belief that biblical prophecies may not always be fulfilled.

God not only knows everything in the universe, more importantly, He knows our hearts. Psalmist wrote, “He knows the secrets of the heart” (Psalm 44:21); “you perceive my thoughts from afar” (Psalm 139:2); “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Psalm 139:6). Things we conceal the hardest cannot escape his sight; in his sight, “Everything is uncovered and laid bare” (Hebrews 4:13). The all-knowing God is formidable, but biblical teaching doesn’t stop here; the Lord who knows our hearts cares for us; our every hair has been counted by him (Matthews 10:30); above all, he knows and empathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

Omnipresence

The third aspect of infinity is “omnipresence”. God’s omnipresence, on one hand is about its immenseness which cannot be contained by heaven and earth (1 Kings 8:27). God says “‘Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:23-24). Because God is immensely great, His existence not only fills heaven and earth, but also exceeds heaven and earth.

God’s omnipresence, similar to his all-knowing, is something man cannot run away from. Psalmist wrote “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Psalm 139:7). From the high heaven to the depth of the earth, from the east to the west, from the dark to the light, God is there. However, psalmist begins to see God’s omnipresence not as a thing to be fearful of; rather it’s his comfort: “even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” (Psalm 139:10). To people who rely on God, his omnipresence means regardless where they are, regardless how lonely they are, regardless how dark the surrounding is, God is always with them and He is there to sustain them. Isaiah 57:15 says “For this is what the high and exalted One says— he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

Therefore we can see in our great God that not only his omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are as grand and spectacular as thundering, but He is very fine and delicate in having relationship with us mere men.

(2) God’s Attributes on Goodness

Regarding God’s attributes on goodness, there are different ways to further categorize it. Some attributes can be combined; although it is not absolutely necessary, it works better for our

logical structuring. Here we can expound from four aspects: purity, integrity, love and grace.

Purity

God’s purity includes His holiness, righteousness and justice. Exodus 15:11 says God is “majestic in holiness”. The fundamental meaning of “Holiness” is to set apart, to be separated from many other things in order to be sacred and elevated, making people awed and respectful. For this reason, Bible proclaims that God alone is Holy (Revelation 15:4). “Holiness” has a further meaning for morality, in addition to separation from other things; it is to set apart from sins, not to be contaminated by evils. Because He is holy, we have to respect and adore Him, “worship at his holy mountain”(Psalm 99:9).

God has been described as a god who “exercises justice and righteousness” (Jeremiah 9:24), for He rewards goodness and punishes evil deeds, yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7). “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (Roman 12:19-20). Therefore, we can affirm that even if presently there are many injustices and evil deeds on this earth, eventually God will judge. Because God is holy and righteous, people should keep a heart full of awe and respect in front of Him. (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Righteousness

There are three aspects of God’s righteousness: truth, honesty and faithfulness. These three in Hebrew are from Hebrew “amen” which basically means sturdy and very reliable. It can be translated into “real”, “truth”, “true”, “honest”, “faithful”, etc.

God differs from other deities or idols; He is the true god, a living god which is not made of wood or silver, nor by human hands (Jeremiah 10:8-10). His existence is real. He never lies (1 Samuel 15:29; Numbers 23:29). His word is truth (John 17:7). Jesus not only

proclaims that He speaks the truth or is truthful, but He Himself is the truth (John 14:6).

“Faithful” means reliable, guaranteeing what he has said will be fulfilled and will not change due to some change in the environment; he will never change his mind; he will not change his decision back and forth. Paul wrote, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself” (Timothy 2:13). Based on this, we can entirely rely on Him.

Love

God not only has love, God is love (1 John 4:8). That is to say, God’s nature is love and all He does is out of love. Only like this, can His love be complete and unconditional. He loves, not because the target has something special, but because He is love.

The New Testament and the Old Testament both reveal God’s unconditional love. The Old Testament emphasizes on the selection of Israelites; Moses told Israelites that God’s love to choose them is not because they were any better than others: “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.” (Deuteronomy 7:7).

In the Old Testament “love” is “hesed” in Hebrew which means abundant. Different English editions use different words when translating it: “loving kindness” (KJV), “steadfast love”, “kindness”, etc. Some Chinese editions use “kind treatment”. This kind of love includes love that is exercised willingly and unchangingly, that is promise-keeping, that is emotional and that is to treat others with kindness. This word mostly is used to describe God’s love toward Israelites, but sometimes is used between persons; the most distinct example is in the Book of Ruth (Ruth 1:8).

In Greek, “agape” is the most used word for “love” in the New Testament which

means love out of one’s own will, regardless of whether the object is lovable; love is given just for the benefit of the object itself. Another word “philia” means emotional love. Both words have been used to describe God’s love toward man, and love between persons. From this we understand that God’s love described in the Old Testament and the New Testament involves both will and emotion.

The New Testament talks about God’s unconditional love which is manifested in Jesus Christ’s salvation: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Roman 5:6-8). God’s love is manifested to us when we are still sinners, not after we become righteous. This is unconditional love.

God’s love manifested through Jesus is not only unconditional, but also sacrificial, and self-giving. God’s love is manifested by the fact that Jesus died for us, “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus said “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Luke 10:45). Therefore, believers should treat one another with sacrificial love, “Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).

Grace

Grace has some other related attributes: compassion, patience and lenience. Grace is to give benefit to people who are not worthy of receiving it; compassion is to give favor to people who are in misery; patience and lenience is to put off the punishment that is due the person who deserves it.

God “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,” (Exodus 34:6), is full of grace to forgive sins (Ephesians 1:7). Grace is to

give to persons who do not deserve it; it cannot be earned, nor can it be obtained by good deeds (Ephesians 2:8-9); when you earned it by deeds, it is a wage, not a grace. Roman 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Take note that here it says death is the wage for sin, that is to say, sin deserves death. But, eternal life is not a wage you can earn; rather it is God's grace that people simply do not deserve.

Psalmist uses a father's heart to describe God's compassionate heart: "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13). At the conclusion of the Book of Jonah, God asked a question: "should I not have concern?" (Jonah 4:11). It depicts God's compassionate heart toward helpless people. Christ is also full of compassion; when He saw people scattered like sheep without a shepherd, he had compassion on them (Matthews 9:36; 14:14).

Nevertheless, God's lenience and patience is not to treat guilt as innocence, but to give people an opportunity to repent. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). Paul also warned that God's abundant grace, lenience and patience are to lead people to repentance, but "because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God will repay each person according to what they have done." (Roman 2:4-6). People who do not repent under God's patience and lenience will receive an even more severe judgment in the future.

2. The Triune God

"Trinity" is the signature mark of Christian faith which is a well known "mystery". When discussing "Trinity", in the beginning there was a difficulty in Chinese vocabulary. To begin with, "一體 (one unity)" doesn't mean "one body" as the Chinese translation implies, rather it is about one nature, one characteristic and one source of the origin. God is spirit which has no physical body. In English "Trinity" is from "Tri-unity", three united into one.

An even bigger difficulty is about "three persons" in the Trinity, (when "person" is used to denote a "being, a self-conscious or rational being"). In Chinese there is no such a noun for this concept of "person"; the closest one we have is 「人」 which means man. But God is not "man", therefore some Chinese theologian invented a new Chinese noun, "位格", for "person" in this particular usage. In (Chinese) academic field some called Christian's God "人格神" which literally suggests "man god" in Chinese and is inaccurate. Besides human being, there are at least two other types of entities that are persons: God and angels (including Satan and evil spirits).

In the fields of theology and philosophy, personhood is commonly recognized as one that is extremely hard to define, if it is not totally impossible. In our instinct, we know what person is and what is not. But it is rather difficult to give it a thorough definition. The mystery about Trinity is due to our difficulty with the notion of "person". General speaking, person has a working definition that include: thinking, will, emotion, morality, etc.; one entity has to include all these in order to be considered a person.

(1) The Traditional Definition of Trinity

Traditionally, Trinity includes: 1. there is one and only one God; 2. Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit are all complete God; 3. Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit are three different persons.

“One and only one” means Trinity is not about three gods; Trinity doesn’t negate the fundamental belief of “one and only one true God”. “Complete God” doesn’t mean Father, Son, and Spirit three persons are complete only when all three are summed up; besides, each person is equal in his nature, having the same level of respect, honor and authority. This is not to say that Trinity has no ranking or order in their functioning. “Different persons” means although the three persons are equal in their nature, their relationship and functions do differ. Always, the Son is to obey the Father, never in the reverse order, while Father’s and Son’s wills are in perfect harmony. It is the Father who sent the Son, not the other way around, although the Spirit “sent” the son (Mark 1:12).

To explain the concept of Trinity, many people use different analogies such as “water, ice and steam”, “sun, light, and heat”, etc. These can all show that “three” and “one” may not always be in disagreement for we indeed can see many things that have the nature of three and one at the same time. However, all these analogies after all cannot perfectly explain the true Trinity, instead they may lead people to deviated conviction.

(2) The Biblical Foundation for Trinity

Many people know that Trinity is not a vocabulary found in the Bible, but this is not to say this doctrine is against the Bible. Trinity is a conviction that is concluded after integrating all data in the Bible.

“Hints” from the Old Testament

The Old Testament emphasizes on God’s uniqueness without giving any direct revelation on Trinity. Some passages may have hinted traces of the Trinity; while these traces suggest “possibility”, we cannot totally affirm their original meanings.

First of all, in the Old Testament there are many places where God is addressed in plural form, “Gods”. In Hebrew, “Elohim” itself is a plural noun; it sometimes means “gods”, but most of the times it points to the one and unique God. In Genesis there are a few places where God refers to himself as plural “we” (Genesis 1:26, 3:22, 11:7). There are two other places where when the Creator is addressed as God, the Hebrew original text uses plural (Ecclesiastes 12:1; Isaiah 54:45). Not all theologians and Bible scholars believe the plural noun or pronouns suggest the Trinity. Many of them consider all this may have to do with “plural of majesty and intensity” which is a shared phenomenon with other ancient Near-East languages.

Another place in the Old Testament that may have to do with Trinity is “Angel of the LORD”. There are many passages where it is mentioned, from Genesis to books of Minor Prophets. In Joshua 5:13-15, “commander of the army of the LORD” appeared to Joshua; although it’s not called “Angel of the LORD”, what’s depicted of him in the verse is very similar to “Angel of the LORD”. “Angel of the LORD” when appearing, is not only like an angel, but also like God Himself. Sometimes in one passage, He will be called “Angel of the LORD” and also “the LORD” (Genesis 16:7-13). Some scholars believe “Angel of the LORD” is the second person in the Trinity.

In the Old Testament there are passages where “God’s Spirit” or “the Spirit of the LORD” is used. In Isaiah there are two passages that clearly separate the LORD and the LORD’s Spirit: “And now the

Sovereign LORD has sent me, endowed with his Spirit.” (Isaiah 48:16). “In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them. “(Isaiah 63:9-10). In this passage “he” means the LORD and we can see all of the three, “LORD”, “Angel of the LORD” and “the Spirit of the LORD” appeared at the same time with all being distinguishably different.

There are some “triple” proclamations that may also be related to Trinity. Examples are: Aaron’s three blessings “The LORD ...” upon the people (Numbers 6:24-27); Isaiah heard Seraphim proclaim say, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3).

Although the Old Testament doesn’t have a single place where Trinity is definitely indicated, it is evident that the LORD and the Spirit of the LORD are two different persons.

Revelations from the New Testament

The New Testament clearly addresses God as Father, Son and Spirit. For example, “Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1) where “God the Father” is a person least disputed.

Christ has also been addressed as the Lord and is said most clearly in John, Chapter 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Hebrews 1:8 also says it plainly “But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom”.

Holy Spirit has also been addressed as the Lord. In Acts Chapter 5, when apostles rebuked Ananias and Sapphira for their deceit,

they said that they had lied to the Holy Spirit, and then immediately went on to say that they had lied to God (Acts 5:3-4). From this, we can see that Holy Spirit is equivalent to the Lord.

When Angle of the Lord proclaimed to Mary that she was soon to conceive by the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35). “Holy Spirit”, “the Most High” (God) and “Son of God” all are mentioned in one sentence. At the place where Jesus’ baptism was recorded, the three persons appear at the same time, each distinctly different: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’ “(Matthews 3:16-17). The Holy Son went up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended and the Holy Father spoke from the heaven above.

Lastly, In Jesus’ Great Commission, He instructed the disciples to “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (Matthews 28:19) where “name” is singular in the original text which makes it obvious that the three persons share one nature and one name.

In the Old Testament, Aaron’s blessings are three-fold of “the LORD”; in the New Testament blessings by the Trinity is more clearly pronounced: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” (Corinthians 13:14).

(3) Trinity’s Implication upon Believer’s Life

To the majority of Christians, “Trinity” is only an abstract conviction which they have to accept as part of the doctrines and which may have little value in their daily practicing. What

difference does it make in our daily lives, how many persons God has? Except for exerting triple blessings like in the above during service time, or when singing “Doxology”, seldom would church teach believers how to put Trinity into practice.

First of all, Doxology helps us clarify God’s word. When we mention “God” in our conversation, for example “God is with us” or “he loves God”, whom are we referring to? Is it Father, Son or the Holy Spirit, or all the three included? The majority of believers are not clear on this aspect mainly because they don’t know the relationship among the three persons, or the differences among the works done by the three persons, or the differences among their individual relationship with us. As a matter of fact, we have triple relationships with God, with each relationship distinctly different; to confuse these relationships is to overlook the abundance of God’s nature.

Second, whom do believers pray to? Whom do we talk to when praying? Some believers out of habit always pray to Jesus; some people or churches insist on traditional way of praying: by the Holy Spirit, in the name of the Holy Son, pray to God, the Father. The

traditional teaching indeed is based on the Bible; we are to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” (Ephesians 6:18); Jesus told us to pray in his name (John 14:14), He also told us to say “Our Father in heaven” (Matthews 6:9) when praying. Furthermore, in Bible’s exemplary prayers, for example in his epistles, Paul often said prayers and thanksgiving “to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, which used Holy Father as the one to whom the prayer was made. Also as mentioned in the above, it is Holy Son and Holy Spirit that are obedient to the Holy Father, not the other way around. Based on this, it is logic to address the Father as the one for us to pray to and the one to make our requests to. Therefore it is in agreement with Bible’s teaching that we follow traditional teaching to pray to our heavenly father.

However, from theology’s point of view, if we define “pray” as “talk with God”, since Holy Father, Holy Son and Holy Spirit are all complete God, there is nothing wrong in thinking that conversing with any of the three is a prayer. As a matter of fact when we talk with God, we have triple associations with the triune God.

Verse 3

That the triune God is the Creator, the Sustainer and Ruler of the Creation, but is prior to, and distinct from the Creation.

1. God's Creation

The triune God is the creator; the very first verse in the very first book of the Bible proclaims: "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). Heavenly Father is called the source of all things: "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came" (1 Corinthians 8:6.)

There are quite a few places in the New Testaments that say the Holy Son is the Creator of all things. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3); "yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." (1 Corinthians 8:6); "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him." (Colossians 1:6)

The role of Holy Spirit in the creation is less obvious. Genesis 1:2 says that the earth was formless and empty, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters, which implies the Holy Spirit was involved in the following process of the creation. Most Bible passages where God's Spirit was associated with the creation are found in the Old Testament; for example, psalmist exalts God saying "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground." (Psalm 104:30)

(1) The Planned Creation

God's creation is not by accident, neither a thing that happened temporarily; rather it is planned for a purpose.

God's Plan on Sovereignty

If the creation is planned, it must have been planned before the creation; this is so when Bible says "according to his eternal purpose" (Ephesians 3:11). Not only the creation of the universe is planned in advance, God also has a plan for the creation of each of us. Psalmist wrote "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139:16)

God's plan will never be thwarted by man, nor is it subject to man's opinion; He does whatever pleases Him (Psalm 35:6); no one works as his counselor (Isaiah 40:13-14; Romans 11:34). This is God's liberty that theologian Karl Barth emphasized. Because God is completely at his own will, no purpose of His can be thwarted (Job 42:2) and He is not subject to changes. He proclaims "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' " (Isaiah 46:10). God's never-changing plan includes everything; Bible uses "all things" or "everything" to describe the scope of God's plan (Roman 11:36; Ephesians 1:11).

Purpose of God's Plan

Many places in the Bible mention that the purpose of God's plan is for his Glory. Ephesians Chapter 1 repeatedly emphasizes that God's predestine before the creation is to "for the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14). The Book of Colossians also proclaims that not only in him all things were created, but also "for him" (Colossians 1:16). Psalmist also wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1).

Some criticized that if God's plan is for his own glory, isn't He selfish? This criticism doesn't put into consideration that God is the only ultimate being for He exists before all the creations; If He were not for his own glory, whose else could it be for? "For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Romans 11:36).

In addition to God's glory, God's creation has at least one more purpose which is to let people enjoy His Sabbath-rest in His love. Genesis 1:1-2:3 indicates that man is the last one created among all the created beings and man can be deemed as the pinnacle of the creation. But, man was created on the sixth day which is not the end of the creation because the seventh day is the last day. In the six days of creation, each day not only proclaims "there was evening and there was morning", but that God saw it "was very good"; all this indicates that particular day was complete and finished. This is not so for the seventh day for which there was no evening, nor morning; that is, it is not finished yet and is the eternal objective of the entire creation of time and space. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his." (Hebrews 4:9-10)

God is not selfish; He created all things and he created us; He has a perfect plan for the entire world of the created. Ultimately He wants us to enter His Sabbath-rest in His love and glory, along with Him.

(2) "Creation from nil Nothing", and Creation from Chaos

In Latin, "ex nihilo" is a terminology used in theology, which is used to describe that God's creation is a creation from nil, nothing. The Bible says what Abraham believed in is "the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not." (Roman 4:17). Many Bible passages mentioned the "beginning" of all things (for example, Mark 10:6). All this indicates that there is a beginning for the created beings to come into existence; before that beginning is "nil". Furthermore, Bible also teaches us that God creates by word. Psalmist wrote: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Psalm 33:9). Genesis Chapter 1 depicts how heaven and earth were created; each passage says whatever "God said" to be done, it's thus done. Even His Son from whom all creations are made is called "Word". The creation is made out of word, not from any material: it is created from nil, nothing.

Early church fathers paid great attention to this kind of "came into being from nothing" perspective on Creation; it is not only because Bible teaches so, but also because at their time they wanted to resist "Divine Emanation" advocated by then Neo-Platonism. That theory considered all created beings were the result of emanation by God's abundant nature. Based on that theory, creation was bound to happen, not due to God's liberal choice. What's more important was "Divine

Emanation” believed that all beings, including mankind, possess God’s deity nature because all came from God’s nature. Church fathers recognized the danger of this ideology and so did all they could to emphasize that creation is made from nil, nothing.

Created being was not produced from God’s nature, but rather was created from nothing; thus, the created doesn’t have God’s nature; thus God and the created beings are totally distinguishably different beings; this is God’s “total otherness”.

As to how God creates, and whether the “six days” in Genesis Chapter 1 are literally 6 of 24-hour “day”, there have been considerable amount of disputes, although we don’t believe this is the focus of our Christian faith. The important thing is God’s creation not only brings about everything, but manifests God’s omnipotence; He is potent in solving the darkness, evils, confusion and chaos that His people face. All in all, Christian’s Creation points out that all beings come to existence from God; except for Him, there is no ultimate being. God’s creation is an entire new creation and none of the created is evil in its nature.

2. God’s Providence

God maintains and keeps everything and this is so called “providence”. Providence is closely related to the plan; if God wants to complete his perfect plan, He must protect and manage his creations. God, by his all mighty power, sustains everything, and this is to say that none of the created is self-sustainable and everything entirely relies on God’s providence.

(1) The Scope of God’s Providence

Israelites praised God in a prayer “You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens,

even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything” (Nehemiah 9:6). The author of the Book of Hebrews described Jesus, the exact representation of God, “sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3).

The Great Nature is under God’s providence. Psalmist talks about God’s making grass grow, settling the Moon, and the Sun (Psalm 104: 14, 19), as well as feeding the animals (Psalmist 104:21-27). Cloud, mist, thunder, rain and wind are all nature phenomenon that God sustains. He directed ravens to supply Prophet Elijah with food (1 Kings 17:4).

Bible says human’s history is under God’s control; Daniel proclaimed “He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others” (Daniel 2:21); Daniel also said in another place “the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.” (Daniel 4:25). God himself declares “I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures; like a mighty one I subdued their kings” (Isaiah 10:13). Paul when preaching to Athens about the true God of heaven and earth, said “he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26)

God controls the macro perspective of the history, as well as individual’s personal situation. “The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.”(1 Samuel 2:6-7) Psalmist said to God “My times are in your hands;” (Psalm 31:15). From these passages it is evident that man’s life or death, poverty or prosperity is all in God’s control. Of course, this

doesn't mean that each and every detail is directly manipulated by God; rather everything that happened is permitted by God.

(2) God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility

If God's plan includes everything and is not changeable, and cannot be thwarted by anyone, then are man's actions and determinations out of man's free will? This question ever since the ancient time has been contemplated by many theologians and various discussions were proposed. The coordination between God's sovereignty and plan, and man's free will determination can be the most difficult question raised among Christian theologians and philosophers.

The simplest deduction may come if we say that man doesn't have the freedom and that everything happens according to God's never changing plan. People who are in favor of this point of view believe that since God is in control of everything, whatever man does, including his determination and choice, should also have come from Him. Besides, Bible indeed says that if a man is not a slave to sins, he is an instrument of righteousness (Roman 6:12-18). Bible also says that God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and He is not subject to man's questioning (Roman 9:18). "Man doesn't have free will choice" seems simple and clear, but it has some serious and unresolved issues.

First of all, the most obvious question is: humans consciously think they have the freedom to make a decision; if they are not truly free, is that subjectively experienced freedom just an illusion? Why would God want man to live in an illusion? The second question may be even more severe: if man doesn't have

the freedom to choose, then why should man be responsible for his own decision? If man's "choice" is not a true choice, but is according to God's plan which is predestined to happen, and then God wants to hold man responsible for his "choice", isn't there some suspicion of injustice? Besides, if our sinful decision is what God wants us to do, God is the source of evil deeds which is unacceptable to Christian belief.

On the other hand, if we affirm that man has the freedom to make decisions, man's subjective experience of the freedom to choose is then real, not an illusion that God gives him. Furthermore, man has to bear moral responsibility himself and the source of all evil deeds is man's free will choice. This concludes the perspective that "man has the freedom to choose" can avoid critical issues due to the perspective of "man doesn't have the freedom to choose". However, "man has the freedom to choose" has its own issues that are hard to resolve.

First, if man has the freedom to make decisions, how can God guarantee that His plan will be completely fulfilled? In another word, if things happen according to man's decision and man's decision is not always based on God's plan, then God doesn't have the total control over history's development; what He prophesizes to accomplish becomes uncertain; He becomes a liar or a unfaithful God. Not only that, on the subject of salvation, man's salvation has to rely on his own choice which will give things for him to brag about which is in direct contradiction with Paul's teaching "this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

It seems both "man doesn't have freedom to choose" and "man has the freedom to choose" have serious theologian issues. As a

result, some so-called “midway approach” theories have been proposed. First of these theories believes that God’s complete and unchanging plan co-exists with man’s freedom to choose; God’s plan is based on man’s free will choice. According to this theory, God is like a perfect program producer; He doesn’t do everything that is required by the program; rather He has a team to work together and produce the program. He puts right persons in the right positions, making them all utilize their own talents to execute their individual parts of the program, with their individual judgments from their individual roles. When the producer arranges for various parts, the whole program will complete according to his plan while each team member carries out his part by his own free will and the producer never directly “controls” team member’s actions.

In this theory, decisions made by man are not “controlled” by God, but are out of man’s free will. But, because God has complete knowledge, knowing certain man under certain circumstance will make certain decision, he places individuals in their rightful positions so that His plan gets completed. The most obvious Bible passage that supports this theory is the story of Joseph. Joseph told his brothers “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” (Genesis 50:20). An evil decision made by his brothers’ free will, turned out to be an important link in accomplishing God’s plan. This theory accommodates the thought that man has true freedom, and at the same time, affirms that God’s plan will be fulfilled according to his Will.

The only issue is that God’s plan becomes passive in its nature because it is “based” on man’s freedom to choose. However, this issue is less critical when compared to those raised from the prior two perspectives.

There is yet another theory about the coordination between God’s plan and man’s choice which is to separate the details of the plan from the overall plan itself. According to this theory, God’s plan is only for the general direction, not on minute details. Details of how history progresses have to do with what man is to decide; if man’s freedom to choose causes things to happen against God’s plan, then God will intervene to assure His plan gets fulfilled. This theory gains support from the Book of Esther. Mordecai told Esther “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). The general direction of God’s plan is to save Jews and it shall be done. Esther might decide to get involved on this matter; if she were not involved, things would have happened differently, but still, God’s plan would have been fulfilled. This theory accommodates both the certainty of God’s plan, and man’s true freedom to choose; however, God’s plan doesn’t include everything, only the general direction.

These two theories, though not totally without questions, are biblical and are more reasonable than the two simpler perspectives of “man doesn’t have freedom to choose” and “man has freedom to choose”.

Verse 4

That the first man, Adam, was created by God in His image, but fell from his original state by sinning against God, and hence incurred upon himself and all his posterity the guilt of sin, condemnation, and death; therefore, all mankind are in need of salvation, but are totally incapable of saving themselves.

1. God's Image

Mankind is different from all other created beings because all mankind are created in God's image. God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

All mankind have God's image; it means mankind belong to God and mankind's value is more precious than that of other created beings. This can be considered as the foundation of Christian Ethics which includes equality for different races and genders, and holiness and dignity of life at its different stages (unborn baby, elder people and terminally ill)

(1) The Meaning of God's Image

What does "imago dei" or "God's Image" mean?

Theological Theories

God is spirit (John 4:24), having no physical body; therefore we can say for sure His image is not about his outer appearance; rather it's an abstract concept. Basically we can discuss God's Image from three perspectives: Essential (or Ontology), Relations Theory and Functionalism.

"Essential" is the most traditional theory among the three and also is the one most accepted. This theory believes that man is in God's image by which it means man in his nature shares some similarities with God in the areas of morality, rationale (the ability to think

and reason), legalism and eternity. The most intuitive explanation of having God's image is that we are "like" Him, but the problem is: it is hard to define the exact aspects where we are "like" God; besides, there is no direct biblical foundation either. Hence, basically we use logic deduction to observe human's nature, and the difference between nature of human and that of other created beings, in order to examine if it matches God's nature.

"Relations Theory" believes Image is not about inner quality; it is not about asking questions such as "What is man?". Rather it is about relationship, which is man's capability to communicate with God. Existentialism whose main advocate was Emil Brunner, believes man, through Jesus, has relationship with God and that relationship is God's image; human nature can be complete only in that relationship. In other words, other created beings that are without God's image are complete as soon as they are created, but man is not complete until he has relationship with God and manifests his true human nature. According to this perspective, man is like a mirror reflecting God's image, but the reflection is there only when he is in front of God. This theory makes a connection between human nature and man's relationship with God; it explains very well the purpose of existence for biblical figures. This theory believes that without establishing relationship with God man has a broken and incomplete image.

"Functionalism" believes "image" has a meaning of "representing" like an image of the nation's leader printed on a monetary token (bill or coin); the image represents the monetary value endorsed by the government

authority through that token. Man, on the earth, has God's image, i.e. man represents God on the earth, has God-given authority and carries out his functions to manage this world. "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.' " (Genesis 1:26-28)

The above three perspectives all complement one another without excluding one another; all three match the descriptions of mankind in the Bible. In reality, man has to have relationship with God, and has to be like God to a certain degree. Also, man should have certain characteristics in his nature in order to represent God and fulfill man's functions in managing this world.

Biblical Data

Although Bible mentions God's image in several places, it never directly discusses what it contains. Nevertheless, from these passages we still can get some hints. First of all, from Genesis 1:27 we know that God's image includes male and female. Genesis 5:1-2 repeats it again that God created mankind in His likeness, male and female, and blessed them.

After the flood, God blessed Noah and his sons but forbade them to eat any meat with blood still in it because blood is life. From this comes the concept of "shed human blood" which is to take away human's life which is to kill a human. "Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind." (Genesis

9:6). This is a teaching on "life for life" which is because man has God's image. Why? First, man has God's image, thus has moral responsibility and should bear consequences when committing a crime. Second, killing a man is not a common crime, but is to kill a man who was created in God's image. Following our previous discussion that "image" means "representing", to kill a man is to directly offend God Himself.

In the New Testament there is a similar passage "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be." (James 3:9-10). This passage puts praising the Lord in parallel to cursing human beings which indicates treating God and treating man is equivalent because man is made in God's image. This explanation shares similarity with the above discussion about "killing a human is equal to offending God"

First Corinthians 11:7 says "A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God". This verse is part of the passage in First Corinthians 11:1-16 which is one of the most disputed passages in the New Testament. Not to mention all the disputes, just by reading this passage itself, we can understand that God's image has to do with His glory. Image is not equal to glory, but is closely related to glory.

There are other passages in the New Testaments that talk about "image"; most of them have to do with encouraging believers to be "like" God or Jesus. Roman 8:29 says that believers are predestined "to be conformed to the image of his Son". Paul admonishes Colossian believers in his epistle to put on the new self, "which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator". This passage basically treats God's or Jesus' image as His moral characteristics that are "true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:24).

God's image, besides "to be like Him in nature", also means representing God and reflecting His glory.

(2) The Fall of Mankind, and God's Image

In the above discussion, the New Testament has several places that talk about the "new self" must gradually grow into God's or Jesus' image after believers are saved. This suggests that mankind's fall deprived them of God's image, and salvation is purposed to restore that image. Other passages such as Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9-10 on the other hand clearly contain the fact that fallen mankind still have God's image.

How do we resolve these two seemingly contradictive thoughts? To begin with, these passages didn't say that sin deprived mankind of God's image, rather they said people, after being saved, should grow more and more like the mankind that God created in the very beginning and be more and more Christ like. Therefore, mankind are not deprived of God's image due to mankind's fall; rather it is sin that damages, distorts, and obscures mankind's nature so that mankind no more live like mankind, much less like God. Fallen mankind still have God's image, still represent God, and still hold higher value than other created beings. However, this image is broken and incomplete.

2. Sin

Mankind's fall although doesn't cause the loss of God's image, has some serious consequences. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Roman 5:12). That "one man" is Adam. In regard to the concept of "sin", it is mainly based on Roman 5:12-21. Traditionally speaking there are two aspects of sin: sin-nature and guilt.

(1) Sin-Nature

It's commonly regarded that Genesis Chapter 3 records the fall of our forefathers; they disobeyed God's command and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge which made them lose the paradise, Eden. God said to Adam "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:17-19). Based on this passage, there are two aspects of the consequence after Adam sinned. First, the ground (the created earth) is cursed. Second, Adam is to die. These two aspects can be considered as the same thing: death comes to the ground as well as to man. In Bible "death" essentially means "separation", which is to separate from the origin of life. The ground, when just created by God, was in harmony, full of crops to sustain lives; but now it got cursed due to man's sin and is no longer a life-friendly environment.

God told Adams "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." (Genesis 2:17). Therefore from the beginning God had revealed to mankind that the wage of sin is death which is not just the physical death of the body, but more seriously, death of the spiritual life.

Death shows man's nature has been distorted. The original good nature has turned into a nature that is prone to sin. The original intimate relationship with God has now been replaced with the separation from God. This distorted and contaminated human nature, in Paul's theologian perspective is often called "flesh". "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I

have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” (Romans 7:18-20). Our ancestors’ fall brings about all mankind’s sinful nature, leaving us in a situation where “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out”. Therefore, nobody can save himself by doing good deeds.

(2) Guilt

“Guilt” is the reality of sin’s being convicted. There are more disputes on this subject among theologians than other topics, and the main argument is whether man is guilty at birth. The above mentioned passage in Roman 5:12 “all sinned” becomes the focus of the dispute. There are two main different perspectives among Christian believers.

Arminianism advocates “Indirect Imputation” or “Natural Headship” and interprets that message as “all sinned because of Adam’s sin-nature”. This interpretation basically believes Adam’s sin-nature, not the guilt itself, has been inherited and passed on to all his descendents. Man’s guilt is due to his own sinning and so, guilt is indirectly due to Adam through his sin-nature.

Calvinism advocates “Direct Imputation” or “Federal Headship” which interprets the passage as “all are guilty of the sin that Adam represents”. This interpretation considers Adam not only passed on his sin-nature, but also his guilt, directly onto all his descendents. Adam represents the whole mankind; hence, the whole mankind has to bear Adam’s guilt. We are sinners, not only because we ourselves sinned with our sin-nature, but also because our guilt has been convicted due to Adam’s sin which happened long before we sinned.

Indirect Imputation sounds more agreeable in that one is responsible for one’s own sin; why should Adam’s descendents be responsible and get convicted for sins Adam

committed? Nevertheless, explanation offered by Direct Imputation is closer to the meaning of the passage because the passage’s main point is to put Adam’s sin and Christ’s righteousness in direct and parallel comparison. “Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.” (Romans 5:18-19). Christ’s righteousness clearly is “directly imputed” to believers, not indirectly transferred in order to make believers carry out their own righteousness and become righteous persons themselves. In parallel, Adam’s guilt is directly imputed to his descendents. To say it is not fair to impute Adam’s guilt to his descendents is to say it’s not fair to impute Christ’s righteousness to believers.

“Federal Headship” uses other biblical examples as analogies, in addition to Romans Chapter 5. One example is: Abraham was selected and God made a covenant with him and the covenant was extended to all his descendents. Another example: David’s victory over Goliath has this ideology of representing in it: victory for the representative of an army is the victory for the whole army. All this leads us to conclude that it is not unreasonable that God uses Adam as the representative of the mankind to choose between sin and obedience. The most important thing is to grasp the truth of direct imputation in Jesus Christ himself. He bears the punishment for mankind’s sin because mankind’s sin is directly imputed to Him.

However, “Direct Imputation” still has issues that are hard to resolve: it is not entirely parallel between Christ’s and Adam’s imputations. Adam’s guilt is imputed to the whole mankind, but Christ’s righteousness is only imputed to those who accept salvation. If Christ’s righteousness were to be imputed to every single person, then it would have become “universalism” which believes that all mankind

eventually will be saved; therefore, Adam's imputation has to differ from Christ's imputation. Adam's guilt is imputed to all mankind without mankind's selection, but Christ's imputation of righteousness is up to believers' choice.

Regardless of indirect or direct imputation, Bible clearly teaches us that our situation is: we were dead in our transgressions and sins. (Ephesians 2:1). Man living in shame and guilt, has been convicted but cannot help himself; man will perish if not for the salvation offered by God, out of God's own initiation.

Verse 5

That after the Fall, God, in His mercy and love, made provision for men's redemption through the establishment of the covenant of grace with His people by the promise and the actual giving of the Savior Jesus Christ, whom to believe is justification and life.

1. The Foundation of Salvation

Salvation is not founded on mankind, but on God; it is centered on God and is started from God. The ideology of salvation is based on Bible's teachings on God's nature, man's nature and sins. In the aforementioned Verse 2, we have discussed God's nature and in Verse 4 we have discussed mankind and sin. Here we will focus on salvation.

(1) God's Holiness

The premise of salvation is God's holiness which is not compatible with sin. Before issuing Laws, God bade people to purify themselves and bade Moses to put limits around the mountain. "Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain." (Exodus 19:12-13). The purpose of setting such strict boundaries is for people to understand that this law-revealing God is sacred, intolerant of any sinful offense.

For God cannot tolerate sin, He must deal with problems caused by sin and solve the situation that men are sinners. There are two ways holy God may handle sinful men; one is eternal separation which is punishment; the other is salvation which is to turn around men's sinful situation.

Death is separation and eternal separation is "eternal death" which is an ending that sinful mankind deserves because holy God must be separated from sinful mankind while separation from God is death. Following this, eternal death can be considered as the punishment for sins committed, also as the natural consequence of sin, for God is holy. Contrary to this, turning sinful mankind around to save them into righteousness is the beginning point of salvation.

(2) God's Love

It is out of God's loving nature that He wants to turn mankind from their sinful situation because God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). All that God does is out of his love which is not subject to the loved one's qualifications.

Paul wrote: God "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5). John also wrote: "He sent his

one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10). God’s holiness makes Him want to solve issues brought by sin; God’s love makes Him solve sin’s issues by salvation and set up His salvation plan.

(3) The Difficulty of Salvation: Mankind’s Situation

Man cannot save himself and there are three reasons why so: 1. Man, due to his sinful nature, cannot live a sinless life on his own. We can see this in “no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law” (Romans 3:20). As man on his own cannot do good and become righteous, man cannot pay back with good deeds for all the wrongs he did. 2. Man is obligated to do good deeds because “If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them” (James 4:17). Good deed by itself has no merit. 3. God doesn’t want man to save himself by works. “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith.” (Romans 3:27). As works make people boastful, God predestines that it is not by man’s own works that man gets saved.

Man, not being able to rely on his own works, has to count on grace in order to solve sin’s issues. Grace is a good benefit that one is not worthy of, because “Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.” (Roman 4:4). The previous passage says grace is God’s attribute which forgives man’s sin. However, righteousness is also God’s attribute and the righteous God does not leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:6-7). His sin-forgiving grace must satisfy the requirements of His righteousness.

This is the difficulty of salvation: the salvation plan has to turn around man who

cannot save himself, but at the same time it cannot leave the guilty unpunished. Needless to say, to the omnipotent, omniscient God, there is no problem that is too difficult. When we come to understand God’s prepared salvation through Jesus Christ, we cannot but exclaim for God’s marvelous and incomparable wisdom, just like Paul repeated it three times in the Book of Ephesians Chapter 1, “to the praise of his glorious grace” (Ephesians 1: 6, 12, 14).

2. The Provision of Salvation

Salvation is realized through Jesus Christ and this is not to say that God’s salvation is only revealed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament we do see consistent patterns in the redemption system.

(1) Signs in the Old Testament

The Book of Leviticus records the detailed process for the entire sin offering and explains the essence of it; “Say to the Israelites: ‘When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD’s commands— If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. He is to present the bull at the entrance to the tent of meeting before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it there before the LORD’” (Leviticus 4:2-4).

There are two elements in the sin offering.

First, the bull used in the offering has to be without defect. No-defect means perfection; a body with no defect is a sign that represents the moral aspect by the material aspect, using tangible material to represent the abstract. In the aforementioned, before God issued Laws on Mountain Sinai, He wanted Israelites to purify themselves, “Have them wash their clothes” (Exodus 19:10). By the cleanness of their clothes, tangible material was used to represent the abstract morals.

Second, the animal sacrificed in the sin offering is to die in the sinner's place. Blood represents life; the animal in the sin offering is slaughtered and its blood becomes an instrument to forgive sin. The author of the Book of Hebrews points out "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22). Death is the consequence of sin; the sacrifice animal has to die because it is to bear sin's consequence on behalf of the sinner.

The sin offering in the Old Testament indicates the principle of redemption: the one who is sinless bears the burden for the one who has sinned for the consequence of sin, which is death.

(2) Atonement in the New Testament

The Atonement in the New Testament circles around Christ's death.

Five Different Theories

For what did Christ die? Or, how does Christ's death bring about redemption? Generation after generation, theologians all try to answer these questions. Here we can summarize into at least five theories.

a. Example Theory believes Christ's death is the ultimate example of God's forever faithfulness. This theory emphasizes that Jesus is human and man's redemption is to follow Christ's good example to show God this kind of faithful love that lasts until death. Christ's death indeed is a good example "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." (1 Peter 2:21). But this is not the most important meaning of redemption; if it were, then redemption was righteousness by deeds. Setting example is secondary, not the primary meaning.

b. Moral Influence Theory believes Christ's death is the ultimate manifestation of God's love toward mankind. Based on this theory, man's problem is his fear of God; God is love and He wants man to be reconciled to Him. This theory emphasizes that through Christ, God's compassion toward man is manifested; man's redemption is to answer God's love, to repent and to turn back to God. Bible clearly explains the concept of being reconciled to God: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." (2 Corinthians 5:19)

c. Governmental Theory believes Christ's death signifies the severity and consequence of sin. In this theory, God is a holy and righteous judge who will not easily forgive sins, in order that people will not take it lightly and sin even more. Jesus willingly sacrificed himself to manifest the well-deserved punishment, and to deter sinners. "It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious." (Isaiah 42:21). Jesus' death makes man realize the horrific punishment for bearing sin's consequence. But, righteousness is not the only attribute of God; redemption also requires His love.

d. Ransom Theory

In the past some people believed that Jesus was a transaction between God and devil and God used Jesus' death as a ransom paid to the devil to redeem man from slavery and to set man free. This thinking is no longer accepted by theologians. "Ransom" is an analogy from ancient time's slavery system and is mentioned in many places in the New Testament. God said "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Paul also said that we were "bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). That is, Christ's death paid the price for man's sin.

e. Satisfaction Theory believes that Christ's death satisfied the requirement for God's righteousness. This theory emphasizes that man sins mainly because man wants to be against God and to offend God's holiness; therefore God wanted to accept "paying back" to calm his anger. This thinking is similar to the above theory, but the payment was made to God, not devil; it's not about setting man free from slavery, but about satisfying God's anger that is attributed to His righteousness. Man couldn't pay enough to calm the anger; only the offering of God's sinless son can satisfy God's requirement. "Calm the wrath" and "ransom" are the main themes of the New Testament; for example Paul wrote "Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:9). However, both "Satisfaction Theory" and "Government Theory" emphasize on God's righteousness but they overlook God's love.

All of the above theories about redemption are not totally correct; rather they look at redemption from different layers and different angles. New Testament talks about the purpose of Christ's death from different angles using different analogies; this is necessary because redemption is very rich and abundant and cannot be fully explained by one single theory.

Data from the New Testament

As follows, we will briefly list what New Testament has expounded on Christ's death. Topics that have been mentioned in the previous section, such as "ransom", "love", "calm the wrath" and "reconcile to God", etc. will not be repeated here.

Father sent his Son to the world. The purpose is not to condemn the world for their sins, but to save the world through him (John

3:17) "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." "Sent" has a sense of "give up", "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

Christ is the sacrifice for the sin offering. Baptist John said "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul said "just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). The author of the Book of Hebrews used extensive space to articulate that the sin offering, which is required in the Old Testament, is in fact pointing to Christ, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The sacrifice offering made with sacrifice animal is a sign for Christ because the only sacrifice that meets God's requirement is Christ himself.

Christ's death is a substitute. The New Testament often says that Christ's death "is for us". For example, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Roman 5:8). In Greek, *huper hēmōn*, besides "for our sake", also means "in our place" that is to "take our place". With regard to "taking our place", the passage that is clearest in this teaching can be found in Second Corinthians 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

In conclusion, besides discourses on "ransom", "wrath", "reconciliation" and "sacrifice", "scapegoat" can be considered as the clearest interpretation in the New Testament for Christ's death. Christ died in our place to bear the consequence of sin which is death so that we can be free from this consequence.

Verse 6

That Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent by the Father, begotten by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary; that He lived a sinless and obedient life, suffered and died on the cross vicariously for the sins of His people who believe in Him; that God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him both as Lord and Christ, and gave Him the promise of the Holy Spirit for His Church

In the year of 325 AD, bishops held an Ecumenical Council at Nicaea for the very first time in the history. To cope with the impact by Arianism, the main focus of the conference was on the nature of Christ. The conclusion reached at the council became the foundation of Christian Theology. In the several centuries that followed, there were many Ecumenical Councils held to clarify Christ's deity and his humanity and the relationship between the two. Nicene Creed declares that Holy Son is "God from God, light from light, true God from true God".

1. Christ's Deity

Christ's deity may well be the earliest theological question that got early church's attention because if Christ is the true God, how is he distinguished from the one and only God? Almost all heresies that deny Christ's deity are to avoid the question of whether there is a true deity besides God.

(1) Historical Heresies Regarding Christ's Deity

Early in the history, there was a sec of Jewish believers, called Ebionites who firmly believed in Monotheism and couldn't accept the belief that there is a deity besides God, Yahweh. They believed that Jesus was a very devout Jew and was selected by God because of

his piety to become the promised Messiah. They believed that after Jesus was baptized the spirit of the Messiah, that is a supernatural power and inspiration, fell on him. This thinking influenced the then yet-to-come "Dynamic Monarchianism" or Adoptionism.

Another heresy is Arianism. According to Arian, Christ is the firstborn, also the ultimate of all the created beings; God first created Christ and then through him created everything else. They used many biblical passages to prove their perspective. Example passages are Proverb 8:22, Mark 13:32, John 14:28, 17:3, Acts 2:36, Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 3:2. Among them the most important one is Colossians 1:15-16 "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."

Arian explained "firstborn" as "created first"; if one is created first, he cannot be as eternal as God. This theory attracted many believers because on one hand it can avoid the question of "another God", on the other hand it can exalt Christ to a position higher above all other created beings. Athanasius, an early church father at that time, recognized the

danger of Arianism so he debated greatly with Arian; in the end, it resulted in **Nicene Creed** which says: Christ was **begotten and not made; of the very same nature of the Father, that is of the essence of the Father**. Holy Son's birth is in the eternity; therefore he cannot be non-existing at any given time.

In fact, all the passages referenced by Arianism are about Christ's obedience to Father in his functioning; there is no evidence that Christ in nature is below and underneath God.

(2) Biblical Revelations Regarding Christ's Deity

In the New Testament, there are plenty of evidences about Christ's deity. Here we can discuss from the perspectives of authors of the following three books:

Gospel of John

John is the most powerful book expounding on Christ's deity. In the beginning of the book it declares Christ's deity right away: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). "Word" of course refers to Christ; there is nowhere else you can find it more direct in claiming that Christ is God.

In the Book of John there are seven instances of "I am" (ego eimi). "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35), "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12), "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture." (John 10:9), "I am the good

shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11), "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die" (John 11:25, NIV), "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6), "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5).

As stated in Verse 2 of our EFC Faith Proclamations, "Yahweh" is the name God revealed himself with, to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). Most Bible scholars and theologians believe that the Book of John records seven of "I am" to purposely distinguish Jesus' deity.

Furthermore, in the Book of John, there are 41 instances of Jesus' calling God "my father". This is a very intimate calling, one that exceeds the relationship between man and God. Jesus said "I and the Father are one." (John 10:30), also "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. ... I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me." (John 14:7-10). All this father and son relationship manifests that in nature his identification is the same as God's.

The Book of Hebrews

In the beginning of the book, it addresses Jesus as "Son". "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son," (Hebrews 1:1-2). Here, it compares the ways revelations were done by God "in the past" and "in these last days". In the past it was through prophets (plural) and in these last days by his Son (singular); it puts emphasis on that prophets and his Son are different by nature. It follows by describing the Son as "the radiance

of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Christ is God's "exact representation" where representation means an exact copy in nature from the Father to the Son by means of engraving and imprinting. This offers a clear affirmation on Christ's deity.

The Book of Hebrews has a very clear theme which is Christ's far superiority: Christ is superior to angles, Christ is superior to Moses, and Christ is superior to Aaron. When expounding on Christ's superiority to angles, the author referred to Christ by citing several passages from the Psalms which apparently are sayings made to God. "But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.' He also says, 'In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.' " (Hebrews 1:8-10). Referencing these passages clearly indicates that in the Book of Hebrews, Christ is equal to God.

Epistles by Paul

In Paul's epistles there are plenty of direct discussions about Christ's deity. In Philippians 2:6, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;" where "nature" has a meaning of "likeness" or "form". In Greek, *morphē* means "all the attributes that a thing has". Thus "equality with God" explains more clearly about Christ's position.

Colossians 1:15 says "The Son is the image of the invisible God". God is spirit and

invisible and Holy Son is the image of God. This is similar to what is said in John 1:18 "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." Paul went on to say "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him." (Colossians 1:19) where "fullness" refers to the abundance from God which is even more clearly explained in the following chapter "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form," (Colossians 2:9). God's nature includes deity and God's deity lives in Christ.

There are also passages in Paul's epistles that indirectly manifest God's deity by Christ's role as a judge. Paul addressed Christ as "who will judge the living and the dead" (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul also mentioned that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ for the things we have done (2 Corinthians 5:10). The Old Testament calls God the Judge of all the earth. God says "for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side" (Joel 3:12); Abraham called God "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25). All this leads us to conclude that calling Christ the Judge of the world is to put him and God in an equal position.

(3) Evidence by Christ's Resurrection

Christ's resurrection made his deity evident. Resurrection itself cannot prove that Christ has God's power and might. In the Bible whenever Christ's resurrection is discussed, it always says "God has raised Jesus to life from dead", "rise from the dead". We can see that Bible emphasizes that Jesus' resurrection is an act of God, not that it is due to Jesus' own capability. Romans 1:4 says "who through the

Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord". Jesus' resurrection "appointed" Jesus the Son of God. The original wording means "declare". God uses Christ's resurrection to declare his stature as God's Son. His resurrection is a seal, with a signature of approval by God, on all his acts and all his words, including his miracles and his self-proclamation of his deity.

Theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg pointed out that Jesus' resurrection meant to the then Jews, a sign of the coming of the End Time which is the coming of the promised Messiah. In Daniel 2:2 it mentions that at the End Time, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Paul pointed out that Christ's resurrection is a sign before the resurrections at the End Time, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20). All these passages resonate what has been proclaimed in the Book of Hebrews: God during the "End Time" reveals through His Son.

To the then Jews, Christ's resurrection also made it clear that He is that "Son of Man", and his "coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14).

2. Christ's Humanity

Under the influence of secularization trend, Christ's humanity has become less of an

issue in modern Christian faith. However, in Christian history Christ's humanity has been an important subject, not only related to believers' lives but also directly related to redemption: if Christ were not truly a man, he could not take our place to bear the punishment for our sins.

If Christ is truly a man, then he lived out the true humanity. Throughout human's history, only Christ has sinless human nature; He is the only one that manifests perfectly the original humanity that was made by God in God's image, in the very beginning.

Hebrews 4:15-16 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need". To believers this means a tremendous encouragement that Christ can empathize with us, and can plead on our behalf.

(1) Heresies Regarding Christ's Humanity

Early in church history, most questions about Christ's humanity were related to Gnosticism. Scholars believe many passages in First John are geared toward Gnosticism. This heresy, similar to Neo-Platonism, believes that all material things are evil and only spirit can be good; therefore good God cannot possibly incarnate and become flesh which is material.

In early church history, there was an important sect called Docetism whose name came from Greek *dokeō* that means "like" or "seems to be". As suggested by its name, this

sec believed Jesus only looked like human, but was not a true human. Docetism believed what so called “incarnation” was God’s appearing in a human’s form, just like in the Old Testament God also used different forms (including that of man) to appear to men.

Another heresy was Apollinarianism. Apollinarian argued greatly for Christ’s deity but then he put so much excessive emphasis on Christ’s deity that he distorted Christ’s humanity. He explained the flesh (Greek sarx) in “The Word became flesh” as “body”. He believed that Christ only had human’s body and the sacred “word” replaced the human’s spirit.

Apollinarianism was very appealing as it seemed to reasonably explain Christ’s dual natures of man and of God, and at the same time avoided the critical question that God is spirit and God also has man’s spirit. But, denying Christ’s having human spirit is equal to denying Christ’s being a true man. Based on that, Christ’s mind and thought were not that of man and his humanity was just the body itself. Although Apollinarianism was deemed as heresy earlier on, many believers who are not theologically trained would take this theory as the right explanation for the incarnation, not realizing its fault.

(2) Biblical Revelations Regarding Christ’s Humanity

In the New Testament, especially in books written by John, there are many places where incarnation is emphasized.

Passages Directly Related to Christ’s Incarnation

The most important one surely is John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his

dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”. In his epistles John also said, “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist,” (1 John 4:2-3). John emphasized that this “the-way-of-life” Christ is not illusive but is real, “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched” (1 John 1:1). Jesus’ human side can be sensed and felt by our five senses.

In Paul’s epistles there are also proclamations of Christ’s incarnation, “Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.” (1 Timothy 3:16). This great mystery is God’s appearing to us in the flesh.

“Flesh” (Greek sarx) is a word often translated into “body” and sometimes “flesh and blood”. It has many different usages and an important one is to use it for man’s weakness, especially to contrast with God’s strength or power. When Peter made that famous proclamation “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”, Jesus said “this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthews 16:16-17). They are opposite things: “flesh” and “heaven”, “from man” and “from God”.

When discussing the message of the cross which is seemingly foolish, Paul did a contrast between the wisdom by human standards and God’s power and might (1 Corinthians 1:26, 2:5). In spiritual warfare we

don't fight with our flesh, rather we have the power and might from God which can demolish strongholds (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). We have to put on the full armor of God for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12).

When John talked about believers' lives, he emphasized the importance of "born of God". "Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13, NIV). When discussing the issue on reborn, John also made a contrast between born of flesh and born of Holy Spirit (John 3:6). There, flesh is not used as a bad and negative thing, but is used to compare with God or God's spirit to demonstrate the difference in nature. Flesh is weak and limited, so is man who is born of flesh.

The author of the Book of Hebrews says "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—" (Hebrews 2:14). This passage, besides mentioning Christ's flesh and his death, points out that Christ, through his incarnation, identifies with us who too have flesh and blood.

Depictions of Jesus' Humanity in Books of Gospel

In addition to the above mentioned passages that are more direct, we can see from the stories recorded in the four Gospel books that Christ indeed lived out his human nature.

First, Jesus, like all other mankind, was born from his mother's womb; he once was a baby, a child and then grew up gradually, just like other human beings. "Jesus grew in wisdom

and stature, and in favor with God and man." (Luke 2:52). This passage is important because it not only mentions Jesus' growing physically in flesh, but also spiritually in "wisdom", indicating both his inner being and his outward human side were growing. This refutes Apollinarianism whose perspective is: Jesus' humanity is only about his external flesh and body, for God's wisdom is infinite and cannot increase.

Furthermore, Jesus had human's feelings. He loved Lazarus and his sisters (John 11:3). He had compassion when He saw people had a need (Matthews 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34); He rejoiced (John 15:11; 17:13); He became sorrowful and troubled (Matthews 26:37, Mark 14:32-42, 15:34, John 12:27); He became angry (Mark 3:5) and He was amazed (Mark 6:6, Luke 7:9). Although all of these feelings, except for amazement, can apply to God, all the recordings of these feelings are used on the aspect of inter-personal relationships.

There are many depictions in the Bible about Jesus' limitation due to his human nature. He got hungry (Matthews 4:2), thirsty (John 19:28), and tired (John 4:6). Above all, the most important limitation was his sure death. Hunger, thirst, weariness and death are all things that Bible says God does not have; they are entirely of human nature.

There is one passage which provokes many discussions and shows that Jesus could be limited in knowledge too. Jesus himself said "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Mark 13:32). Some consider it is not that Jesus didn't know, but that Jesus didn't want to let others know (reference Acts 1:7). This explanation is less convincing because He

not only said “no one knows” but specifically said “nor the Son”. Some others explained that what Jesus said means that this matter is not up for him to decide, but for God to decide, that is, “know” is about the authority. This explanation sounds more reasonable than the former one, but still is not entirely convincing.

Another passage records “speak just what the Father has taught me.” (John 8:28). Here it implies at least some part of Jesus’ sayings were taught and instructed by God. In theology, Jesus’ not all-knowing manifests his limitation due to his human nature. He, being Son of God is omnipotent and all-knowing (omniscient), but being a man He was limited in his power and knowledge. Therefore all the works that He had done were by the power of the Holy Spirit, just like we human beings. Jesus even had to communicate with heavenly Father through prayers.

(3) Jesus’ Innocence

As discussed in the above Jesus had a human nature that was sinless, blameless and was in the same original human nature in God’s image as it was originally created before man was fallen. Jesus proclaims “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” (John 8:29). “Always do” means He ceaselessly does things that please God and this discusses his innocence from a positive side. Following that, Jesus boldly challenged people who opposed Him “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?” (John 8:46). Paul wrote, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Book of Hebrews also states it clearly “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been

tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” (Hebrews 4:15). It also says Christ being a high priest, is “holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.” He was sacrificed for the sin offering and “offered himself unblemished to God” (Hebrews 9:14). Peter wrote, “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.” (1 Peter 2:22). John also said “in him is no sin” (1 John 3:5).

Besides these passages, based on theologian conjectures, we know for sure that Christ with God’s nature cannot sin because God’s nature and sin are not compatible. However, some theologians have questions about this “Sinless Christ” conviction and mainly there are two reasons for it.

First, if Christ is completely sinless, does that mean Christ differs from us in our human nature? If so, then the argument that “He must be a real human being in order to be our scapegoat” cannot be established. This thinking, although may sound reasonable, has a presumption behind it: only sinful nature is authentic human nature; obviously it is incorrect. Human nature got contaminated but that doesn’t result in a new definition for human nature; Christ, being a “real human being” was as much a human being as both healthy man and sick man are human.

Secondly there is a tricky question that is about whether Christ can be tempted. If we said Jesus cannot sin then is it meaningful at all to say that he had been tempted? In other words, can a man who cannot sin be tempted? First of all, Bible clearly says that Jesus had been tested; the Gospel Books record how He went through the temptation (reference Matthews 4:1-11). Furthermore in Hebrews 4:15 it says “one who has been tempted in every way, just

as we are” which clearly explains that Jesus’ being tested is a very crucial theological point of view and it is directly related to our mentality when approaching God, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16).

Since both Christ’s innocence and his being tempted are clearly explained in the Bible, we have to simultaneously accept teachings on Christ’s human nature on these two aspects, and to give some theology-based explanations. We can believe that Christ being God will not sin and Jesus being man has the capability to sin. Thus we can conjecture that when Jesus was in this world the pressure to sin that he had experienced was real and it was as real as his experience of being hungry and being weary due to limitation by his human nature. Theologian Leon Morris pointed out that because Jesus never sinned, his experience of being tempted should be stronger than others. The more a person is prone to sin, the less he will experience the temptation because as soon as temptation comes he will readily give in and sin. Some theologians think Morris has a reasonable explanation while others don’t agree with him. There are other explanations offered by other theologians. Nevertheless, logically speaking, a person who never sins is not the same as a person who has never been tempted before; likewise we believe Christ’s innocence doesn’t contradict his being tempted.

3. The Relationship between Christ’s Deity and Christ’s Humanity

The simultaneous affirmation on Christ’s deity and his humanity is of great importance as it is the foundation of our

Christian faith. But we still have to clarify the relationship between the two. Like Trinity, Christ’s dual divine and human nature is an important subject in Christian theology. In church history, once the disputes over Christ’s deity had settled, God’s dual nature became the greatest topic in theology. Amidst these discussions, at least two are considered wrong.

(1) Historical Heresies on the Union of Deity and Humanity

The first wrong perspective was Nestorianism. There are many interesting stories regarding Nestorianism. Among them the one that draws the most attention from Chinese churches is that the very first Christian sec that ever came to China was Nestorianism (景教). However, all these stories mainly were about political and power struggles and were not beneficial to faith related discussion. Therefore here we only discuss Nestorianism as a theory without asking whether in the history Nestorian himself ever kept his own doctrine.

Nestorianism believed that Christ’s deity is separated from his humanity; the one who was born of Mary was the human side of Christ while Son of God who is in eternity is the divine side of Christ. From the surface this theory sounds reasonable, but this theory actually believed in two Christ’s: one Christ who is human and the other who is divine. Following that, Christ’s have two thoughts and two wills, thus are two separate persons; this thinking destroys the redemption which is based on one Christ and includes the relationship between God and man.

There is another heresy called Eutychianism which is the entirely opposite of Nestorianism. This heresy believed that Christ’s divinity is blended in with his humanity. Among

this heresy there were two divided theories. One said Christ's deity mixed with his humanity resulted in a third not-man-not-god nature which has attributes from both deity and humanity. The other said that Christ's humanity was absorbed into his deity and so it denied the reality of Christ's human nature.

Generally speaking, Nestorianism separated too far apart the divine side of Christ and the human side of Christ while Eutychianism fused too much the two sides of the dual nature.

(2) The Correct Definition of "Incarnation"

Through the debates with the above mentioned heresies and others, we can clarify "incarnation" which is our doctrine on the unity of Christ's dual divine and human nature. This doctrine has four statements: First, Christ is true God. Second, Christ is true human. Third, Christ is a person. Fourth, Christ's dual divine and human natures are united but not mixed up. Hypostatic Union is the foundation of orthodox Christianity.

The union of Christ's dual nature into one person is a mystery; our limited reasoning capability cannot thoroughly analyze the relationship in between. Paul has his famous proclamation in the Book of Philippians "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Philippians 2:6-7). "Made himself nothing" has an original meaning of empty himself (reference NIV). "Empty himself" doesn't mean losing, it's there to resonate the following "taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

likeness". Christ's deity is not reduced but is limited. This is because if Christ wanted to live out his limited humanity, he had to limit his infinite deity; otherwise his humanity would be lost in his deity.

Someone offered an analogy that Christ's deity is like the light of a lamp and his humanity the shade of the lamp. The lamp shade doesn't reduce the light but just limits the projection of the light, making the light not totally shine through. Similarly Christ's humanity doesn't reduce his deity a bit; it just limits the manifestation of his deity.

4. Christ's Work

(1) Christ's Work Viewed from His Status

In Greek *christos* is a synonym for *māshîah* in Hebrews which means the anointed one. In Bible there are three positions that are to be anointed: prophet (1 King 19:16), priest (Leviticus 4:3) and king (1 Samuel 24:6).

Prophet

Moses ever foretold that "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter used this passage to declare Jesus' identity (Acts 3:22) and make known that Christ is that coming prophet. Jesus once hinted on his being a prophet who was not honored in his own home when he said "A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home." (Matthews 13:57). When Jesus was entering Jerusalem, the crowds said "This is

Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthews 21:11).

The most important job for a prophet is to reveal. Christ, from the very beginning to the very end, manifests his functioning in revelation. Before he was born into this world, he is light of the mankind “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ... The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.” (John 1:4, 9), where “light” represents God’s revelation in man’s heart.

Incarnation is the ultimate revelation. “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18). The Book of Hebrews also says “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, ..The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” (Hebrews 1:1-3). Both of these passages have similar meaning that Christ was born to the world to reveal God’s nature in a tangible form and body and this revelation is for “End Time” and so, is the very last, the very highest and the most complete revelation.

Renowned theologian, Karl Barth has a whole set of systematic theology that is built upon this conviction of “Christ is God’s complete revelation”. To him, this is the only acceptable way to explain the Trinity. Since Christ is God’s perfect revelation, He must be God Himself.

After ascending to heaven, Christ still reveals to the world through His church. He bade his disciples “teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded” (Matthews 28:20). He is to return in the future and his second coming, like his first coming, will be the greatest revelation ever. Bible uses “appear” to describe his second coming, “But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). “Appear” is an act by God to reveal to people. Paul said at that time we will know fully everything that God wants to reveal to us “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Priest

Priest’s main function is to reconcile, being a counselor between God and man. The author for the Book of Hebrews spent much effort discussing Christ’s position as the High Priest and emphasized that Christ is a priest in the order of Melchizedek not Aaron (Hebrews 5:6-10, 7:1-17). Melchizedek symbolized Christ.

First, Melchizedek was a king (King of Salem also called King of righteousness) and also was a priest with a king’s honor. Prophet Zechariah once prophesized about the coming Messiah: “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.” (Zechariah 6:12-13). Christ is the King and the Priest at the same time.

Second, His priesthood has nothing to do with his genealogy. Priests in the order of Aaron are descendents of Levi and a High Priest has to be a descendent of Aaron. But

Melchizedek “Without father or mother, without genealogy” was not restrained because of his relationship or his lack of relationship with ancestors of Levi or Aaron. Christ is a descendent from David who was from the tribe of Judah. Furthermore, Melchizedek is greater than Israelite’s forefather Abraham which indicates Christ’s priesthood had been selected before Abraham was selected and it exists long before the history of redemption.

Third, he is timeless: “without beginning of days or end of life, resembling the Son of God”, represents Christ’s eternity. Christ’s priesthood, unlike that of Aaron, will never end and He will be priest forever.

The most important priestly duty for Christ is to sacrifice Himself as a sin offering. “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God,” (Hebrews 10:12). He is the priest and the sacrifice object all at the same time. When he sits down at the right hand of God, he doesn’t stop his work; rather he continues to work as a priest, to plead on people’s behalf, and to be a counselor between God and man. “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (Roman 8:33-34). “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Hebrews 7:25). Because of his priestly work, we can come before the Lord, not afraid of being condemned.

King

King’s duty is very clear: to reign. Messiah’s reign as a king was the most important function Jewish people valued at Jesus’ time because they had been longing for a ruler who came from God to set them free from the governing by gentiles. The most important prophecy about Messiah’s being a king is in Second Samuel 7:12-16 where “Covenant with David” is recorded. The backdrop of that covenant was peacetime when King David ruled the nation; when he thought that he himself was living in a palace while God’s ark of covenant was kept in a tent, he had the desire to build a temple for God. However, God didn’t want him to build the temple, instead God wanted to build a dynasty for David, “When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” (2 Samuel 7:2-13). “David’s descendant” became a synonym for the hope for Messiah.

Isaiah prophesized “Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.” (Isaiah 9:7). The angel announced to Mary that she was to bear a baby: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

Christ’s kingship exists since he was born. Those Magi from the east asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?”

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” (Matthews 2:2). Their gifts for Jesus were: gold, frankincense and myrrh which were all gifts for a king. Jesus addressed himself as king in front of his disciples “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthews 19:28) He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey, the crowds with palm branches acclaimed “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the king of Israel!” (John 12:13). In the end, when he was questioned by governor, “Are you the king of the Jews”, he replied “You have said so” (Matthews 27:11).

However, Jesus’ sovereignty didn’t fully manifest when Jesus was on the earth; it has to wait until a later time to fully manifest and fulfill. Paul in the First Corinthians 15:24-25 says, “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” When Christ comes again, gloriously descending upon the earth “Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” (Revelation 19:15-16.)

(2) Christ’s Work Viewed from His Different Stages

Christ “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he

made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11). This passage explains that Christ’s work on this earth can be divided into two stages: humbled and exalted.

Humbled

Jesus humbled himself and became a man. Although he only spent thirty some years on the earth, it is very important. First of all, he prayed. Every Gospel Book has stories about Jesus’ praying. After busy work, before it dawned, he went to the weirdness to pray (Mark 1:35); before he called and appointed his 12 apostles, he was up in the mountain praying all night long (Luke 6:12); sometimes he sent disciples away from him and then he went to pray by himself (Matthews 14:23).

Jesus never sinned all his earthly life and was in the company of sinners. When he was questioned by then religious leaders, he said “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthews 9:12-13). Contacting sinners was an important task when Christ was on this earth.

When Jesus was in this world, he lived a life of poverty. When a scholar wanted to follow him, Jesus told him “Foxes have dens and

birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Matthews 8:20). Christ’s living a deprived life wasn’t something he couldn’t help with; rather it was his own choice. When Paul praised Macedonian churches for their offering out of love and care, he gave his interpretation about Christ’s poverty and made it exemplary to believers “you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Therefore, we can say that Christ, when he was in this world, was accompanied by sinners as well as poor people. When he saw people with need, he had compassion for them, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthews 9:36). The author of the Book of Hebrews explained “He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.” (Hebrews 5:2). To meet people’s need with a compassionate heart was a ministry done by Christ when he was on the earth.

Jesus proclaimed and instructed. In the four Books of Gospel what Jesus had said accounts for half of the total verses; this indicates Bible values highly what Jesus said while he was in this world. “The Beatitude” (Matthews 5-7) is the one that best represents his teachings. In “The Beatitude”, Jesus always taught people by citing then well-understood Jewish Laws, but his way of teaching was totally different from that of scholars. He emphasized that he was not to abolish the Laws, but to fulfill the Laws (Matthews 5:17). Jesus taught the essence of the Laws, drawing attention away from superficial deeds into the inner world. When the crowds finished listening of his

teaching, the Bible says all were amazed at his teaching “because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.” (Matthews 7:28-29).

Jesus not only preached in public, he also taught disciples in private. Although the disciples might not understand at the time, later after Christ was raised from death, Holy Spirit came upon them and they gradually came to understand the meaning. This is just what Jesus had promised “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26).

Besides his life and his words, the thing that Christ did that draw most attention are miracles and wondrous deeds that he performed. His miracles can be categorized into two types. The first category is miraculous healing including driving out demons and making dead people come back to life. The second category manifests his power over the great nature, which includes his authority over wind, sea and food.

Nevertheless we have to be careful on this subject. Although miracles manifest Christ’s having extreme power, and they were performed out of His compassion for people, miracles are not only to demonstrate his supernatural power and to provide for people’s need, but also to manifest that he is that promised yet-to-come Messiah. When John, the Baptist, was in prison he had a doubt in his mind and so sent someone to ask Jesus “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” and Jesus replied “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.”

(Matthews 11:2-5) This clearly quotes the Book of Isaiah 35:5-6 and 61:1 to make it known that his deeds are to fulfill Old Testament prophecies that are related to Messiah. Jesus' ministry is Christ's (Messiah's) ministry. The Book of John has similar explanation "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31)

Certainly, the most important task that Christ did in this world is his death. The meaning of his death has already been discussed in the above and we won't repeat it here.

Exalted

Christ's being "exalted" started with his resurrection. In theory Christ's resurrection is not a task he did all by himself; rather it is God who raised him from dead. But his resurrection, like his death, is the most important event in his worldly life. We believe Christ was physically resurrected, not so-called "spiritually resurrected". People who saw Christ's resurrection didn't see a delusion, or an invisible and intangible spirit. Jesus told two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." (Luke 24:39)

Christ's resurrection triggers many discussions and the Bible provides us with some data. Christ's resurrection differs from any other resurrection miracles ever recorded in the Bible because he was not just raised from dead like Lazarus (John 12:38-44). Those people came back to life but later they died again, in

other words, they didn't turn around death's reality. But Christ's resurrection is different; he was raised back to life and lives forever; he is the resurrection pioneer in the End Time and because of this, he is called "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20)

Resurrected Christ will never die because he has a new body which exceeds all limitations imposed by the material world; he was able to suddenly appear in a house whose doors and windows were all closed (Luke 24:36-37; John 20:19). Paul described this resurrected body as "imperishable"; hence, "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

Though we say Christ's resurrected body is a "new" body, it doesn't mean that body is totally created new from nothing. To begin with, after his resurrection, some people seemed unable to recognize him; it could be because they didn't expect him to come back to life, or maybe because there had been some kind of quality changes in the resurrected body that made the outer appearance somewhat differ from the original body. On the other hand, these people in the end were able to recognize Jesus; all this indicates that his body might have gone through some changes, but there were still some similarities between the old and the new; what's more important is that his body still bore the wounds and marks he had when he died (Luke 24:40; John 20:20). Even John saw in his vision that he is like a slain lamb (Revelation 5:6). Furthermore, we know that after Christ's resurrection his body was no longer in the tomb. All this leads us to conclude

that his old body had been transformed anew into a new body.

“And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.” (1 Corinthians 15:14) That is, Christ’s resurrection proves that our faith is real and our savior is a living Lord who is still living today and who will come again.

After resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven. There are three places in the Bible that record the fact of Jesus’ ascending (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). Among them, Acts Chapter 1 has the most details. At first glimpse, Christ’s ascending to heaven may seem not that necessary as he could just all at once disappear and go back to heaven. But Christ’s ascending

has its meaning; he wanted people to watch his departure, his going back to heaven. The Book of Hebrews called him “a great high priest who has ascended into heaven” (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus himself once told his disciples about his “going away”, “But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (John 16:7). Christ’s ascending to heaven is not only to remind people that he is now in heaven the place where Father God is, but also to get people prepared to await his second coming. Angels told those people who were watching Jesus’ ascending “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11)

Verse 7

That men are saved by grace through faith in Christ in response to the Gospel preached, or otherwise presented, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through whom ransomed sinners became the sons of God and heirs of eternal life. That Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men; through Him and only through Him the believer has access to the Father.

1. The Realization of Salvation

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Man is saved by God’s grace; God provides salvation for us in Christ; Man is to obtain it by faith. The saying, “Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life” has a very rich and deep theological ideology in it.

In Chinese, “being saved” is unclear in its meaning. Often it refers to a man being changed from a non-believer to a believer or from a non-Christian to a Christian. Therefore when people ask “Have you been saved?” often they are asking “Have you become a Christian?” In English “conversion” is the word for this particular meaning that is changing from non-believer to believer. Here we will discuss two aspects of faith. First, it’s about the nature of faith; what’s included in the faith that can save

people? Second, it's about the contents of the faith; what should people believe in order to be saved?

(1) The Nature of Faith

When Jesus just started out to preach, his message contents were recorded briefly in Mark 1:15, "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" The first half of this brief statement was an imperative proclamation that is to say: not much time is left and God's judgment is imminent. The second half is an invitation or pleading that people should repent and believe in the Gospel. "Repentance" and "faith" are things for us to contemplate here because these are things man has to do in order that salvation may come.

Repentance and Faith

In the Bible, "repentance" (naham and shub in Hebrews, metanoēō and metameomai in Greek) has three related meanings. First of all, it has a neutral meaning of "changing mind" (Matthews 3:2; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:38; 17:30) with no inclination toward right or wrong but it just indicates the fundamental meaning of so-called "repentance". Second, it is "remorse" or "regret" (Job 42:5-6; Jeremiah 31:18-19; Matthews 21:29, 32, 27:3); it has a hint of right or wrong but it may not have to do with being morally wrong or correct. Third, it is "turning away from sins" (Chronicles 7:14, Isaiah 59:20; Ezekiel 18:30-32); it has an obvious association with morality. From these meanings, "repentance" is to "turn to the opposite direction" away from the original sinful direction.

When found in the Old Testament faith is mostly used as a verb whose Hebrews root is

amen. "Amen" basically means firm, reliable and it is like gluing onto a person or a thing to trust and depend on that object.

In the New Testament, faith is used both as a noun and as a verb. Generally it means to consider that a statement or a matter is real and true. If prepositions, en or eis, are used it then means "trust and rely on".

Generally speaking, faith when used as a verb it can have two types of objects; one is a saying, an idea or a matter where it means agreeing that the object is real and true. The second type of object is a person which then means trusting (him), relying on (him) or deeming (him) reliable. Based on this, "have faith in Jesus" is using the second type of object and therefore it means not only to agree that Jesus and stories about him are all real and true, but also to trust Jesus, and to consider him reliable.

"Faith" is to turn to and depend on the object while "repent" is to turn away from the original direction. Therefore Faith and Repentance are two sides of a coin, indivisible. "Repentance" is to turn away from the direction that leads to sin and to the world, and that is counting on one's own capabilities. To have faith in Jesus is to turn to and rely on Jesus Christ. Without "turning away" there is no "turning to". Therefore, "have faith in Jesus" is not merely about agreeing with things that are about Jesus, or merely about adding a belief into one's life, rather, it's about forsaking what one used to count on and accepting a new object to trust and rely on.

Faith and Deeds

Some considers what Paul thought about salvation differs from what James did;

some even consider the two contradict each other, with James' thinking being closer to what Jesus had meant.

Paul held a very strong "righteousness by faith" theological perspective on salvation, especially seen in his thorough explanation in the Books of Romans. "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." (Roman 3:25-28). Later he also said "Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." (Roman 4:4-5). Paul's argument is based on the reasoning that if salvation is out of God's grace then it cannot be earned by works; grace is free but works are done in order to earn and gain; the two are incompatible.

The Book of James offers a seemingly opposite conviction, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (James 2:17). What's interesting is that Paul cited Abraham's example to illustrate "righteousness by faith" (Roman 4:3), while James also cited Abraham's example, but to draw an opposite conclusion, "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" (James 2:21). Based on that, James concluded "You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone." (James 2:24).

In fact, Paul's perspective on salvation doesn't really contradict that of James. Paul

was not against good deeds, as in the beginning of Romans Chapter 6 he pointed out not being a slave to sin (i.e. having good deed) is a natural outcome after becoming righteous by faith; that is to say, true faith surely will produce good deeds. To Paul, "faith" logically should contain deeds; therefore being saved is totally just by faith, having nothing to do with good deeds, but faith is a belief that requires actions and deeds. This coincides with James' perspective. Hereby, Paul's point of view doesn't contradict that of James. What James said "righteousness by deeds" is because deeds manifest the faith which is the faith in the "righteousness by faith".

In the mid 20 century, within Evangelical denomination, there was a so-called "Lordship Salvation" dispute. It peaked in the eighties and produced some related books and articles which have positive impact on churches.

"Lordship Salvation" believes the faith that saves requires one's surrendering life's sovereignty to Christ; believers not only accept Christ as savior, but also accept Him as the Lord in their lives. People who advocate "Lordship Salvation" believe that evangelical denomination overly emphasizes "righteousness merely by faith" which leads to so-called "easy-believe-ism" which makes many church people believe they are Christians simply because they agree with some salvation related Christian doctrines, while in reality they never have their lives saved.

"Lordship Salvation" has its Biblical foundation which mainly is in the Book of James, as the aforementioned "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." Additionally, there are passages that put "faith" next to "obedience" (Matthews 11:28-30; Romans 1:5; 6:17; 16:26) that

indicate obedience and faith are inseparable. Similarly, Paul said, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Roman 10:9).

People who oppose “Lordship Salvation” consider it a dangerous argument which may easily lead to legalism and salvation by deeds. They point out that the Book of James as well as other passages that connect faith with obedience primarily state that good deeds are performed out of faith, not a qualifying requirement. Roman 10:9 says the requirement of salvation is acknowledging the fact that Christ is the Lord, but is not about surrendering one’s sovereignty to Him. A question they ask is, “Who can truly and entirely surrender their sovereignty? If a total surrender is not required, then, exactly how much of it has to be surrendered in order to be saved?” This question surely is challenging and difficult to come up with an answer from people who advocate “Lordship Salvation”.

Many people who advocate “Lordship Salvation” but are not rigid in theology may be prone to using some daily-life behaviors as a standard to measure whether one’s faith is good enough to save his life; this may easily lead to a dangerous thinking that good deeds are required for salvation. Therefore, from certain aspect, “Lordship Salvation” reminds us the importance of transferring sovereignty so that we don’t fall into the trap of “easy-believe-ism”.

The crucial point is that faith and repentance is two sides of a coin; with that in mind we shall not fall into “easy-believe-ism”. The faith that saves contains the element of

giving up one’s original life direction as emphasized by “Lordship Salvation”. However, a right “Lordship Salvation” has to avoid two issues. First, it should not use behaviors as the measuring standard. Second, since so-called “surrender of sovereignty” is not an outcome of a deed, nor can it be measured or its threshold quantified, we must be cautious when defining a concept like that. Using repentance to define the sovereignty may be the best analysis we can come up with; “Repentance” is to change the direction, therefore, itself is not a deed but a direction. Although repentance indeed will produce deeds, it is about the direction; it cannot use a fixed set of behaviors as its standard; rather it uses mentality as the standard. In fact, faith is also a mentality, a mentality of reliance. Therefore, these two (faith and deeds) complement each other.

(2) Contents of Faith

“Believe in Jesus” is a mentality and an orientation, and a reliance on Christ. However, Jesus also requires that man “believe the gospel” where gospel has its contents. When we spread the gospel, the main purpose is not to have someone agree with us on a belief system but to believe and rely on a specific target. However, gospel has its contents and it’s very important to spread the correct contents of gospel.

Paul wrote, “By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.” (1 Corinthians 15:2). Paul went on expounding on the contents of the gospel: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he

appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Here Paul listed two matters regarding Christ that are according to the Bible. First, Christ died for our sins. Second, Christ was raised from the dead on the third day. Right after “died for our sins” it added “buried”; burial is to prove that he indeed had died; following “resurrected on the third day” he added that Christ appeared to many people including Paul himself; all this proves that he indeed was resurrected. Looking from all this, we can see two important things in the Gospel: Christ died for our sins and Christ was resurrected. These two truths are clearly proven, not just some empty theories.

From the above two matters, we can conclude that the life-saving gospel of salvation includes: a. we are sinners. b. Christ died for our sins. c. Christ was resurrected. Within Evangelical denomination, when preaching gospel, often more attention is given to man’s sin and Christ’s death. This is understandable because death is the consequence of sin. Nevertheless, we shouldn’t overlook the importance of Christ’s resurrection. As a matter of fact, in early church, apostles, when preaching, all said “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.” (Acts 3:15). Apostles looked upon themselves as witnesses to Christ’s resurrection.

Christ’s death is to solve sin’s consequence while Christ’s resurrection is to

give man a new life. This will be further expounded as follows.

2. Consequences of Salvation

The first half of “Believe in Jesus; have eternal life” has been explained while the second half needs more discussion. “Have eternal life” is not the sole consequence of believing in Jesus; at least there are also “declared righteous” and “becoming children of God”. In the section for our next Verse, we will discuss the concept of eternal life.

(1) Declared Righteous

“Declared righteous” has its origin from *dikaioo* which is a terminology used in law-enforcement court which is equivalent to nowadays “declared innocent”. In Greek, verbs that end with *azō* usually means “make it so”; for example, *hagiazō* means make it sacred. Verbs ended with *oō* usually means “declared as” or “deemed as”; for example, *axioō* means “considered worthy”. Therefore *dikaioō* means “credited as righteous” instead of “made righteous”. In another word, “declared righteous” is a change of one’s situation, not a change of one’s nature itself.

Paul has in-depth teachings regarding “declared righteous” in the Book of Romans.

First of all, declared righteous is apart from the law: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” (Romans 3:20-21). This indicates that man is not declared righteous by his own deeds.

Second, to be called righteous is to manifest God's righteousness: "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:25-26). The righteousness in the "declared righteous" is that of God, not of man, and is given to whoever believes in Christ.

Third, "declared righteous" is to declare sinners righteous: "However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:5). Only sinners need to be declared righteous. People who are declared righteous are not righteous by their own nature; rather they are credited as righteous by God.

Fourth, "declared righteous" is contrary to "convicted": "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?" (Romans 8:33-34). Righteousness is the opposite of sin; sinners were to be condemned, but now are declared righteous. Declaring righteous changes a man's situation from being condemned to being innocent.

(2) Becoming Children of God

People who are saved become children of God; this is called "adoption" in theology: one was not born as a child but now is given a child's status.

From certain aspect, all mankind are God's children because He is the creator. "Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God

create us?" (Malachi 2:10). In the Book of James He is called "the Father of the heavenly lights" (James 1:17). However, there is a profound difference in the significance of believers' being children of God and created beings' being children of God.

"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). It is a right given by God to all believers to become children of God. "Right" is a status and a position; becoming children of God is a change in the identification and the status that qualifies us to receive all benefits of being children of God. Paul in Ephesians 1:3 wrote: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." "Every" means "all"; no benefits have been held back and not given to us. In Romans 8:32 it also says "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?". All these benefits include at least four aspects.

First, our sins have been forgiven. Psalmist depicts that God treats us like a father treats his children "he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;" (Psalm 103:10-13). Paul wrote, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Our sins are forgiven not only at the moment when we are saved, but also from then on, ceaselessly, for we have

peace with God. (Roman 5:1). In the original text “have peace” is in present tense which stands for a constant situation.

Second, a father looks after his children. In Jesus’ famous speech on “the flowers of the field and birds of the air” (Matthews 6:25-34), he specifically addressed God “Heavenly Father”; if Heavenly Father even cares for wild flowers and little birds, wouldn’t He care even more for His children? Hence, we ought to be concerned with heavenly matters, not with what to eat or what to wear.

Third, there is freedom for children of God. In Romans Chapter 8 it explains in details the importance of the Holy Spirit in believers’ daily lives. Among them one key point is to witness that being children of God we no longer have fearful hearts. “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:14-16). Therefore, we, who have received the Holy Spirit, have hearts of children and can intimately call God “Abba, Father”. Slaves are in bondage and fearful but children are free and fearless.

Fourth, children of God are subject to God’s discipline. The author of the Book of Hebrews points out that no disciplines seem pleasant at the time, but they are good for us. (Hebrews 12:5-11). Being disciplined is a right which only children can have. “If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.” (Hebrews 12:8). Here it demonstrates that fathers discipline out of love. Moreover, because God, unlike earthly

fathers who discipline “as they thought best”, is perfect and holy who “disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.” (Hebrews 12:10). For this reason, when we face discipline, we should not fear, nor get discouraged, but resolutely seek God’s holiness.

Becoming children of God is a change in the status, also a change in the life. Because of this, God’s “adoption” is not like that of humankind. Human’s adoption can only change one’s status; only God’s adoption can actually give lives to His children and this is so-called “eternal life” in the Bible.

(3) Rebirth and the Eternal Life

Jesus told Nicodemus “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3) Rebirth is an essential qualification for entering God’s kingdom; people not born again cannot enter God’s kingdom. Nicodemus thought Jesus was talking about rebirth in flesh that is to be born out of a mother’s womb once more. But Jesus says rebirth is from the Holy Spirit and thus it is a spiritual rebirth, and a rebirth of one’s inner life.

As “declared righteous” is a change in one’s situation so is born-again a change in one’s nature. Rebirth happens when one is saved; rebirth is the reconstruction of sinner’s life and is a work done by God, the creator of the heaven and the earth, onto man. Paul discussed that salvation is entirely due to God, not us; he then pointed out “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10). “God’s handiwork” originally means “God’s handcraft”, shaped by his masterly skill.

Old Testament's Promises on Born-Again

Promises about life's reconstruction have been mentioned as early as in the Old Testament. Prophet Ezekiel prophesied what are to happen when God saves His people: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ezekiel 36:25-27). In this passage it mentions that God will cleanse us with water; it also mentions God will put the Holy Spirit in man. This may be the reason why Jesus told Nicodemus "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Man will receive a new spirit which is the new inner life. What this prophecy has described is the exact concept of born-again.

Another prophecy in the Old Testament can be found in the Book of Jeremiah which is called "prophecy on the new covenant" and which in a similar way discusses God's turning from judgment to salvation: " 'This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,' declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.' " (Jeremiah 31:33-34). The new covenant that God has made is to write his law in man's heart. This passage, similar to the aforementioned passage in Ezekiel, is about the

reconstruction of man's inner life. Although here there is no mentioning of the Holy Spirit, the law is no longer written on stone tablets but is written in man's heart; this is very similar to what Paul has explained in the Book of Romans: "But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." (Romans 7:6)

New Testament's Depictions of Rebirth

There are many discussions in the New Testament on rebirth, from various aspects and angles. Paul said anyone who is in Christ is a new creation "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). "New creation" explicitly means "newly created"; this echoes with "His handiwork" in the aforementioned passage of Ephesians 2:10; it is about the sinner's life being reconstructed.

In the Book of Titus, Paul linked together God's salvation, the work by the Holy Spirit and the rebirth: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:4-5). "The washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" is similar to what Jesus has said, "born of water and the Spirit"; rebirth is a work by the Holy Spirit to renew and cleanse life and this process happens when one is saved by God.

Rebirth is a work done by the Holy Spirit, made possible by God's truth and Christ's resurrection. God: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (James 1:18);

believers: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Peter 1:23). Rebirth is a work by the Holy Spirit at its own will and is not controllable by man, although God’s truth is conveyed through preaching in order to be heard and accepted by people. Therefore we can say that rebirth is an outcome of the working-together by the Holy Spirit and man.

Besides God’s truth, many passages connect Christ’s resurrection with believers’ rebirth. Peter said, “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4). Paul considered that the new life is the same as the spiritual resurrection and it has to do with Christ’s resurrection, “made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:5-6); also, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20). Our lives are united with that of Christ and his resurrection becomes the foundation of our resurrection.

The ideology of “resurrected with Christ” is explained in the most details in Romans Chapter 6: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too

may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.” (Romans 6:3-8)

Believers first die with Christ and then get resurrected with Christ; death is to terminate the old life, to be free from sin’s slavery; resurrection is to gain the new life. Believers are united with Christ and His death becomes our death, His resurrection our resurrection. This is why Christ’s resurrection is so important; His resurrection not only proves his position, but also has become the foundation of believer’s new life.

This new life is so called “eternal life”. Apostle John said rebirth is from God: “children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13). Man born of God has God’s life in him. Many people think “eternal life” is all about going to heaven after death; but actually eternal life is given at the time of one’s being saved; it’s not something that will come only after death. A life that is reborn is a life that is eternal. “Life” and “eternal life” are the same in John’s books when he wrote “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 John 5:12)

“Eternal life” is not only a life that will never die, but also a life of fullness. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Fullness is being content, having no want (Psalm 23:1). Hence, “eternal

life” has to do with both quantity and quality. The saying “Believe in Jesus to get eternal life” doesn’t mean to get a ticket in order that you

can go to heaven after death; rather it is to get a life of fullness, a life that will never perish and a life that you can never lose. (John 10:28-29).

Verse 8

That every believer is a new creature in Christ, and is called to walk in the Spirit, to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness, and thereby manifest the fruit of the Spirit, conforming himself to the image of Christ; that good works are the fruit of the Christian life, and are not ways of justification.

Verse 9

That God alone is the Lord of our conscience, and that the believers are free from the commands of men which are contrary to, or in addition to, the Scriptures in matters of faith and conduct.

1. Work Done by the Holy Spirit

Pneumatology has been a very popular study in the past 30 years. The third wave of Charismatic Movement forced evangelical churches to take a serious look at teachings that are related to the Holy Spirit. As matters that are related to the Holy Spirit often involve individual’s personal experiences as well as church’s overall direction, discussing topic like this often ends with people getting emotionally upset because of the heated debates, or it ends with member’s departing or minister’s resignation or even church’s division. Here we don’t take a preset stand, but just clarify some concepts based on Bible’s teachings; our purpose is to come up with common vocabulary set and a clearly stated ideology so that we can discuss this subject matter with a calm and

mutually respectful attitude. (Please refer to Volume 3.)

(1) Work done by the Holy Spirit as recorded in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit often is called “God’s spirit” or “Yahweh’s spirit”. When God speaks of the Holy Spirit he will say “my spirit”. There are several places in the Old Testament which talk about Holy Spirit’s doing God’s works such as creations or management (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13). Some works done by the Holy Spirit are the same between the Old Testament and the New Testament; among them revelation is the most distinct one. Examples are: the Holy Spirit entered into prophet Ezekiel and made him stand up and hear God’s voice (Ezekiel 2:2);

Holy Spirit raised him up, into a vision (Ezekiel 8:3, 11:1, 24). Besides, we read Old Testament's accounts about Holy Spirit's doing its work by guiding Israelites while in the desert were given instructions by the Holy Spirit (Nehemiah 9:20). Psalmist pleaded with the Lord, "may your good Spirit lead me on level ground" (Psalm 143:20).

However, in the Old Testament, Holy Spirit's most distinctive work is to bless man with talents. Pharaoh knew Joseph had wisdom in governing Egypt: "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God" (Genesis 41:38). Moses selected 70 elders and the Holy Spirit rested on them, "Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied" (Numbers 11:25). "Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses." (Deuteronomy 34:9)

About the above figures from Moses' Torah, Joseph's nation governing capability, 70 elders' leadership and Joshua's leadership for all the Israelites were all received when the Holy Spirit came upon them. In the Book of Judges, Yahweh's Spirit rested on the judges and they became powerful and defeated enemies. These examples include: Othniel (Judges 3:10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 14:19). Later, when Saul and David were chosen as kings, Yahweh's Spirit also fell on them (1 Samuel 10:10, 16:13).

First Samuel Chapter 16 has record that is especially clear. God rejected Saul as king and told Samuel to go to the house of Jesse to

anoint a new king. David was chosen, "So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David." (1 Samuel 16:13). Right after that it talks about Saul, "Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him." (1 Samuel 16:14). Oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit; in the Old Testament when a man is anointed he receives a title and responsibility and God's Holy Spirit comes upon him. David received king's title and Yahweh's Spirit came upon David; at the same time the Holy Spirit left Saul to indicate the king's status had been transferred from Saul to David. Hence, when David committed adultery, he repented in Psalm 51 with such plea, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). David knew when Saul offended God, God took the Holy Spirit away from him and David didn't want to have a bad ending like that. What David asked was that God gave him an opportunity so he could keep his position and capability as a king.

All the leaders mentioned in the above received leader's position and the Holy Spirit came upon them. However, there is a passage where we can see that not only seemingly "superior" position can have the Holy Spirit: "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills— to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts." (Exodus 31:2-5) Bezalel was chosen by God not to reign like a king, nor to serve as a spiritual leader like a priest, nor to speak about special revelation like a prophet.

All he did was hand-craft which we usually don't consider requires Holy Spirit's power.

From the above biblical facts in the Old Testament, we come to realize that in the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit came upon a person it was to empower him to accomplish tasks which he had been chosen for; this is like the revelation prophet Zechariah received in the famous vision of "the Gold Lampstand": "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty." (Zechariah 4:6).

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit wasn't given to every believer, but just some specifically chosen persons designated for some specific tasks; when Holy Spirit came upon a person it didn't stay with that person forever; when his job or task was finished, the Holy Spirit left.

(2) Work done by the Holy Spirit as recorded in the New Testament

The New Testament has far more discussions on works done by Holy Spirit than the Old Testament. Works done by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament include those done in the Old Testament as aforementioned; additionally they include some important works that are not done in the Old Testament. The greatest difference is that New Testament promises that every believer has the Holy Spirit with him, not just some specifically chosen people for some specific tasks and responsibilities.

Indwelling by the Holy Spirit

Paul in Ephesians 1:13-14 wrote, "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your

salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's". These two verses teach us some very important concepts regarding the Holy Spirit and the believers.

First, faith is the requirement to receive the Holy Spirit; have faith and you will have it; there is no need to go through other routes. Paul, when talking about the contrast between law and faith, asked: "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?" (Galatians 3:2). Certainly Paul was talking about being saved; therefore, we can say that Holy Spirit is directly connected to salvation, and salvation only has one single requirement which is faith. Some may point out that in Acts there are a good number of examples that believers didn't receive the Holy Spirit right after they believed, instead they received the Holy Spirit when apostles placed their hands on them. However, in Acts, especially in the early part of the book when church just started, it was a special period of time when the Holy Spirit was transitioning from its works for the Old Testament to that of the New Testament and thus phenomenon happened during that period of time shouldn't be considered as exemplary for the rest of the history. In the epistles of the New Testaments we can see that people believed in the teaching before they accepted the teachings by the Holy Spirit.

Second, Holy Spirit is promised to us; since it is God's promise, it will not fail and every believer will receive it.

Third, Holy Spirit is our "deposit" guaranteeing our inheritance that is still to

come. “Deposit” is a business terminology to denote an amount paid to the payee by the payer to guarantee the full payment in due time. If Holy Spirit is the deposit for receiving future inheritance, it will never leave the believers, until “the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). Jesus also said it plainly: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.” (John 14:16).

Fourth, the Holy Spirit that is in us, is a “seal mark” on us, indicating that we belong to God just like a cow or a slave has been branded with a mark of his master to indicate that he is owned by his master and protected by his master.

Holy Spirit’s dwelling in us indicates that our bodies are the residence of the Holy Spirit, the temples of the Holy Spirit. Since it is Holy Spirit’s place, we ought to take good care and treasure it, not to sin against our own body. Paul used this to admonish people to stay away from adultery: “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;” (1 Corinthians 6:18-19).

The Out-Pouring of the Holy Spirit

Out-Pouring of the Holy Spirit is one expression that has many different explanations. Many people use “Out-Pouring of the Holy Spirit” to describe a group of people as being collectively filled with the Holy Spirit, while others refer it to a phenomenon of extensive works done by the Holy Spirit. Because the usage of this phrase is not unified, quite often

when discussing things on this subject matter, people will make their arguments using the same phrase to mean different things, or use different phrases to mean the same thing or phenomenon.

Out-Pouring of the Spirit was prophesied in the Old Testament. Isaiah Chapters 28 to 33 are God’s judgment on Judah, with all those proclamations of “Woe”. Amidst all these, God still leaves some hope for his people: “till the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest.” (Isaiah 32:15). Ezekiel Chapters 33 to 39 have prophecies for Israel’s revival, including the famous vision of “Valley of Dry Bones”; that section ends with something that is similar to the aforementioned comforting prophecy in Isaiah “I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the people of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.” (Ezekiel 39:29)

The most noticeable prophecy in the Old Testament that has to do with out-pouring of the Holy Spirit probably is in the Book of Joel, 2:28-29 “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” This passage draws attention mainly because in Acts Chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit came upon them, Peter stood up and told people who were there at the time, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16), and then he quoted Book of Joel 2:28-31.

Among New Testament theologians and Old Testament theologians there are different opinions regarding whether the coming of the

Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. Some consider Peter only "borrowed" Joel's words, some consider it a complete fulfillment, yet some consider it is partially fulfilled since the latter part of the prophecy sounds more like the End Time; still some consider it is to be fulfilled multiple times: once in the Pentecost and then still to be fulfilled in the End Time or some other times. Regardless of the arguments, Joel's prophecy is similar to that of Isaiah and that of Ezekiel in talking about God's turning around his judgment, giving grace to his people and pouring out of His Spirit.

In the New Testament, besides Acts Chapter 2, there is only one place where out-pouring of the Holy Spirit is mentioned: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4-7). Paul said that it was the time when God's kindness and love "appeared", which sounded like referring to a historical incident.

Hereby we can give a simple conclusion for "out-pouring of the Holy Spirit"; "out-pouring of the Holy Spirit" is a major historical event which was prophesized by the Old Testament prophets; it is to turn around God's judgment and it is to help apostles come to realize that it is time for God's salvation to manifest itself.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

"Baptism with the Holy Spirit" is another phrase for which different people have different definitions. The traditional Pentecostals believe that baptism with the Holy Spirit happens after a person is saved and it is the turning point that breaks through that person's spiritual life; it is also called "the second blessing". This perspective mainly refers to Acts 1:5 where Jesus promised that "in a few days" things were going to happen on the disciples; clearly that promise referred to what is recorded in Acts Chapter 2, the Pentecost experience. Furthermore, during that period of the Pentecost, apostles all spoke in foreign tongues; therefore baptism with the Holy Spirit, they thought, would surely bring about the phenomenon of speaking in tongues.

However, we have already pointed out that the beginning part of the Acts records the earliest church days when the Holy Spirit was transitioning from his works from the Old Testament to the New Testament and therefore should not be used as examples for our present time. "out-pouring of the Holy Spirit" is a prophesy in the Old Testament, but "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" on the other hand was never mentioned in the Old Testament; all this leads us to believe that baptism with the Holy Spirit is entirely Holy Spirit's work in the New Testament, following the Holy Spirit's descending on that Pentecost.

The aforementioned passage in the Book of Titus mentioned "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). It is obvious that "rebirth", "washing", "the Holy Spirit" and "renewal" are all mutually related and they match our interpretation of rebirth. "Rebirth" is a "renewal" of one's life which is a work by "the Holy Spirit" to wash

clean one's sins ("water"); all this happens when one is saved through faith.

Paul in First Corinthians Chapter 12 talked about Christ's body; he mentioned that we are all baptized by one Spirit: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:13). The "one body" is Christ's body which is the church. It may be more accurate if we were to replace "to form one body" with "to enter into one body". The baptism with the Holy Spirit unites man with Christ, making him part of Christ's body.

From the above passages, except for the early church times, the baptism by the Holy Spirit occurred at the time when man was saved by believing in Jesus; records from all aspects lead us to believe that baptism with the Holy Spirit is the beginning of the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in us; it is an experience shared by all believers although they may not always "feel" it, nor will there always be some outward phenomenon.

Filled with the Holy Spirit

Among issues related to the Holy Spirit, "Filled with the Holy Spirit" is also extremely debatable. To begin with, it doesn't have an all-agreed-upon definition; neither does Bible offer an explicit one. One thing we should pay attention to is that the third person in the Trinity of God is the Holy Spirit who is a person of his own thinking, feeling and will. In many discussions or disputes about works done by the Holy Spirit, we often unknowingly tend to see the Holy Spirit as a force, and a source of energy rather than a person. Since it is a person,

it must be whole so that every believer will have the same Holy Spirit; no one has more of it or less of it. Following this, "filled with the Holy Spirit" doesn't mean the Holy Spirit has come so much of it that it fills a person. "Filled with" is not about the quantity of the Holy Spirit; rather it refers to one's relationship with the Holy Spirit; it is about how much a person has surrendered of himself to the Holy Spirit for His control.

Although there are many passages about being filled with the Holy Spirit, there is only one that is an imperative: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit," (Ephesians 5:18). In the phrase "Instead, be filled with the Spirit", there are two things that require our attention. First, it is a passive sentence: be filled with the Holy Spirit; filling is not to be initiated by ourselves; rather it is done to us by the Holy Spirit. It is also an imperative, a command; if it is a command, there is something we will have to do to enable us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Second, the present tense of the verb expresses ceaselessness, constancy and normalcy. We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not once or occasionally, but constantly. In another word, Christian's being filled with the Holy Spirit should be a normal condition; a rightful Christian's life should be one that is always filled with the Holy Spirit, instead of being filled only in some special gathering.

Among discussions on being filled with the Holy Spirit, the most disputed issue is the qualification to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the outward performance when being filled with the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately Bible doesn't give use direct answers to these two questions. What is the qualification to be filled

with the Holy Spirit? Since “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to surrender to the Holy Spirit, naturally the qualification for being filled with the Holy Spirit is to surrender oneself which is to obey the Holy Spirit. Paul, in Galatians Chapter 5 did a contrast between flesh and the Holy Spirit: “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.” (Galatians 5:16-17). We have to choose between desire of the Holy Spirit and desire of the flesh.

In Romans Chapter 8 there is a similar teaching: “Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” (Romans 8:5-7). Likewise, we should have our minds set on things that matter to the Holy Spirit instead of things that matter to the flesh; this is what people, who live in accordance with the Holy Spirit, do.

In the above Ephesians passage, before the imperative “be filled with the Spirit”, there are commands “Be very careful”, “making the most of every opportunity” and “understand what the Lord’s will is”. These commands are all in line with obeying the Holy Spirit and setting one’s mind on what the Holy Spirit desires; in general they can be considered as qualifications to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Compared with the qualification, the outward display of being filled with the Holy Spirit gets even more disputes. Although Bible

doesn’t have direct explanation as to how it ought to look like when one is filled with the Holy Spirit, there are numerous individual cases. Some, when filled with the Holy Spirit, started to say what God wanted them to say (Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 4:8, 31; 13:9); when Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, he was led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tested (Luke 4:1); when the day of Pentecost came, the Holy Spirit came down and the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to talk in foreign tongues (Acts 2:4); Steven when stoned to death was filled with the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God (Acts 7:55). These individual cases do not seem to have any uniformity which indicates there is no fixed format for the outward manifestation when one is filled with the Holy Spirit.

In Ephesians 5:18 it says “Do not get drunk on wine” before “be filled with the Spirit”. Does it suggest being filled with the Holy Spirit looks somewhat like drunken? Based on this, some believe that people when being filled with the Holy Spirit will act out strange behaviors like a drunkard unable to control himself. However, in this passage getting drunk is to contrast with being filled with the Holy Spirit; they were not cited as analogies; wine can make people self-indulgent but the Holy Spirit does not. The only commonality may be that the drunken person is entirely controlled by the alcohol to the extent like a person, who is filled with the Holy Spirit, is entirely controlled by the Holy Spirit. Following the imperative “be filled with the Spirit”, is “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:19-20). One reasonable explanation is that all these conducts, if they are not the inevitable

performances after one being filled with Holy Spirit, at least they are compatible with being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Besides praising and thanksgiving, there is one more reasonable conjecture: people who are filled with the Holy Spirit ought to bear fruit of the Spirit. When contrasting the Holy Spirit with the flesh, Paul made a list of some obvious “desires of the flesh” which is then followed by the fruit of the Spirit “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22-23). A person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is entirely under the control of the Holy Spirit and he ought to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

2. Believer’s Life

Salvation can be looked at from three stages: called righteous, sanctification and glory. Called righteous is the first step which has been discussed in details in the above. Being glorified happens in the very end and is a state in the eternity; this will be expounded in the last Verse. Sanctification is a process following conversion; it can also be called as the growing life of a believer.

(1) Accepting the Truth and Wearing the New Self

It has been mentioned that rebirth is given to us by the Holy Spirit through the word of truth (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23). It is evident that Christ’s truth is crucial to Christian’s life from the very beginning. Paul reminded Ephesians believers that they were people that already accepted the truth and so were entirely different from before when they didn’t know

the truth. About those gentiles who didn’t know the truth: “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.” (Ephesians 4:18-19).

Following that, Paul used some synonyms to depict their conditions, “the way of life you learned”, “you heard about Christ”, “were taught in him” and “the truth that is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:20-21). “... to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:21-24). He used “putting on the new self” as an analogy because the new self is to be worn on the outside like a behavior that people can see; but before putting it on, one has to “be made new in the attitude of your minds” where “attitude of your minds” is an inward thing.

People who have accepted the truth should have a brand new way of living and should differ from those who don’t have Christ’s truth; this change starts from the inner mind.

(2) Die to Sins and Live to God

In the New Testament, Romans Chapters 6 to 8 unarguably has the most detailed discussions on life after one being called righteous. There are many details in it but here we only explain some crucial points. In the above, we already mentioned that we died

with Christ, that is to say we died to sins. Dying to sins is not to let sins lord over us, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.” (Romans 6:6-7).

We also live with Christ, and live to God so that we have “a new life” (Romans 6:4). The very first imperative tense in the Book of Romans is in Chapter 6:11: “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” “Count” is the command there; we already died with Christ to sins, and live with Christ to God, therefore we should take this as our new identity which is no longer slave under sins. This is a turn-around of one’s mentality; we Christians have to reevaluate our nature and live out our lives according to the facts that have been accomplished on us. This agrees with the aforementioned teaching of “to be made new in the attitude of your minds” in the Book of Ephesians; it also echoes what is said in the latter part of the Book of Romans, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.” (Romans 6:12-13)

(3) Grace and Law

After bidding believers not to let sin reign, Paul said something that upon first glance seems coming out of nowhere, “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not

under the law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:14) Why “not under the law, but under grace” is the reason that we are no longer slaves? Doesn’t law regulate people not to sin? Doesn’t grace lead people to relax more and sin more?

Paul already answered these questions in Chapter 7. He pointed out: “For when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death.” (Romans 7:5). Later he also said “the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death.... it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.” (Romans 7: 10, 13). Law was well intended to make people aware of sins, but it is also a tool of sin, making people sin because of the law.

In the last section of Chapter 7, Paul’s famous “the passage of struggle” explains how a man under law struggles: “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:18) Theologians have very diverse perspectives about this passage as to whether Paul was talking about his experience prior to coming to know Christ, or after. Some believe it is about his experience before he came to know Christ and so this struggle got resolved at the time he believed in Jesus. Some believe he was talking about his experience after he already knew Christ; therefore it is normal for Christians to have struggle like this. But then, why did Paul have his victorious proclamation in 7:25, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”? Was he discussing his experience as a Pharisee, prior to his believing in Christ? (Acts 23:6)

No matter how it is explained, Paul wanted to point out the issues due to “righteousness by law” and explain how sin

uses law to make people sin; the purpose is to advise Christians to no longer live under the law because we have been set free from the law and are now under grace. Therefore, “For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” (Romans 6:14) People who live under the law will have to face the issue of “For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out”. Only people who live under grace can serve the Lord: “serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code.” (Roman 7:6)

Therefore Christians have to stay away from legalism in order to live out the new life. Legalism has two aspects: “Meritism” and “Dogmatism”. Meritism is to earn benefits from God by one’s good deeds; this mentality is against grace. Dogmatism is to use following of regulations as the standard for one’s behaviors; this is against the life that is to live in the Holy Spirit. Christians can easily fall into legalism; we have to be careful.

(4) The Flesh and The Holy Spirit

In the above, we already mentioned the contrast between living according to the flesh and living according to the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:4-5). “Flesh” (Greek sarx) is an important concept in Paul’s theology. The main usage of flesh in Paul’s epistles doesn’t refer to “body”, rather it is an abstract concept and has meanings on several aspects.

First of all, “flesh” refers to “the outside being” which is in contrast with the inner heart or the inner life. For example, “inward Jews” are circumcised of the heart while “outward Jews” are circumcised physically. (Romans 2:28-29). Here, “flesh” contrasts with “heart”. Other

passages contrast flesh with “soul” (1 Corinthians 5:5). Another passage is in Second Corinthians 5:16 which says that they no longer regard Christ from a worldly point of view; Chinese NIV translates “flesh” into “outer appearance” to denote that flesh is the outward being.

Besides, flesh especially refers to “the weak”. Flesh is where the illness and the pain come from (2 Corinthians 12:7, Galatians 4:13-14); flesh is mortal (2 Corinthians 4:11), and is made a contrast with God’s power and might: “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Here in NIV “world” actually refers to flesh and body.

However, in Paul’s theology, the most noticeable usage of “flesh” is not the ordinary weakness but the moral weakness. As to explanation on this aspect, most theologians agree that flesh and sin are not the same thing but they cannot agree on what flesh exactly is. Some believe “flesh” is the sinful nature. English NIV translated it into “sinful nature”. In the above “the passage of struggle”, it says “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Roman 7:18). If flesh is the sinful nature, it surely has no goodness in it.

Following that, Paul reiterated “So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.” (Roman 8:21) This “law” is like a description of the sinful nature. In fact, the whole “passage of struggle” seems to describe how the sinful nature operates. Flesh is not the sinful nature itself, but is the thing that submits to the sinful nature: “So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.”

(Romans 7:25). Here, “submit” is equivalent to “become a slave to”. In other words, flesh becomes a slave to the sinful nature.

As we read further down the passage, there is a clearer explanation, “For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3). There are two things that are note-worthy. First of all, the law cannot solve sin’s problems due to the infirmity of the flesh. Second, God’s way of solving sin’s issue is through Christ’s incarnation and “he condemned sin in the flesh”. We can see that God’s way was not to have Christ take up human’s sinful nature and condemn the sin in the sinful nature; rather, Christ was to take up human nature and solve sin’s problem in the human nature. The law cannot make people do good deeds for human nature is infirm and enslaved to the sinful nature. Further down the passage, starting from Verse 5, Paul drew a striking contrast between those who “live according to the flesh” and those who “live in accordance with the Spirit”.

Based on all this we may offer an explanation like this: “flesh” when deemed as being morally weak, refers to the infirmity of the humanity which has been polluted or attached by the sinful nature and which makes us prone to sin; or we may say “flesh” is part of the human nature that connects us to the fallen world. This is similar to the above discussion on the infirmity that is not the immorality itself; both are related to man’s being a created being; the infirmity is a contrast to God’s (Holy Spirit’s) power. Flesh, to Paul, is not a contrast to man’s soul but to the Holy Spirit; flesh’s infirmity and flesh’s connection to the fallen world can only be surpassed by our relationship with the Holy

Spirit. The old self is flesh because it is connected with the fallen world and is in the realm of this world; a Christian, being a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), has his nature connected with God’s Spirit and is now in the realm of the Holy Spirit.

(5) Union with Christ

Believer’s life being united with Christ is an important concept in the New Testament. Historically there have been various explanations on “union with Christ”. There is Radical “Mysticism” who believes that believers and Christ are united in nature; this thinking is prone to the danger of Pantheism.

Mild Mysticism believes believer’s inner life is united with Christ. They didn’t offer a clear explanation; so-called “union of life” may be explained in different ways but Mysticism often explains it as a believer’s total losing of himself, letting Christ live for him. Their most quoted passage is Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This passage on the surface seems to support the point of view “losing oneself” but the second part of the passage says “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God”. It clearly states that “I” is the one who lives. Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Matthews 16:24) Denying oneself is not the same as making oneself totally vanish.

The opposite of Mysticism is **Psychological Union** a theory which believes the union with Christ is external like a relationship between friends, or couples or teacher and

student; believers and Christ share common interests, common goals and understand each other; it is an intimate relationship. Neither this theory nor Mysticism can thoroughly explain the concept of union with Christ according to the Bible.

There are two aspects to look at when examining the union with Christ: one from the side of the believer who is in Christ, the other from Christ who is in the believer. "In Christ" is one of the most encountered phrases in the New Testament. The Book of Ephesians has many usages of this kind of expression: "with every spiritual blessing in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3), "he chose us in him" (Ephesians 1:4), "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:6-8). Other passages also have similar teaching, "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17), "in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). In general, theology explains "in Christ" to be "in the realm of Christ" or "relying on Christ".

The other aspect is that Christ is in the believers. In Colossians 1:27 Paul wrote, "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." "Christ in us" is the hope of glory, which works in the similar way as the Holy Spirit's dwelling in us. The above cited passage in Galatians 2:20 says, "Christ lives in me". All these teachings most likely refer to believers' having to live out the likeness of Christ.

When talking about "union with Christ", the most important thing is about sentences

that have "with Christ" in it: "we share in his sufferings" (Romans 8:17); "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20); "died with Christ" (Colossians 2:20); "buried with him" (Romans 6:4); "made us alive with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5, Colossians 3:1); "seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6); "co-heirs with Christ... share in his glory" (Romans 8:17). "With Christ" means that we stand at Christ's place and position and identify with Him; how He is, so will we be; this is about union in the status.

Among Jesus' teachings, the analogy of vine and branches can explain the truth of "union with Christ": "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5). Mutual "abiding in" like this is the connection between the two and the result is to "bear much fruit" which is an outcome a believer ought to give. This passage connects several related ideologies including the effect of a prayer (John 15:7), keeping His commands (John 15:10) and that His joy and our joy may be complete (John 15:11); above all is the loving relationship (John 15:12-13, 17).

Generally speaking when we unite with Christ, position-wise we are judged jointly with Him and his righteousness becomes ours; life-wise, Christ's life enters into our inner being; spirit-wise it is a life revival and interchange which is a work done by the Holy Spirit and it is a mystery, but it doesn't eliminate existence of either side's individuality or subjectivity.

Verse 10

That the church, consisting of all true believers, being Christ's own and indwelled by the Holy Spirit, is the Body of Christ, the invisible church; that the church is holy, universal and one in Christ; that the invisible church manifests itself in the visible church, the local congregations consisting of all who profess to believe in Christ and are baptized; that as the people of God and a kingdom of priests, the church is called to grow unto the stature of the fullness of Christ and to fulfill her missionary work through the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in worship, sacraments, fellowship, discipline, and services.

Verse 11

In the priesthood of all believers, and the parity of the ministers and the laity.

1. The Nature of the Church

“Church” means different things to different people. To some, church is a religious organization. Sometimes when people talk about “church” actually they are referring to the denomination, or the leaders who govern the church. For example, when people say “This is a decision by the church”, more likely they refer to a decision made by the decision maker in the church. Often in Christian community, “church” refers to the building where gathering is held, that is the “church building”. In fact, many people use “church” and “church building” interchangeably. Therefore when people say, “We go to church” they mean they go to the place where the church is located.

(1) The Definition of “Church”

In the New Testament the Greek word that has been translated into “church” is *ekklēsia* which is a combination of *ek* and *klēsis*. *Ek* means coming out and *klēsis* whose verb is

kaleō means “calling” or “calling for”.

Therefore *ekklēsia* means “a group of people who have been called out”. Some scholars believe when used outside the Bible, *klēsis* is calling out the witness, but in the New Testament its main usage is for God’s calling of man for the salvation.

ekklēsia appears 115 times in the New Testament and it is used for non-religious crowd only three times which are all in the Book of Acts (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Besides, it is used twice to mean the entire Israelite congregation (Acts 7:38, Hebrews 2:12). In the remaining places it all refers to church; the majority of the usage means Christians who gathered locally (i.e. the local church); sometimes it refers to all who believe in Christ (i.e. the universal church).

Universal Church

“Universal Church” is a spiritual entity of all the believers who gather in all “local

churches”; it is a general term to address all the people from ancient to nowadays, here or abroad, who believe in Christ. “Universal Church” is not only geologically universal but timelessly universal.

In Paul’s epistles it has been mentioned in many places that “church” (referring to Universal Church) is a “mystery”; it’s called mystery not because it is hard to understand but because it has never been revealed before in the Old Testament. One of the important mysteries is that Jews and gentiles are united into one, “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 3:6). The theme, that Jews together with Gentiles are called heirs of God, is an important one in Paul’s theology. Another “mystery” is that Christ lives inside every believer, “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27) Additionally there is a mystery of church’s being Christ’s bride; when Paul in Ephesians 5:22-33 discussed the relationship between husband and wife, he used the relationship between Christ and church as an example, “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:32). Lastly when Paul talked about resurrection, he told Corinthian church a “mystery”: “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). This mystery is what he talked about in First Thessalonians 4:13-18: the Rapture.

Local Church

“Local Church” refers to a group of Christians who are mutually committed to bringing out believers’ functions that are required according to Bible’s teachings, under the leadership and spiritual authority that are commanded in the Bible.

Not any group of Christians who gather together can be called a “church”; they have to have leadership and spiritual authority that are in accordance with principles set in the Bible. In the following discussion on jobs and duties in a church we will explain in more details about leadership and authority. In addition to leadership and authority, this group of Christians must share one and the same spirit of mutual commitment in order to work out functions that are required of the church.

Looking from one angle, local church is part of the universal church. Yet, looking from another angle, local church is the tangible representation of the Universal Church down on the earth; it is a miniature of the Universal Church. Universal Church is an abstract existence while Local Church is a physical entity; for this reason, Universal Church is sometimes called “Invisible Church” and Local Church “Visible Church”.

(2) The Identity of Church

Bible uses many different words, even pictures, to describe the identity of the church. In the Bible, teachings that have to do with nature of the church identity are mainly for Universal Church. However, since Local Church is to represent Universal Church in a tangible way, these teachings also apply to Local Church.

Here we will discuss church identity in six different ways, using six different expressions.

People of God

First Peter Chapter 2 has a very important teaching about church's identity, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) We are "People of God", a group of people who belong to God. As we belong to God, naturally the supreme authority of the church belongs to God. Take note how Peter addresses God, "who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"; he reminded us the reason that church is People of God is that God called us out of darkness so that we may enter into his wonderful light.

There is a purpose for People of God in this world that is to proclaim God's goodness; church has to reflect the nature of God's goodness. If church cannot attain this goal, it is not worthy of being called "People of God". The most fundamental nature of God is his holiness; therefore Peter said so in the preceding Chapter 1, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). Therefore in the Bible Christians are called "Saints". Saints do not refer to a group of extraordinarily holy people as we see Paul addressed that troublesome Corinthian church as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Every Christian is a saint. "Holy" is to be set part the way God calls upon church to be separated out of the darkness and become children of light.

Body of Christ

"Body of Christ" originally was used as an analogy but has gradually become a way to directly address the church. Ephesians 1:22-23 talks about Christ's supremacy, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

As Christ is the head of the church, He has the supreme authority of the church, "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." (Colossians 1:18). Church should obey Christ in everything (Ephesians 5:23); if church doesn't exalt Christ then it doesn't let Him be the head.

The most detailed discussion on "Body of Christ" can be found in First Corinthians Chapter 12. The focus of that passage is on the relationship among church members; it calls each believer in the church "body part". Therefore we now call fellowship among believers "body life". If church is a body then believers are "body parts".

There are at least three important points to notice for this analogy of Body.

First of all, church must demonstrate a spirit of unity; body parts cannot form a healthy body if not all the individual parts can be united. Paul wrote, "we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:15-16). The whole body is joined properly through Christ; church's

unity is for Christ's sake, not for the commonalities of the group of people. Only in unity can there be healthy growth which is growth in love.

Second, church as a body must have people of various functions. Paul asked, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be." (1 Corinthians 12:17-18). "Birds of the same feather flock together" is our natural tendency which makes us easily become a church of homogeneity while the biblical principle requires diversity so that various functions can be brought out. The analogy using body also teaches us not to look down upon any kind of people just because they are not like us; instead we ought to accept one another.

Third, this is related to the above that believers are body parts to one another and have to depend on one another. "The parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." (1 Corinthians 12:23-25). It is the concept of "complementing one another" that we will make up for other people's shortcomings so that everyone's lacking can be covered.

Temple of God

In First Peter Chapter 2, church is called "Temple of God" as an analogy: "the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' " (1 Peter 2:4-6). Church is the Temple of God; every believer is a stone that builds up the Temple and these stones are not dead, rather they are "living stones". We have to pay special attention that here in the New Testament, God's Temple is not a physical building, but a group of people; it is not the church building but the church people. Temple is where God dwells (2 Corinthians 6:6); in New Testament's ideology, God doesn't dwell in a building structure, rather He dwells in people.

Since this Temple is built with living stones, it has life and can grow and is to gradually grow into what it should be like (Ephesians 2:21). Believers are living stones just as Christ is the living stone; in between believers and between believers and Christ there should be lively relationship. Christ is the corner stone of this Temple; corner stone is the most important stone of a building structure for all other stones are to align with it; it is the key element for all the unity, harmony and orderliness. This has similar meaning as the aforementioned analogy of Body: "From him the whole body, joined and held together". Because of this, church should center on Christ.

Paul in Ephesians Chapter 2 also mentioned the foundation of this Temple, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20). Apostles and

prophets are church's foundation and this has two significances. "Foundation" may refer to the time; that is to say church was established by apostles and prophets. Foundation may also refer to the structure; that is to say church is built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets for they represent the revelation received from God through the New Testament.

Since Church is Temple of God, people ought to respect church. Paul gave a severe warning, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). This warning tells us that God highly values His church; He dwells in it and will destroy any person who destroys the church. Here we are reminded once again that Temple of God is we, the people, not the gathering place.

Bride of Christ

In the above we have mentioned that Paul when talking about spousal relationship used the relationship between Christ and church as an example to explain. Church is what Christ loves, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27). Christ uses His self-giving love to cleanse the church and make her holy and blameless.

To a bride the most important requirement is to be pure; Paul said that he

presented Corinthian church to Christ "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." (2 Corinthians 11:2). Spiritual purity has two aspects in it. First is the purity in belief, not to be penetrated by heresies; second is the purity in morality, leaving no room for sins and evils; church should do its best to keep its purity.

Waiting for bridegroom's coming is church's anticipation, encouragement and the source of energy. That moment is Christ's second coming; there will be "wedding of the lamb", "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Revelation 19:7-8). The Bride and the Bridegroom are united and are together forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Christ's bride refers to the entire church, not individual believers; Bible never uses spousal relationship to describe the relationship between Christ and an individual believer.

Priesthood

In the Book of Hebrews it uses much space to discuss the position of the High Priest (e.g. Hebrews 4:15-17). There are other passages in the New Testament that also explain that church has priesthood which comes from Christ. John, right from the beginning of the Book of Revelation, introduces Christ from this angle: "who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (Revelation 1:5-6). What follows in Chapter 5, is a song that praises Christ and reiterates this essence: "because you were slain,

and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:9-10).

Christ redeems the church, making her a kingdom of priests. In the aforementioned passage in First Peter it so describes this priesthood: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9). This kingdom of priests is holy and has king’s honor; the priesthood is not in the order of Aaron, but is like Christ, in the order of Melchizedek, having king’s status. Church should value its honorable status, not to trample on it or even put it to shame the status which is given by God through Christ.

Priest’s duty is to plead and to sacrifice on behalf of others. Paul bade Timothy that the most important thing is to make intercession for all people (1 Timothy 2:1-2). In First Peter when explaining that church is God’s Temple and Priest, it also tells what believers ought to do, “offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5). Peter didn’t list in details what the spiritual sacrifices were, but in the New Testament there are at least seven passages that mention what we offer to God as sacrifice. First, we have to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2); second, the fruit of gospel is an offering to God (Romans 15:16); third, the effect of our ministry is an offering (Philippians 2:17); fourth, church’s provision for the minister can also be counted as an offering to God (Philippians 4:18); fifth, the praise and thanksgiving that we utter to God with our lips are offerings (Hebrews 13:15);

sixth, doing good and sharing with others are sacrifices that God is pleased with (Hebrews 13:16); seventh, prayer of all God’s people is an offering made in front of the throne (Revelation 8:3).

Household of God

Church is the household of God; that means believers are members of the household, no longer outsiders: “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (Ephesians 2:19). Paul told Timothy, “in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15). Given it is “God’s household”, the master of this household is God. In the above it’s mentioned that whoever believes in Christ has the right to become a child of God (John 1:12). Thus church has to respect and honor God, not to act like Israelite priests whom prophets rebuked, “‘A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘It is you priests who show contempt for my name.’” (Malachi 1:6)

If God is the master of the household, then people who serve in the church, especially those who are in pastoral ministry and are leaders, are then “stewards”. “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). Stewards shouldn’t treat the household as their own belongings, but just take care of the household on behalf of the master. Nevertheless, the Bible also says that people who lead the church should have “a fatherly heart”; Paul made it clear about his status as a

steward and then went on kindly expressing his fatherly heart: “I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:14-15). This is like a double duty: on one hand working as a steward to take care of God’s household for God, on the other hand leading the church with a fatherly heart.

The concept of “household” is not only important to leaders, but also to church, the whole entity. Believers in the church are “family members” not consumers who patronize a store; therefore all blessings or hardships belong to the whole household; both joy and load are to be shared.

2. Church’s Functions

Church has many functions and it is hard if not impossible to go to details for each and every of them here, but we can group them into some major categories. There is no absolute way to categorize them and different approaches have been proposed. Here, we will go through them in five areas (We-EFC for short): upwardly Worship, downwardly Equip, outwardly Evangelize, inwardly Fellowship and outwardly Manifest through Community involvement.

(1) Worship

Worship is an attitude; worship is short for “worth-ship” which is used to express the worth of the person who has been worshiped. When Apostle John saw the vision of the heavenly throne, he recorded some

unforgettable proclamations: “the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.’ ” (Revelation 4:10-11).

Laying down their crowns is an act of worship. Those crowns were the most glorious and honorable decoration on the twenty-four elders. They took down their crowns and laid them before the throne to express that the one who sat in the throne was worthy the most valuable, most glorious things that they had; or to express that the most honored and valued things they owned had become not worthy enough in front of God. And then they, in their singing, proclaimed that He is worthy of glory, honor and power.

Following that, when the attention was turned to the scroll in the right hand of God, they proclaimed that no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth but the slain lamb was worthy to open the scroll. The twenty-four elders sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10). Then, hundreds of thousands of angels responded by saying “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12). In the previous text he who sits on the throne is worthy of worship

because He is the Creator; here the Lamb is worthy of worship because He is the redeemer.

In church the goal of worship activities should be to express the worth that we offer to God for what He is worthy of. Therefore, worship activities should center on God; any activity that does not center on God is not a worship activity.

When Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman, her excuse was that they Samaritans wanted to worship on that mountain while Jewish people said Jerusalem was the right place to worship. Jesus told her that the location was not important; rather the important matter is in one's inside, "the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:23). Because God is spirit, only in spirit can we truly communicate with Him. The original text "in the Spirit" and "in truth" can be explained as "the Holy Spirit" and "the Truth"; that is to say that we should worship God in the Holy Spirit and in the Truth.

(2) Equip

To equip is to build up believers. "Build up" appears many times in the New Testament. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). Building up one another is not only a responsibility for every believer but also a mission for the whole church. In Jesus' Great Commission, one work is "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthews 28:20). Therefore we can see that

equipping to build up believers is an essential function of church.

Paul instructed Timothy: "the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." (2 Timothy 2:2). Here we can see four generations of relaying the teaching: Paul instructed Timothy who was to entrust reliable people who in turn will teach others. The inheritance of faith is built up like this, generation by generation. Besides vertically teaching down to the younger generation, horizontally building up one another is also commanded in the Bible, "Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up." (Romans 15:2)

(3) Evangelize

Church's functions are not only for people inside the church, but also for outside people; the goal is to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" to the world. In fact, declaring outwardly includes many aspects; here we will discuss two main aspects: Evangelize and Community Involvement. To evangelize is to bring the spiritual gospel to nonbelievers in this world; community involvement is to bring God's light into the world of darkness.

Evangelization includes gospel ministry in local place as well as missionary ministries across cultures and across nations. Modern time churches make a distinction between evangelism and missions: so-called evangelism refers to evangelical work for the same locale and the same culture while missions are for people who are not in direct contact with a local church; they can be across culture in local

place, or same culture in foreign places or across culture in foreign places. Essentially, all these can be considered evangelical ministries.

The motivation of evangelism is for three counts of universality: sin's universality, God's universality and salvation's universality. Bible emphasizes it clearly that sin is universal: "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), "There is no one righteous, not even one" (Romans 3:10; Psalm 14:3). Not only Bible says so, from our own observation we all can see that this world indeed is full of sins. Sin's universality indicates people universally need salvation.

To Chinese, God is neither a "foreign god", nor a religious target for Jewish people. God is the Lord who created the world as the Psalmist wrote, "For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens." (Psalm 96:5). If He is the Lord who created the world, then He is not only a god for a certain nation or people, but God of the whole world. Furthermore, He is to seek people. Jesus told the Samaritan woman: "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:23). He seeks people because He loves them and his love is universal: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

John 3:16 tells us not only that God's love is universal, but that the salvation he brought through His only son is provided for people universally. Hence, due to sins, people universally need the universal salvation that has been provided by the universal God.

From the Old Testament to the New Testament we always see God's evangelical

heart. When God called Abraham to make a covenant with him, the promise he got is: "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). The Book of Jonah depicts even more vividly God's heart after Jonah unwillingly went to Nineveh to "evangelize"; God taught Jonah the most important lesson: "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:11). "Having concern" is to have compassion; we have to understand God's heart which is full of compassion toward people in this world, in order to get the driving force to evangelize.

The New Testament is even clearer in evangelical commission; many people know the "Great Commission" in Matthews 28:19-20. Although all the four Gospel Books have this teaching but each has its own emphasis. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes on the goal of the commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthews 28:19-20). The goal is to make disciples of all nations; therefore church's role is "Disciple Trainer".

In the Gospel of Mark the emphasis of the Great Commission is the action to preach. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15). There the role of the church is "Preacher of the Gospel". The emphasis of the Great Commission in the Gospel of Luke is the messenger: "You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:48). Who are the people who preach? They are witnesses;

therefore, witness is the role of the church. The Gospel of John emphasizes on how to evangelize: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21). This is a way of “sending”; Jesus is the greatest across-culture missionary; He was sent from heaven to the earth; now He says He is sending us likewise. Therefore, church’s role is an ambassador who has been sent.

A church that is evangelical is one that prays, one that is compassionate about evangelical ministries for local people of the same culture, one that sends money, and one that sends people.

(4) Fellowship

“Fellowship”, for many churches, is an organization; often it refers to a group of people who gather together with a goal to meet their common needs. Church emphasizes on diversity while fellowship emphasizes on commonalities.

Greek verb, *koinōneō* is used eight times in the New Testament, *koinōnia*, its noun, eighteen times, *koinōnos*, its **nominative noun** ten times. In general there are five related usages.

First of all is “be associated with” or “befriend”. For example when Paul talked about not to have anything to do with ghost worshipping, he said, “No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.” (1 Corinthians 10:20) where participant is from *koinōnos*.

Second, it is “generosity” or “sharing the load”. For example, when talking about

donations, Paul said, “Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.” (2 Corinthians 9:13) where generosity is from *koinōnia*.

Third, it is “take part” or “participate”. For example, Peter, when talking about the consequence of getting to know God, said “Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” (2 Peter 1:4) where “participate” is from *koinōnos*.

Fourth, it is “sharing”. For example, Paul, when talking about suffering and comforting, said “And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:7) where “just as share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort” has a direct meaning of people who share in suffering and comfort. “Sharing” is from *koinōnos*.

Fifth, it means “partners” or “companions”. For example, Paul, when pleading with Philemon for his forgiveness of Onesimus, said “So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” (Philemon 17) where “partner” is from *koinōnos*.

Befriending, generosity, participation, sharing and partnership are all things we should see inside a church; also they should be things we can see in every kind of ministry and every kind of activity.

(5) Community

Churches of Evangelical denomination used to value only spiritual type of evangelical works, considering all outward ministries not functions of the church if they don't have evangelical contents. But in recent years western Evangelical denomination has begun a trend to value community involvements. But Chinese churches, including EFC churches, still naturally tend to be overly conservative, or just use community involvement as a means to evangelize.

It is not totally irrational for Evangelical denomination to have attitude like this; mainly it's due to lessons learned from the history. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the evangelical movement was ignited and many willing people wanted to bring Gospel into the crowds, thus came the birth of "community evangelism". Church organizations such as "Salvation Army" and "YMCA" were set up one after another. However, many such ministries gradually lost "evangelism" and became "community" only. As a result, the well-intentioned "community evangelism" had become a negative label in Evangelical denomination. Furthermore, in mid twentieth century, the influence of "liberal theology" gradually penetrated into "the third world" churches which then led church to go into politics; the conservative evangelical denomination started to form an attitude of staying away from "community evangelism".

In fact, "community evangelism" is an important part of the biblical teachings that apply to church. The New Testament indeed considers the eternal salvation as the most important matter, but community participation is not merely a means to evangelize, it has its own value. Jesus said we are the salt and the

light in this world, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthews 5:16). Take note that Jesus didn't bid us to be the salt and be the light; instead He said we were born to be God's children and it wasn't a choice. Our choice is between being the salt that has lost its saltiness and being the salt that can add its saltiness to the flavor; similarly between being the light that is placed under a bowl and being the light that shines in front of people.

Jesus, before his imminent going to the crucifixion, prayed for His disciples and people who would follow Him later: "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." (John 17:14-15). People who belong to Christ no longer belong to this world, but we are not to leave this world. This is the way of "out of the world yet into the world"; we enter into this world to demonstrate our functions, but we are not to just flow with this polluted world.

Someone on a Sabbath brought Jesus a sick patient, asking Him if it was lawful to heal people on Sabbath, with an intension to find a reason to bring charges against Him. Jesus replied by asking them "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." (Matthews 12:11-12). From Jesus' conversation we can see a principle: practically helping others is more important than keeping religious symbols. Jesus by no means said keeping Sabbath is not important; Sabbath is a

symbol of our faith. (Our lives as believers have many parts that are symbolic, e.g. hymn-singing and praising) When seeing a person in need, we should not be constrained by this kind of symbols and refuse to lend a helping hand. All this tells us that doing good deeds has a value by itself; it doesn't have to be only belief-motivated.

3. Church's Organization and Responsibilities

(1) Organization and Authority

Some Christians believe that church, being a spiritual organization, is not a worldly organization, hence it shouldn't be an organization of men. But we can see from the New Testament that the earliest recorded church already had some organizational structure. They had people with formal responsibilities (Philippians 1:1); they had elections (Acts 6:5-6); they gathered at a fixed time (Acts 20:7); they had church member list (1 Timothy 5:9); they had systematic offerings (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); they worshiped and ministered in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The issue of power and authority in the church often causes tremendous confusion. To start with, Bible has the highest power and authority in the church and it is undeniable. Following that is so-called "spiritual authority". This authority must be exercised under the principle of "all believers are priests" so that every believer can have direct relationship with God, instead of accessing God only through people with the spiritual authority, using them

as the mediators. There is only one mediator between God and man and that is Jesus Christ.

Churches of different denominations adopt different organizational structures. In general there are three basic structures.

"Episcopal" is a system of organization where every local church is supervised by an overseer or bishop, acting as their highest leader; under that are elders (pastors) and deacons; only bishops or overseers can call for and install clergy. In the Bible there are people who had such a role: Jesus' brother James, Timothy, Titus, etc. In church history, ever since the second century Episcopal has become a formal structure. However, every time the Bible mentioned the elections for overseers or elders, there were all in plural, never in singular. From the angle of actual practice, letting one single person hold all the power may have the best efficiency in management, but it may have the highest risk. Besides, it may be against our status under the principle of "all believers are priests".

"Presbyterian" is a way of structuring where every local church is led by plural Elders; among them some are designated to be "Education Elder" or "Management Elder". Bible clearly gives Elders the authority to lead the church (see next section regarding Elder's responsibilities), although it doesn't mention any structure above the level of local church.

"Congregational" is a structure where every local church is self-sufficient and independent and democracy is the framework of church management. In other words, congregation has the highest authority and all clergy are to be elected by the congregation. In the New Testament there are records where local church was independent and self-

governing; they judged their own members (1 Corinthians 5:13), elected their own clergy (Acts 6:1-5), and resolved their own disputes (1 Corinthians 6:1-5). The status of “believer-is-priest” and the equality-among-members seem to be the biblical foundation for democracy. On the other hand, the Bible also mentions that there are certain people in the church who have the authority and should be respected and obeyed by the believers (Hebrews 13:17). Though believers in the Christ are all equal, it doesn’t mean every believer has the same level of spirituality.

In conclusion we may say that God entrusts some mature and gifted leaders with the spiritual authority to lead and teach the church. These people are called “Elders” or “Overseers” in the New Testament. Except for this, the Bible does not give any absolute regulation about church’s organization and structure.

(2) Elder’s Office

In the New Testament, it only mentions two formal offices: “Elder” (or Overseer) and “Deacon”. By “office” we mean formal position. In Ephesians 4:11 there is a list of “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers” which is more about types of gift than types of office. In the next section we will further discuss the concept of gift.

In the New Testament, “Elder” and “Overseer” are the same. “Elder” is from Greek presbuteros which means “elder people” while “Overseer” is from Greek episkopos which means “a person who oversees”. In ancient time, elder people in general were the group leaders; hence “elder” gradually became a

synonym of “leader”. Not every church or denomination uses the same word to call this office. Here we will discuss responsibilities of “Elder” and “Overseer” based on biblical teachings in the New Testament, but we will use “Elder” for the name of this particular office. “Elder” may be considered the most essential office in a church; without it no local church can be established because Elders have the “biblically established leadership and spiritual authority” in the aforementioned definition of “local church”.

Modern day’s “Pastoral Office” is not mentioned in the Bible, except in the Ephesians 4:11, NIV has “the pastors and teachers” whose original meaning is “the person who pastors and teaches”. Grammar-wise “pastor” and “teacher” share one article which means it is the same kind of person with two different aspects of it. What is discussed in the Book of Ephesians is about functions of gift, not offices. When we examine duties of today’s Pastoral Office, we can see that it is identical to that of the Elder’s Office. Therefore we may say that “Elder” in the Bible is equivalent to “Pastor” nowadays. Or looking from another side, nowadays pastor is an appointed and designated Elder. For this, all the biblical teachings regarding Elders can be applied to pastors; “Pastor” and “Elder” essentially are the same.

Responsibilities

There are three aspects of Elder’s responsibilities.

First of all is management, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17).

They are the overseers of the church, having the authority to manage and supervise a church.

Second, they are to shepherd. Paul reminded Elders in Ephesians: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28). Peter advised people who served as Elders like himself, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be;” (1 Peter 5:2). They are the pastors of the church and have the authority to teach.

Third they represent the church. In the Book of Acts, when a situation arose where a representative was needed to take care of a matter on behalf of the church, it was Elder who acted as the representative. Examples are: accepting monetary gift (Acts 11:30), calming down disputes in a meeting (Acts 15:2); listening to Paul when he said farewell to the church (Acts 20:17).

Authority

Being teachers on the Truth, they have the spiritual authority to teach believers and the church about doctrines and behaviors. Being overseers they have the authority in administrative management. However, these authorities are limited to the local church where they have been called to serve. Elders coming from a different church will need permission from the host church if they are to exercise their spiritual authority in that church.

Qualifications

In the Bible there are two passages where Elder’s qualifications are listed: First Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. The former one is for the office of “Overseer” and the latter “Elder”. The two passages have much duplication; the most important commonality is that both qualification lists start with “above reproach”; this indicates “above reproach” is the main theme of the entire qualification list. Being a church leader, one has to be clear of any charge of wrongdoing in all aspects. The two lists share many commonalities, although they are not totally identical; we believe neither is a complete checklist; rather they were important items Paul had identified and listed with emphasis.

As far as personality is concerned, the Elder has to be self-controlled, disciplined, descent, gentle, not competitive and not quick-tempered. As for characters, he must be hospitable, not given to drunkenness, not a lover of money, loving what is good, and holy. Family-wise, he must be faithful to his spouse; his children must believe and are not open to any charge of being wild and disobedient; every member in the household must be a believer. Reputation-wise, he should have a good reputation not only within the church and also outside the church. Judgment-wise, he has to be just and fair, always keeping the pure Truth. Capability-wise, he must be good at managing and teaching. Experience-wise, he must not be a newly convert.

Please take note that in Elder’s qualifications, more are about character than capability; this indicates that in the Bible one’s character is valued more than one’s capability. There are only two capabilities that are mentioned: capable of managing and good at

teaching (including the capability to differentiate the pure Truth from the rest). They are to match Elder's responsibilities which are management and pasturing. Another important matter is that these two passages are not the only places where it mentions that church leaders should not be greedy; (e.g. 1 Peter 5:2); this may be because disciples saw money as a great temptation for people who were in charge of church management.

(3) Deacon's Office

"Deacon" is from Greek diakonos whose original meaning is "people who serve". This word is used thirty times in the New Testament; only in three instances was it used as a proper noun for church office. Therefore, all the biblical teachings regarding "Deacon" can apply to people who officially serve in a church.

Responsibilities

The New Testament doesn't have a clear description for Deacon's responsibilities. But from its original meaning, we know Deacon's responsibility is to serve various needs in the church. Some believe what's recorded in Acts 6:1-6 about seven persons' getting elected to serve "distribution of food" is about the election of deacons. However, that passage doesn't use the word of diakonos. Perhaps we can say those seven persons were the prototype of "Deacon" in the later days. Given so, Deacon's responsibility is to assist church leaders in church's administration and management.

Although "Deacon" when used in the Bible is not the highest ranking leader in a

church, the word diakonos actually carries much respect and dignity as it has been used to describe works done by apostles (2 Corinthians 3:6), angles (Matthews 4:8-11) and our Lord, Jesus (Matthews 20:28).

Qualifications

There is only one place in the Bible which explicitly lists Deacon's qualifications: First Timothy 3:8-13; among them some are the same as those for Elder. For personalities, Deacons have to be of descent, self-controlled, faithful in all aspects; for characters, they can not be double-tongued, or indulging in much wine, or greedy; in family life they have to be faithful to their spouses, good at managing children and the household affairs; when giving judgments, they have to have clear conscience and always keep the Truth; for experience, they must be tested first and found blameless.

(4) Working Together with Various Gifts

Just like the analogy between church and "body" as described in the previous section, the goal for various gifts is that people with different gifts work together and rely on one another in the church. Not everyone agrees on the definition of gift; some believe it has to be mentioned in the Bible to count as a gift; some believe gift is a special thing given by the Holy Spirit, not including abilities that one was born with or abilities that one acquired; some believe only gifts that are used in church ministries can be counted as gifts. Still, some others believe there shouldn't be any restrictions like this.

In the New Testament there are five lists of gifts, each having its own emphasis and perspective: Romans 12:6-8 lists gifts from their functioning point of view, First Corinthians 12:8-11 from the perspective of man's capabilities; First Corinthians 12:28-30 lists types of persons (apostles, prophets, teachers, etc.); Ephesians 4:11 also lists types of persons; First Peter 4:11 emphasizes on functions. Looking from all these, we can say "gift" is a capability that is given to a person to work out some function in the church; as for how and when the Holy Spirit gives the gifts to people, Bible doesn't have a clear explanation.

Gift doesn't seem to have a fixed correlation with one's spiritual level. People with many gifts or strong gifts may not be the ones who have good spirituality. On the other hand, people without distinct gifts may not be ones with poor spirituality. From Corinthian Church we notice it is a church full of gifts for which Paul thanked God, "I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." (1 Corinthians 1:4-7). In spite of that, Corinthian Church was a church that had so many spirituality related issues that Paul reprimanded that they were like babies and were of flesh, "Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready." (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Gift not only has no direct relationship with spirituality, but it also can be abused. The giving of gifts is totally controlled by the Holy Spirit but the usage is controlled by men. Gifts are tools given us; we can use them to benefit others or we can use them for our own selfish gain. Paul used three chapters of passages (1 Corinthians 12-14) to teach Corinthian Church how not to abuse their gifts.

People who abuse their gifts do not understand that the purpose of gift is to build up the church, not to benefit individuals who are gifted. Paul clearly advised, "Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church." (1 Corinthians 14:12); take note it is to build up the church, not an individual. When we ask for gift we ask for the sake of church, not for ourselves. Gifts will enable different church parts to work together and to depend on one another since nobody owns all the gifts and nobody is without any gift. Each person is to serve according to the gifts he has, but not only people with gifts should serve. For example, evangelism is a gift but we all have the responsibility to evangelize and cannot use "no gift" as an excuse not to do it.

In conclusion, a successful church organization must have excellent leaders as well as individuals whose gifts are all placed in the most suitable positions so that they all work out well and bring out the best effect.

4. Sacred Ceremonies

Ever since Middle Ages, Catholic Church holds seven sacred ceremonies. Reformed Churches, due to "Sola Scriptura", only accepts two ceremonies that Bible clearly tells us to observe: Baptism and Sacred Communion.

Some Christians based on John Chapter 13 also observe feet baptism. However, throughout church history we didn't see feet baptism being put into practice, not even in the Book of Acts or any epistle in the New Testament. For this reason, EFC agrees with traditional point of view and doesn't include feet baptism as one of the sacred ceremonies. In principle, there are two criteria for a sacred ceremony to be accepted as a formal ceremony. First, it was directly instructed by Jesus; second, it has been regularly practiced ever since the early church time.

There are four kinds of theories that explain Sacred Ceremony theologically.

The first one is Sacramentalism which is a point of view taken by Catholic Church. Sacramentalism believes a sacred ceremony itself has objective and tangible effect; in other words, sacred ceremony blesses people who partake in the ceremony so that they receive actual spiritual benefit.

The second one is Mild Sacramentalism which is Martin Luther's point of view and has been inherited by Lutheran denomination. They believe any sacred ceremony can have actual effect only if there is faith in it; partakers of a sacred ceremony will receive actual spiritual benefit if they have the faith.

The third one is Covenant Theology which is represented by the Reformed Churches. They believe sacred ceremony is a symbol of keeping the covenant, although the actions involved in the ceremony do not have any real effect; the ceremony itself just represents the covenant-keeping heart of all partakers to make known that they are in the covenant with God.

The fourth one is Symbolism. Many who originated from Radical Reformed, such as Baptist denomination, hold this point of view. They believe sacred ceremony is completely symbolic, having no objective and real effect at all; sacred ceremony partakers use symbolic actions to express its spiritual meaning behind the ceremony.

(1) Baptism

When the New Testament mentions Baptism, often it uses its verb, "baptize" or "be baptized". For this, most Chinese churches call it "the ceremony of baptism"; some churches emphasize the "soaking" method that is used in the ceremony and called it "soaking ceremony" in Chinese.

The origin of Baptism is unknown; one or two centuries before Christ was born, people in Qumran already practiced this ceremony. Many scholars believe that community may be the place where Baptism originated. In the beginning of the New Testament, it mentions "John the Baptist" was baptizing many people in the Jordan River as if that kind of ceremony was not uncommon at that time. Lord Jesus in his Great Commission bade disciples to baptize people with water to make them Lord's disciples "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthews 28:19). In the Book of Acts it records that from the very beginning, church has practiced Baptism (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:14-15, 33; 18:8; 19:5)

The aforementioned four theories that explain Sacred Ceremony all have their ways of explaining the Baptism. Sacramentalism

believes that Baptism objectively places man under salvation; Mild Sacramentalism believes that Baptism through the recipient's faith will give him the salvation. Covenant Theology believes that Baptism replaced the circumcision in the Old Testament and is a symbol that one has entered into the covenant of salvation; it is an act of faith. Symbolism believes the baptism symbolizes the faith and the process of one's getting saved.

Although Baptism is not the method to get saved and salvation is obtained simply by faith (Ephesians 2:9), Baptism and salvation indeed are often connected in the New Testament. Romans Chapter 6 talks about what Baptism stands for: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." (Romans 6:3-4). Receiving Baptism is to express one's identification with Jesus' death and Jesus' resurrection.

Baptism by water may very well represent the baptism by the Holy Spirit: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:13). The original text for "form" can also mean "enter"; baptism by the Holy Spirit makes the person enter Christ's body and become part of Christ's body; hence Baptism by water symbolizes baptism by the Holy Spirit and makes people join a visible local church.

Infant Baptism has been disputed mainly over the issue whether the person who is receiving the Baptism has to understand the meaning of the Baptism. Symbolism generally

believes Baptism symbolizes the faith for salvation and so people need to wait until they have a clear understanding of the meaning of Baptism. Covenant Theology on the other hand believes Baptism like circumcision is for parents to bring their children into the covenant community; therefore it is reasonable for infants to receive Baptism. Regardless of explanations, Reformed Churches all believe that Baptism itself if not received with faith can not be used as a method to get saved; as a result denominations that accept Infant Baptism usually have Confirmation Baptism which is for people who have received Infant Baptism and now have grown up, and out of their own will want to confirm the effectiveness of their baptisms that were done in the past.

Baptism has another disputed issue which is about how it should be conducted. Different denominations use "sprinkling", "pouring", or "immersion" to baptize. The original text baptizō was for non-religious usage which means immersion and soaking; therefore immersion may act out more vividly the meaning of death, burial and the resurrection. Besides from the traces that the New Testament has left, John the Baptism and the early church apparently all used "immersion" method. For this reason some denominations insist on Immersion Baptism. In fact the Bible never directly tells us by which method Baptism should be conducted.

(2) Sacred Communion

"Sacred Communion" is also called "Lord's Supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20) or "Lord's Table" (1 Corinthians 10:21) and some churches call it "breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42; 20:7).

The Gospel Books record when eating the last supper with his disciples, Jesus set up

this sacred ceremony, telling them to “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Much later Paul referring to this record reprimanded the Corinthian Church for some of the church members ate the bread and drank the cup of the Lord “in an unworthy manner”; this clearly tells us that Jesus himself indeed commanded this ceremony. (1 Corinthians 11:23-25). This passage also indicates that in Apostle’s time churches already practiced this ceremony, ever since the beginning of the church (Acts 2:42, 46).

Regarding explanation for the Sacred Communion the main focus is on the relationship between the bread and the cup, and Jesus body and his blood. Catholic’s “Sacramentalism” believes in “Transubstantiation” and trusts that the bread and the drink in the cup actually become Jesus’ body and blood; therefore they call it “Eucharist”. “Mild Sacramentalism” of the Lutheran Church believes in Consubstantiation which believes Christ’s body and blood are connected with the bread and the cup because of the faith. Reformed Churches believe in “Special/Spiritual Presence” which believes Christ’s Spirit is present with the bread and the cup. Symbolism believes the bread and the cup only symbolize Christ’s body and blood and so the Sacred Communion is to symbolically remember Christ’s death.

When Jesus said “this is my body” was he talking about a symbol because apparently His body was still there at that time and so the bread couldn’t have become his body? However, “Lord’s Meal” is not only for symbolic remembrance as Paul warned people in Corinthian Church: “So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). It indicates clearly that even if the bread and the cup were indeed symbolic it would still be a very serious and solemn symbol, one that is not to be taken lightly.

Body part’s mutual communion also has a very important meaning in the Sacred Communion as Paul admonished Corinthian Church for some of its members had the biggest attitude problem with Sacred Ceremony: they despised other brothers. When he said, “without discerning the body of Christ” he might have double meaning for “the body of Christ” because it also means the church; when they were receiving Christ’s body it was unreasonable if they didn’t care for “Christ’s body”.

The Sacred Communion also is a symbol for the new covenant as Jesus said “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). The old covenant has two symbols: circumcision (Genesis 17:9-11) and Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:15). Ever since the very beginning, God likes people to use tangible and visible actions to remember the covenant that is invisible.

Lastly, Sacred Communion also reminds us that Lord will come again. Jesus told disciples to do it until he comes again; he also said “I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matthews 26:29). Therefore each time we receive the Sacred Communion we should hold on to our hope that our Lord promised us that he will come back to take us to His place.

Verse 12

That in the last day, as the consummation of redemption, Christ will come again personally and visible to the earth to judge the living and the dead; that there will be a bodily resurrection of the dead, of the believers through the Holy Spirit unto the inheritance of eternal life, and the unbelievers unto condemnation; and that a new heaven and a new earth will be ushered in

1. Interpretation of Prophecies

The Bible is full of prophecies; many passages were not fulfilled at the time they were written down. Although not all prophecies are related to End Time, understanding prophecies is rather important. Prophecies are never meant to satisfy people's curiosity about the future; rather they are made to encourage believers to wait patiently in devastating situations, to inspire self-conceited believers to watch vigilantly, to awake idle believers to work more enthusiastically, and to warn non-believers to take the opportunity when they still can and seek the Lord soon.

(1) Difficulties Interpreting Prophecies

There are many difficulties explaining prophecies about End Time; one of the reasons is that when making prophecies, prophets often combined and talked about things that were to be fulfilled at different time periods. For example, in the Old Testament the prophecies about Messiah didn't explain that He is to come twice; as a result people got confused about Messiah's status which sometimes is King of

Glory and other times a meek servant. Only when the revelations were made in the New Testament did we realize that some part of the prophecy was fulfilled when He came the first time while the rest will have to wait until his second coming to get fulfilled.

Another example is the prophecy in the Book of Joel 2:28-32: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved;" Exegesis experts hold different points of view about this prophecy regarding the pouring out of the Holy Spirit; it is mainly because in Acts 2:17-21 Peter cited this passage to proclaim that the phenomenon they saw at Pentecost was to fulfill what Joel had said. About this issue there have been various perspectives; one explanation that has been accepted by many, says part of Joel's prophecy has been fulfilled in the Pentecost experience while other parts will

have to wait until End Time to become fulfilled. This kind of “fulfilled in installments” prophecies are hard to give absolutely sure explanations.

Some people will try to match nowadays world situation with biblical prophecies. For example, are disasters prophesized for the End Time the natural catastrophes and man-created disasters that we are seeing in the present time? These efforts in matching the current world situations with biblical prophecies often are subjective; besides too much enthusiasm watching for the End Time may easily make us fall into the danger of predicting Christ’s second coming. Throughout history there were numerous predictions on this regard and all brought bad results. It is God’s will that on one hand we ought to be alert, awaiting Lord’s coming again, on the other hand, He doesn’t want us to predict when that day is going to be. Curiosity like this has been with us ever since the earliest disciples but Jesus told them “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.” (Act 1:7). Therefore anyone who claims he can calculate the date for Lord’s second coming is contradictory to what Jesus has said.

The most difficult part of explaining prophecies is that many prophecies were revealed figuratively; Apocalyptic Literature especially used many visions whose interpretations may not always be easy. Apocalyptic Literature exists in both the Old Testament and the New Testament; the Old Testament has the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of Daniel and the Book of Zechariah; the New Testament mainly has the Book of Revelation. All these books have tremendous amount of passages prophesizing the End Time. Even at

places where revelations were not made through visions, they still were full of figurative speeches; furthermore they involve the relationship between the new and the old covenants. Because of this there are disputes about literal meanings versus spiritual meanings.

The dispute of literal interpretation of the prophecy versus allegorical interpretation of the prophecy often is misunderstood since it is not quite the same as the situation of literal exegesis versus allegorical exegesis in terms of general exegesis. In Evangelical exegesis studies, literal exegesis often is the mainstream. “Literal Exegesis” does not ignore the fact that many parts of the Bible were written using figurative speech, but it considers that despite the figurative speech, a passage still has a normal meaning it wants to express. Perhaps we should call it “Normal Exegesis” to be more accurate because Literal Exegesis believes literature, figurative or direct, is meant to express a meaning rather than concealing it and leaving it for reader’s conjecture. (Allegorical interpretation believes each passage besides its normal meaning has some concealed spiritual meanings which cannot be understood directly.)

But when it comes to interpreting prophecies, Literal or Allegorical interpretations are about a totally different issue which has a rather diverse view among Evangelical mainstream believers who mostly favor Literal Exegesis. This issue is not about the literature of the prophecy itself; interpreting prophetic literature basically is the same as interpreting other type of literatures and is not the arguing point. The arguing point is whether the fulfillment of a prophecy will be exact, direct and specific according to the wording itself, or whether it will be spiritually and abstractly fulfilled. For example, in the Book of Revelation

there is a “beast” (also called “Anti-Christ”) which figuratively is a “beast” but almost everybody believes it clearly is a person figure. However, is the “Anti-Christ” in the prophecy actually a man or a force that is against Christ? People who are in favor of Literal Interpretation of the prophecy believe it is a person while people who are in favor of Allegorical Interpretation of the prophecy believe it can very well be a force. Another similar example is: when the Bible in the end talks about Holy City, the New Jerusalem, does it refer to a specific place or to all the saints who are forever with God?

In Eschatology, the biggest impact of “Literal” versus “Allegorical” is about the prophecy regarding Israelites. In the Old Testament prophecies regarding End Time mostly are about Israelites, how God is going to turn around their sins and turn His judgment into blessing and His punishment into salvation. The relationship between the Old Testament’s Israelites and the New Testament’s Church is a major issue in Exegesis and Theology; it involves questions such as which of these Old Testament prophecies are to fulfill directly on Israelites and which on churches or Christians? For those prophecies that are for Israelites, such as those about lands and descendents, are they to be fulfilled specifically and visibly, or just spiritually?

(2) Views on Millennium and Eschatology

All this issue about “Literal” and “Allegorical” has made Eschatology the most divided study in Christian Theology; furthermore, it has the biggest framework difference among its divisions. Eschatology’s branches distinguish mainly by their views on

Millennium; the difference in the Millennium views basically has to do with how prophecy should be interpreted. “Millennium” refers to Christ’s Kingdom totally manifests on the earth and Christ rules for one thousand years. This “Kingdom of a Thousand Years” concept mainly came from the passage in Revelation 20:1-6 where it says the devil will be bound in a bottomless pit for one thousand year and those people faithful to God will get resurrected and reign with Christ for one thousand years. “This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:5-6).

It is worth noticing that in the preceding passage, that is Revelation Chapter 19, it records the situation of Christ’s second coming. Although Revelation Chapter 19’s contents are rather figurative, most interpretations, including those by various branches of Eschatology’s, agree that the passage talks about the glory of Christ’s final victory.

In regard to discussions on Millennium, there are two questions. First question is whether Christ will set up that kingdom of one thousand years here on the earth? In other words, will the aforementioned passage of Revelation 20:1-6 be literally fulfilled? The second question is, provided the answer to the first question is affirmative, will He come before or after the kingdom is established?

Amillennialism

The first question separates Amillennialism from the rest. Amillennialism

believes that Christ's Kingdom is not one that will be physically built on this earth; rather His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom which is the sovereignty He now has over the churches. Their interpretation on prophecies from the Old Testament is mainly based on spiritual fulfillment; following this perspective "Church" in the New Testament is the spiritual "Israelites". Amillennialism's Eschatology is comparably simple having no need to integrate many different prophetic passages; many scholars believe this is the most reasonable perspective, especially from the theological perspective of the Reformed Churches.

Premillennialism

People who believe that Christ certainly will build a visible kingdom on the earth, have to answer the second question that is: Will Christ's second coming happen before or after the Millennium? The perspective that Christ will come before the Millennium is called "Premillennialism". People who hold this perspective believe one of the goals that Christ is to return to this world is to build a kingdom on this earth; therefore, surely His coming has to be before the building of the kingdom.

This perspective is the main Eschatology among some Chinese churches and the main reason may be that many of the older generation of ministers were influenced by Dispensationalism which has been the most important driving force advocating Premillennialism. Many discussions on End Time Prophecies are perspectives from Dispensationalism. However, not all people who hold the perspective of Premillennialism are for Dispensationalism. The biggest difference between "Premillennialism from

Dispensationalism" and "Premillennialism from non-Dispensationalism" (also called Historic Premillennialism) is that Dispensationalism values Israelites more; another difference is about the time of rapture.

We can understand the weakness of Amillennialism is the strength of Premillennialism, as the latter offers the most direct and natural interpretation for Revelation Chapter 20 and is free from many difficult issues that Amillennialism has to resolve. On the other side of the coin is that Amillennialism's strength is Premillennialism's weakness because Premillennialism offers a rather complicated Eschatology that sounds all too mysterious and too eerie; in the End Time too many bizarre events will happen. Premillennialism, especially when coming from Dispensationalism insists on literal fulfillment when interpreting prophecies. As a result it has to come up with a complicated system in order to integrate many different prophecies literally and free of any contradiction; in the end it becomes a convoluted system that seems overly worked and bent.

In Theology, the biggest issue about Premillennialism is the purpose of establishing the kingdom, that is, why does Christ want to rule over the earth? If his coming again is to defeat the enemies, why wouldn't He go directly into the Kingdom of Eternity? Premillennialism in general will say this is to fulfill biblical prophecies. They can point out that many biblical prophecies especially those regarding Christ's first coming have all been literally fulfilled, hence prophecies regarding His second coming should be expected likewise.

Postmillennialism

Postmillennialism believes Christ's kingdom will take place on the earth, but it won't be established through Christ's coming to this world, rather it will be built by churches on this earth and it is after the kingdom has been built that Christ will descend gloriously to reign. This theory differs from the above two in their different view of the human history; both Amillennialism and Premillennialism believe human history is getting worse and worse, ending with a tremendous disaster that is unprecedented; and then Christ will come to defeat the evil force. On the contrary, Postmillennialism believes that human history is getting better and better and eventually church will rule the world and establish Christ's Kingdom.

The biggest weakness of Postmillennialism is its lack of biblical foundation and cannot explain many Bible passages regarding warnings about the rebellion at the End Time. Furthermore, after two World Wars, the world's political prospect becomes extremely unstable and the possibility of church's being able to rule the world is getting slimmer and slimmer; nowadays not that many people, even fewer from Evangelical denomination, still hold the perspective of Postmillennialism.

2. Depictions of the End Time

Among Evangelical denomination, plenty of people believe either Amillennialism or Postmillennialism but here we don't want to take a pre-set stand. These two differ in many places regarding Eschatology; here we will try our best to be concise and open-minded in discussing Bible's descriptions of the End Time.

(1) The World's Circumstance

In Matthew Chapters 24 through 25, which is called Jesus' "Speech from the Mount of Olives", Jesus prophesized that there will be disasters in the End Time: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Matthew 24:6-8). The disasters to happen in the End Time are called "great distress" because they are unprecedented: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:21-22).

Besides disasters, there will be false prophets and false messiahs. Jesus warned: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24 4-5). He also said, "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:10-11, 24).

Revelation Chapters 13 and 17 describe a number of special "figures": "beast", "the second beast" and "the great prostitute". Naturally, there are many different interpretations for these highly figurative entities. "Beast", also called "Anti-Christ" in general is deemed to be the conceited political force that is against God; but there is no

consensus as to whether it is a political system or a person. “The second beast” which is also called “false prophet” seems to be related to religious belief and like a beast, it can do wonders; some believe the false prophet is a person while others believe it is an evil religion. Generally speaking, “the great prostitute” is not considered to be a person, but a system; some believe it is a false church that rebels and is against the truth; still some believe it is the commercial system or the social culture that is against God’s moral standard. Here we won’t go into details to analyze pros and cons of each interpretation; regardless figures or systems, the important matter is that during the period of “great distress”, the whole world, in its political, religious and social moral aspects, is extremely corrupt and against God. Besides, in Revelation there is a very distinct “figure” which is the “dragon” which is Satan, the one who drives everything that is against God.

(2) Resurrection and Rapture

As early as the Book of Daniel there were prophecies on resurrection: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2). Some awake to receive the eternal life while others to shame and eternal punishment.

In Paul’s epistles in the New Testament, there are two passages that talk about resurrection and rapture: First Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and First Corinthians 15:51-54. The passage in First Thessalonians emphasizes on the comfort and advice toward death and grieving and then extends to the alert for the End Time; First Corinthians emphasizes more on the hope of resurrection.

Combining the above two passages we can come to conclude how believer’s resurrection and rapture are going to take place. It is going to happen at the time when Christ descends; trumpets will blow and dead believers will resurrect to have imperishable bodies while bodies of believers who are alive at the time will transform into imperishable; the resurrected and the transformed will all be raised to the midair and meet with Lord. According to the passage in Chapter 15 of First Corinthians, the resurrected body will be like that of the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20-23) which is imperishable, glorious, strong and spiritual.

Among people who are for Premillennialism, there are disputes over the time when rapture is to take place. The majority of Dispensationalism believe in pre-Tribulation Rapture; non-Dispensationalism in general accepts post-Tribulation Rapture although some accept mid-Tribulation Rapture. Amillennialism usually doesn’t have this issue since the majority of them take the stand of post-Tribulation Rapture; this is because by and large they don’t believe there is a distinct beginning for “the great distress”. However, theoretically Amillennialism is also compatible with pre-Tribulation Rapture.

The main reason for people to believe in pre-Tribulation Rapture is that it matches what has been said in many places throughout the Bible that Lord’s second coming can happen any time. Among these passages, the most important one should be in First Thessalonians, Chapter 5: “Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will

come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3). Since the day of the Lord will come like a thief it is going to be all of a sudden when people are still saying peace and safety. Judging from this, it won't be like a time when the huge disaster has just happened. This seems to contradict the saying that great distress will take place before Lord's second coming; people who are for pre-Tribulation Rapture make a point that the day of the Lord includes two steps: the first step takes place before the great distress (when people are still saying peace and safety) when Lord comes in midair and the resurrection and rapture take place which then commences the great distress; the second step is Lord's actual coming onto the earth which is the pinnacle of the great distress.

People who are against pre-Tribulation Rapture feel that dividing Christ's second coming into two steps makes the already overly-complicated Premillennialism even worse; besides, sudden disappearance of a large number of people from the surface of the earth seems to be too fairy and mysterious. What's more, from Bible's discussions and data, indeed there will be believers out there during the great distress.

Some believe that mid-Tribulation Rapture is similar to pre-Tribulation Rapture and can be considered as a revised stand of pre-Tribulation Rapture. People who are for mid-Tribulation Rapture believe the first half of the seven years of the great distress is the actual beginning of the disasters. Besides, in Revelation after two prophets are taken up to heaven, the seventh (the last) trumpet is to sound (Revelation 11:12, 15); this has been interpreted by the supporters of mid-Tribulation Rapture as the time of Rapture.

“mid-Tribulation Rapture” is a minority stance among Dispensationalism.

Another revision of “Pre-Tribulation Rapture” is the theory of “Partial Rapture”. This theory believes not all believers will be raised, but only the victorious ones will. Partial Rapture usually refers to Matthews 24:40-41 where Jesus said, “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” (Matthews 24:40-41). Another passage that Partial Rapture uses as its biblical foundation is the parable of the ten virgins (Matthews 25:1-12) which indicates only the alert and prepared believers can be raised prior to the Tribulation. Partial Tribulation, like mid-Tribulation Rapture, has some theological questions that are hard to answer.

Regardless of which theory and stand, Christian who believe in Bible all agree that in the End Time, believers will have their bodies resurrected and become imperishable and that is what Paul said in Romans Chapter 8: “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” (Romans 8:21-23).

(3) Christ's Returning

The most detailed description about Christ's second coming is in Jesus' “Speech from the Mount of Olives” (Matthews 24, 25). There

are also other places in the Bible foretelling the circumstances of Christ's second coming. From all these numerous passages we can generally describe the process of Christ's glorious coming, although some of the specifics may differ among different denominations.

First of all, Jesus said his second coming will be an event that gets the whole world's attention: "For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man." (Matthews 24:27). People need not to search for the coming Christ because everyone will see the coming. Furthermore, there is going to be violent shaking in the natural world, "Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken." (Matthews 24:29).

The time of Christ's coming will coincide with the peak of the battle on the earth as Satan starts a world-wide war, "they are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16:14). For people who believe that Old Testament prophecies will be literally fulfilled, this battle is the besieging of Israelite's City of Jerusalem. The Book of Zechariah says: "I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city." (Zechariah 14:2).

Christ will descend the way he ascended to heaven: on the clouds. "They see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory" (Matthews 24:30). He is to descend onto the Mount of Olives (Acts

1:12); Zechariah also had a similar prophecy: "On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south." (Zechariah 14:4).

Revelation Chapter 19 depicts Jesus coming with the heavenly armies following Him: "The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean." (Revelation 19:14). White horses are for winners to ride; His name is "Faithful and True", also called "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS". At that time, dead people will be resurrected (Revelation 20:4); both Amillennialism and "post-Tribulation Rapture of the Premillennialism" believe this is the time when believers are raised back to life; "pre-Tribulation Rapture" advocates believe this is the time of resurrection for believers who lost their lives during the great distress.

Premillennialism believes Christ, after his coming, will put Satan into bondage and establish a kingdom on the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-6). Not all Premillennialism believers think it is going to be exactly one thousand years; some believe "one thousand" may just be a complete numerical number used to denote a long period of time after which is the conclusion of everything (in the material world). For Amillennialism people, following Christ's coming is the beginning of the ending of everything. Everything will enter the final resting place in the eternity.

3. Ending into the Eternity

Regardless of Premillennialism or Amillennialism, they both believe that the material world will come to an end. In Second Peter Chapter 3 it is so described: “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:10-13).

God once destroyed the world by the flood and then He made a covenant with Noah, using rainbow as the sign, never to use flood again. Therefore, in the End Time, God will not use water, but fire for His judgment.

(1) The End Time Judgment

The Bible talks about the End Time Judgment that will have four kinds of circumstances. First, Christ comes onto the earth and kills all nations; this is the judgment on the sinful world. Second, judgment is passed onto angels who have sinned; in First Corinthians 6:3, Paul mentioned believers will take part in judging the angels; the Book of Jude also talks about the fallen angels are awaiting judgment (Jude 6); in the end Satan and his servant angels will be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 20:10).

Third, it is the judgment on all Christians. Believers for the sake of Christ are free from God’s wrath, but they still have to appear in front of the judgment seat of Christ. This judgment is not about condemning sins but about giving accounts of one’s worldly deeds in

order to receive a reward. Paul used “work” as an analogy for a believer’s deeds and ministries that he has done in his earthly life: “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). The judgment done in front of the judgment seat of Christ most likely is after believers’ resurrection and the rapture; some believe this judgment is part of the judgment before the great white throne.

Lastly, it’s God’s judgment upon the whole humankind; all people, except those in Christ, will have to face this judgment which is so-called “judgment before the great white throne”: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.” (Revelation 20:11). Following that, all the dead will be resurrected; some receive eternal blessing and others eternal condemnation. (Daniel 12:2).

“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was

thrown into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:12-15)

Here it mentions two books (Greek bible). The first book records all people’s deeds. The Bible says it clearly that God will judge people according to their individual deeds which are not only external conducts, but also inner deeds that are discussed in the Bible. In Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” He connected one’s inner heart with one’s external conducts.

The second book is the book of life which has been mentioned six times in the Book of Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15; 21:27). “The Book of Life” keeps records of names of people who have a part in the eternal blessing. People whose names are not in the Book of Life will be cast into the burning lake which is the second death.

(2) Hell

“Lake of Fire” is the eternal resting place for people who do not belong to God; it is the second death. The first death is the death of the physical body which is the separation of body and life. The second death is the eternal death which is the separation of man and God, the source of life. Rebirth is the second birth; people who have the second birth will not have the second death.

“Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Revelation 21:27). According to these two passages, man’s eternal resting place

could be either “the lake of fire” or “the New Jerusalem”; whoever has his name in the Book of Life is to go to the New Jerusalem, and the rest the lake of fire.

“Lake of Fire” is the Hell. The Bible describes Hell as a place where “the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:44). It is a place where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthews 8:12). It is a place with “blackest darkness” (Jude 13). Jesus in His parable of “the sheep and the goats” talked about the judgment: “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthews 25:41). Hell is the place prepared for the devil and his angels and this description matches the description in Revelation Chapter 20 (Revelation 20:10). From all of these we can conclude that man’s ultimate choice is whether he is going to the place which God has prepared for His people, or he is going to the place which is prepared for the devil and his angels. Bible doesn’t clearly tell us how punishments are to be carried out in Hell, and we are not to speculate either. There are many beliefs about the Hell but they are just folklore and none are clear teachings from the Bible.

Among Evangelical denomination some believe in Annihilationism or Conditional Immortality. These theories primarily are against the belief that God will place man under a forever torturing circumstance; instead they believe people who are not saved will be destroyed instead of existing forever; only saved people will live forever. They believe the thought of eternal Hell not only contradicts God’s loving nature but also is not compatible with God’s righteousness because a man

throughout his whole life can only do a limited amount of sins and shouldn't be subject to endless punishment.

As mentioned in the above, Hell is not like what tradition says a place where God designs some cruel methods to torture people; rather it is a place for people who themselves chose not to be with God. Bible tells us that Hell is "the second death" (Revelation 20:14). Since death means separation, Hell is the place that is separated from God; it is then a place for people who chose not to be with God; hence it doesn't contradict God's love. Besides, as God is eternal, so is the belonging place where He will be present; therefore, it is not against God's righteousness that sinful people go to a place that is eternally separated from God.

There are two main perspectives about Hell: Literal Hellism and Allegorical Hellism. Literal Hellism believes literal descriptions in the Bible about Hell, such as fire and worms, are the reality of Hell. People who are for Allegorical Hellism believe that these descriptions are just symbolic expressions or they are just some humanly understandable analogies. Both theories believe that Hell describes the eternal separation from God and has no part in God's every goodness and blessing.

(3) The New Heaven and the New Earth

A common concept is that believers will "go to heaven". In fact, believers' eternal belonging place is not heaven but "the New Heaven and the New Earth". The name itself tells us this eternal home is the new world that God has prepared where people can live forever

and enjoy the Sabbath forever. The old is to pass away and the new is to come; this is an entirely new creation or a totally renewed world; it is not a continuation of the old; this means God never forgoes his wanting to put mankind in a created world.

In the New Testament, the primary record about the new heaven and the earth is in Revelation Chapters 21 through 22, although Second Peter also briefly mentions that this world in the end will be melted by fiery fire: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:13). Peter said the new heaven and the new earth is what God has promised; very likely he was referring to the Book of Isaiah 66:22: "'As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,' declares the LORD, 'so will your name and descendants endure.'"

Peter described this new heaven and new earth as "where righteousness dwells". There is no sin there as God no longer allows sins to contaminate His creation. John said: "Then I saw 'a new heaven and a new earth,' for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." (Revelation 21:1). Sea when used in the Bible often represents a force of confusion; the Book of Psalms has many sea related expressions such as "surging waters", "the waves" and "the resounding sea" that all sound like a force of confusion that rebels against God. In the New Heaven and the New Earth there will be no more seas; it means that there will no longer be any force of this kind that rebels against God. Not only will the New Heaven and New Earth be rid of sin, but there will be no more pain either: "'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or

pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4).

Taking it optimistically, the New Heaven and the New Earth is a place of abundance: “To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.” (Revelation 21:6). The ceaseless water source that quenches people’s thirst is a symbol of abundance and no shortage of good things. Ever since the Old Testament, this depicting picture has been used in different places and the most renowned one is Psalm 23: “The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters”. The spring of the water of “life” brilliantly reflects “no more death” and then “Tree of Life” reappears: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2). Ever since our forefather sinned, God never allows mankind to touch the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24). In the New Heaven and the New Earth, there is no more sin and mankind can once again go to the Tree of Life which becomes a symbol of the eternal life.

The New Heaven and the New Earth is so wonderful because it is the place to be with God and with Christ, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.” (Revelation 21:3). God’s throne and His glory are amidst us, “The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun,

for the Lord God will give them light.” (Revelation 22:3, 5).

As to what exactly the New Jerusalem is, there are various perspectives. “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2). The majority of Dispensationalism believe these are literal descriptions such as the size of the city. Non-Dispensationalism believes they are symbolic descriptions but they have different interpretations regarding what those descriptions are symbolic for. Many supporters of Amillennialism believe that the “New Jerusalem” is not a particular place, rather it refers to the saved people as this city is also called “Christ’s Bride” as Revelation 21:2 says: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Furthermore, the bride can converse: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.” (Revelation 22:17). In the New Testament “bride” always refers to Church.

If “New Jerusalem” is a specific place then she must be the “New Heaven and New Earth”, otherwise it is difficult to explain why outside the city are “the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Revelation 22:15); they apparently are people who should be in the Lake of Fire. If “New Jerusalem” refers to the saved people, then they are the ones live inside “the New Heaven and the New Earth”.

Regardless whether “New Jerusalem” refers to people or a place, Bible describes believers’ eternal belonging place as a “city” where residence is the heaven and the earth; furthermore there are resurrected “bodies”. All these mean believers have real lives in the eternity which is not just some elusive and

intangible circumstance. Although we cannot clearly understand how this eternal hometown is going to be like, we know for sure that it is going to be a magnificent place and a magnificent life because it is where we will be with God and the Lamb forevermore.