

WE BELIEVE

Exploring the core beliefs
of our Christian Faith
Part 2



CONTENTS

Introduction

How to use this workbook Pg 3

The Nicene Creed

Pg 4

Section 9

The Church

Pg 5

Section 10

The Christian

Pg 21

Section 11

The Gospel

Pg 35

Section 12

God's Grace

Pg 42

Section 13

Sin

Pg 50

Section 14

Faith, Salvation & Repentance

Pg 55

Section 15

The Christian Life

Pg 66

Section 16

Last Things

Pg 81

How to use this workbook

This workbook is designed to help you consider the foundations of your Christian faith.

Each question in the workbook is based on the Nicene Creed or explores a concept that emerges from it.

Each question has a set of scriptures that will help you find answers. The answers are often in the scriptures.

Read the question and the scriptures and see if you can put down an answer. Write your thoughts and ideas in the lines provided. Try to answer the question and not just write down what you think you know about this subject.

GCI's answers to the questions are located in the column along side, on the same page. Where necessary I have added comments to assist you in understanding the concept.

Feel free to read other books and articles in order to understand the ideas presented. Studying theology is always very profitable when it's done in community, so it's a great idea to work with a friend or in a study group or by WhatsApp if you are separated.

Some of the concepts in the Nicene Creed and therefore those in this booklet are hard to understand because they try to describe a God who is spiritual. Scholars have debated many of these concepts for centuries and not all of them agree. So don't be discouraged if you feel you need to question a concept or need to talk to someone about something you don't understand.

I trust you will love learning about our great God.

Gill Khoury

GCI Pastor South Africa

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy, all-embracing and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.



SECTION 9
THE CHURCH

9.5

What are the identifying characteristics of the church?

(The Creed is included at the beginning of the book.)

The Creed mentions four specific traits of the church. How would you put those traits in your own words? 

Your answer: 

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9.6

In what sense is the church one?

* Eph. 4:5-6 * Rom. 12:5 * 1 Cor. 12:20 *
Col. 3:15 * 1 Cor. 12:12

1) What does the unity of the church tell us about God? 

2) When differences exist among Christians, is the church still one? How so? What is our one-ness or unity based one? 

Your answer: 

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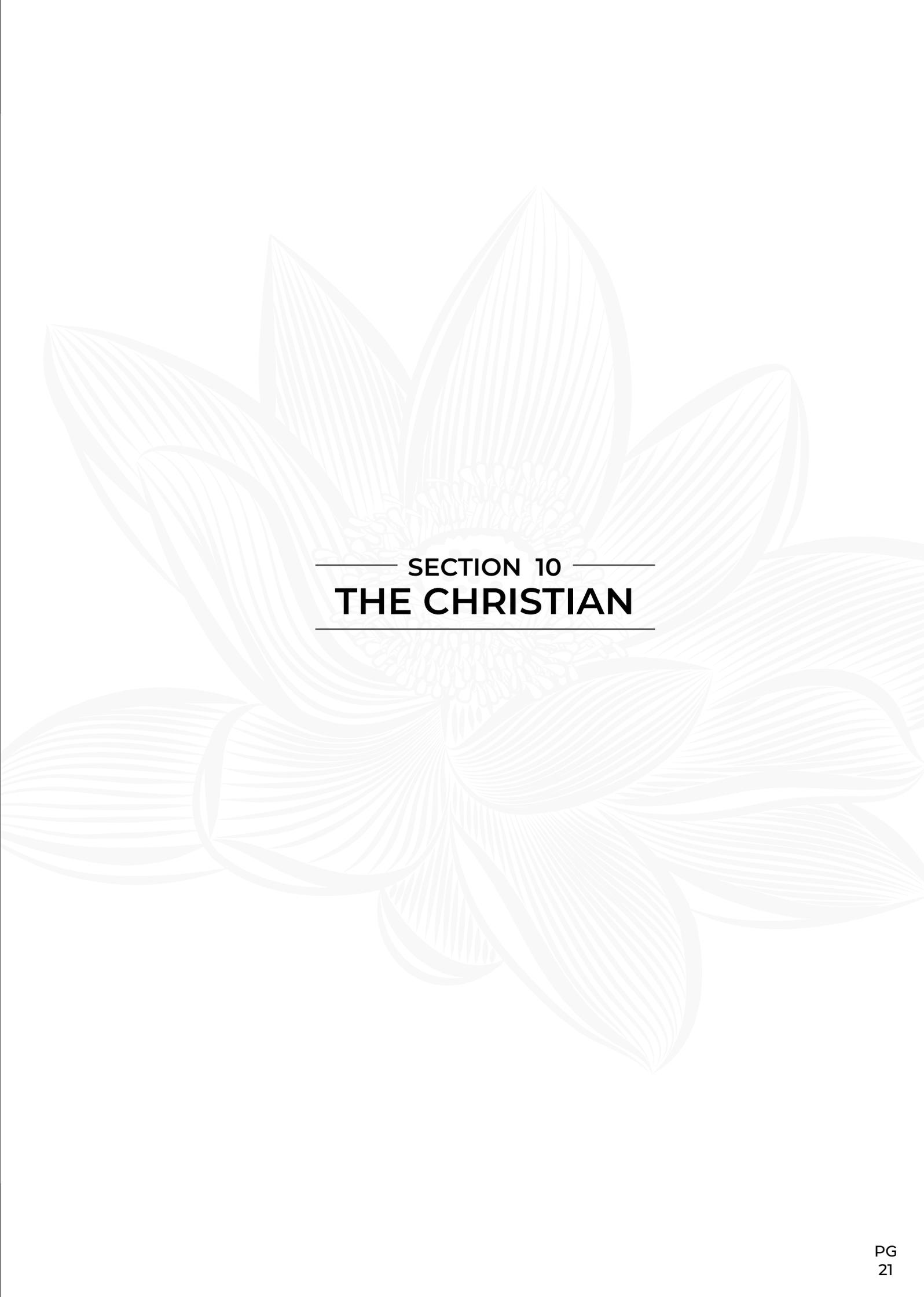
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*GCI believes:
The Creed lists four identifying "marks" of the church: one, holy, all-encompassing and apostolic.*

*GCI believes:
The church is called one because it is the company of all faithful people who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, as he has and continues to give himself to them by his Word and the Holy Spirit. The members of the church are one because they form the one body of Christ, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." The church is called to express this unity in all relationships between believers.*



SECTION 10
THE CHRISTIAN

10.5

How should a Christian treat non-Christians and people of other religions?

* Luke 12:12 * John 14:26 * Rom. 8:26

Do you feel comfortable relating to people with different belief systems? 

Your answer: 

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10.6

Why are Christians people of prayer?

* Ps. 48:1; 96:8-9 * James 5:16 * 1 John 1:9
* Ps. 107:8; 75:1; 50:15 * Ps. 145:18

Write a definition of prayer that describes your understanding. 

Your answer: 

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GCI believes:

As much as possible, we should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. We should express our faith with humility and devotion, as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. On the one hand, we should avoid compromising the truth, but on the other hand we should not refuse to listen to or engage with those who disagree with us. In short, we should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord's welcome

GCI believes:

Prayer means calling upon God, whose Spirit is always present with us, moving us to prayer. In prayer, we approach God with reverence, confidence and humility. Prayer involves both addressing God in praise, confession, thanksgiving and supplication, and listening for God's Word within our hearts and minds echoing his written word. Prayer brings us into communion with God. The more our lives are rooted in prayer, the more we sense how wonderful God is in grace, purity, majesty and love. Prayer means offering our lives completely to God, submitting ourselves to God's will, and waiting faithfully for God's grace. Through prayer, God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service, and deepens our faith. Through prayer, our minds and hearts are being conformed to God's will and heart.

GCI believes:

No. We do not pray to change God's mind or to get God to do what he is reluctant to do. Rather, we pray to discern what God wills and wants. As we pray to the Father, the Spirit enables us to join with Jesus our High Priest in his prayers. Prayer is communion with our triune God.

GCI believes:

God takes all our prayers into account, weighing them with divine wisdom, and responding to them by a perfect will. Although for the time being God's answers may seem beyond our understanding, or even painful, we know nonetheless that they are always determined by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God answers our prayers, particularly for temporal blessings, only in ways that are compatible with the larger purposes of God's glory and our salvation. Giving us communion with God is the heart of all the answers to all our prayers.

10.7

What is the purpose of prayer?

* Eph. 6:18 * Ps. 62:8; 139:1 * Phil. 4:6

* Matt. 7:7-8

How has prayer helped form your faith? 

Your answer: 

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10.8

How does God respond to a Christian's prayers?

* 1 John 5:14 * James 1:17 * Matt. 6:33

Imagine a friend tells you, "God didn't answer my prayer." In light of who our loving God is, how would you respond to them? 

Your answer: 

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10.9

What encourages a Christian to pray each day?

* Is. 65:24 * Luke 11:12-13 * Phil. 4:8

* Eph. 3:20-21 * 1 John 4:19

Describe your motivation for wanting to speak to God through prayer? 

Your answer: 

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10.10

What prayer serves as the Christian's pattern for prayer?

* Matt. 6:

What can the Lord's Prayer teach us about prayer?

Your answer: 

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GCI believes:

The God who has adopted us as his children is the heavenly Father who encourages and commands us to pray. When we do, we are responding with love to that greater love which meets us from above. Before we enter into prayer, God is ready to grant all that we truly need. We may turn to God with confidence each day, not because we are worthy, but simply because of God's grace. By praying, we acknowledge that we depend on grace for all that is good, beautiful, life-giving and true. Prayer is an essential aspect of our relationship with our triune God as one of the fundamental disciplines of our life in Christ.

Comment:

While we can pray in all circumstances, it's helpful at times, if it is the primary activity.

GCI believes:

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives us a pattern for prayer in what is commonly called The Lord's Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-13, NKJV)



SECTION 11
THE GOSPEL

11.1

What is the gospel?

Describe the gospel in your own words. 

Your answer: 

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*GCI believes:
The gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God and salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To preach the gospel is to proclaim the fulfillment of God's purposes through the sending of the eternal Son of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to break into our fallen world, overthrow its evil, and transform and redeem all who were captive to sin and evil's power and eternal consequences.*

11.2

What are the central events of the gospel?

- * 1 Cor. 15:1-4 * Rom. 5:15 * John 1:12
- * 1 John 5:11-12

What do the central events of Jesus' life mean to you? 

Your answer: 

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*GCI believes:
The central events of the gospel are about Jesus: his birth, life, ministry, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Through these events in the life of Jesus, God's kingdom has broken into our time and space to bring about our salvation.*

*Comment:
Each of these events is central to the gospel and no one event is more important than the other. Christianity involves believing all of these events as historical realities.*

11.4

How should we respond to the gospel?

* Rom. 10:9-10 * Acts 16:31

If a person already believes with their heart, why might it be important to confess with their mouth? Reflect on how this might be connected to witness.

Your answer:

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11.5

If sin is so evil, how can God forgive it?

* Ps. 103:10-14

Share how it makes you feel that God does not deal with you according to your sins?

Your answer:

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GCI believes:

We should respond to the gospel with repentance and faith. The Son of God was sent by the Father to assume our human nature to himself and to rescue and transform it in himself. This was done to reconcile us to God so that we might become his beloved adopted children. Jesus Christ came, lived and died for our sins and has made us his, before and apart from our believing in him. He has bound us to himself by his love in such a way that he will never let us go. Therefore, the Lord calls on all humans to repent and believe in him as Lord and Savior.

GCI believes:

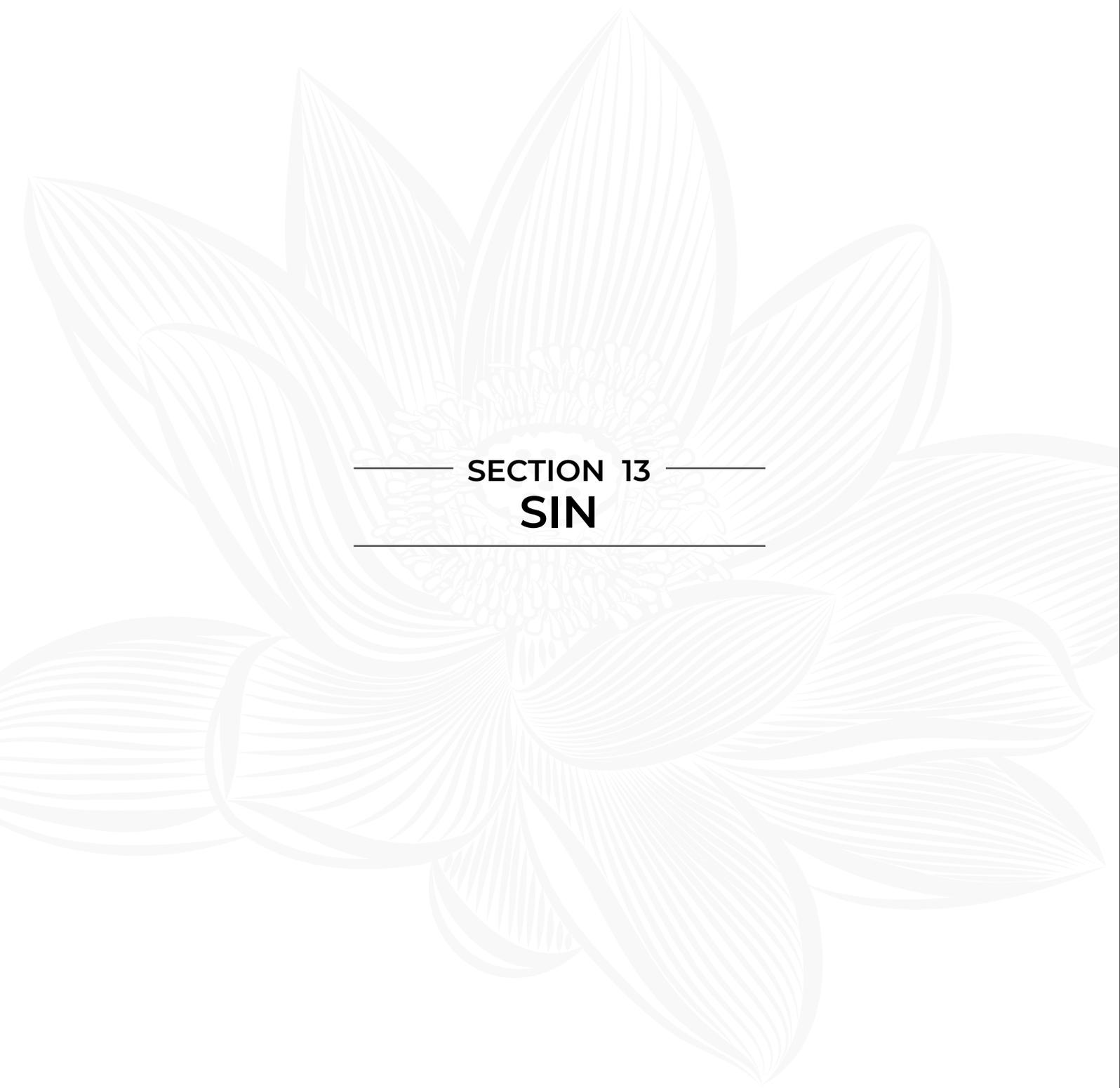
God forgives our sins because he has the grace and power to overcome them and set things right. In forgiving our sins, God is not overlooking or ignoring evil. God is opposed to sin and evil and always will be. God judges what is sinful and evil and condemns it. By forgiving us, God rescues us from the dominion and eternal consequences of sin, making all things new, including our human nature.

Comment:

Within the death of Jesus there is a dual atonement. Jesus not only bore the impact of sin on the lives of humans but he also bore the revulsion of God towards sin.



SECTION 12
GOD'S GRACE



SECTION 13
SIN



SECTION 14

FAITH, SALVATION & REPENTANCE

GCI believes:

No. Faith is the kind of knowledge that results from the open and personal consideration of the revelation of God given through the Person of Jesus and the testimony to that revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Faith has an object that can be known and understood, namely the objective revelation that culminates in the Person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Faith is the personal knowledge of God based on God's own achievement of self-revelation. As such it is public knowledge.

GCI believes:

No. Christian faith is not the result of an act of will or the decision of an individual to affirm or assume something. Faith is a response to the object of revelation, conveyed primarily through hearing, not seeing. Faith has a subjective aspect that is required for all knowledge. Faith involves the humility and at least a mustard seed of trust that corresponds to hearing the truth of what is revealed in God's Word, both living and written. That mustard seed of trust and humility is a gift of the Holy Spirit who works in our subjectivity, but is not our subjectivity or subjective states.

Comment:

Whether we exhibit faith in Christ or not does not affect whether he existed or whether he is true. Faith is based on a real person, not on our own experiences

14.2

Is Christian faith irrational?

* Heb. 11:1

The term irrational can mean lacking reason or logic. How has your relationship with the Holy Spirit formed what you believe is reasonable? 

Your answer: 

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14.3

Is Christian faith purely subjective?

* Rom 10:17

Reflect on how trust and humility can begin as a very small mustard seed, given by the Holy Spirit. How does this move you to gratitude? 

Your answer: 

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14.9

Will all people be saved?

- * Heb. 10:31 * Rom. 11:32 * Matt. 18:12-14
- * Eph. 2:8 * 1 Tim. 2:3-4 * John 3:17-18
- * Ezek. 18:32 * 2 Cor. 5:14-15 * Rom. 10:13
- * Matt 7:21

All who call upon the Lord will be saved.
How is this comforting? 

Your answer: 

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14.10

Through salvation, do humans eventually become God?

- * 2 Cor. 3:18

Jesus was and still is human. How does knowing this help you connect with God? 

Your answer: 

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*GCI believes:
All who call upon the Lord will be saved. No one who seeks after God will be turned away. God's work of atonement was accomplished for the benefit of all. Jesus is Lord and Savior over all persons, though Scripture does not say that all people will necessarily receive the salvation that is theirs in Christ, or that none will irreversibly reject the ministry of the Holy Spirit to unite them to Christ. Salvation is the fruit of a relationship with the triune God—a gift that is complete in Jesus and that must, through the work of the Spirit, be personally received in order for its benefits, especially eternal life in eternal communion with God,*

*GCI believes:
No. Though ultimate salvation does not make us God (or parts of God), it does give us a full sharing in the sanctified and glorified humanity of Jesus Christ. We remain human, becoming fully and truly human as Jesus was and still is. Through the incarnate Son of God, we enjoy union and communion with the whole of God, while remaining fully human.*



SECTION 15
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

GCI believes:

If they have not already been baptized, they should, following proper instruction, be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and thus into membership in his body, the Church.

Comment:

We are baptized into the Body of Christ, not a denomination. Therefore a person who has been baptized previously should not need to be re-baptized if they move churches.

GCI believes:

God first draws us into a deepening and personal worship relationship with him. His desire in doing so is that, through the relationship, we will be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, under the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, which are the infallible and final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

15.1

What should a person do once they have turned to God for salvation in repentance and faith?

* Matt. 28:19-20 * 1 Cor. 12:13

In what way is baptism an outward symbol of our faith? 

Your answer: 

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15.2

What does God desire to accomplish in a Christian's life?

* 2 Cor. 3:18

God's desire is to be in a relationship with you. What feelings does this bring up for you? 

Your answer: 

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15.3

How are Christians to conduct their lives?

- * 1 John 3:16, 23-24; 4:20-21 * 2 Cor. 5:15
- * Eph. 2:10 * Gal. 5:6, 22-23 * Eph. 5:9
- * John 14:23-26 * Col. 1:9-12 * Eph. 5:1-2
- * Rom. 12:9-21 * Eph 4:17-20

How have you experienced trusting God to be difficult at times? 

Your answer: 

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15.4

How does God accomplish this transformation in a Christian's life?

- * Acts 2:42 * Heb. 10:23 * Heb. 10:25
- * Ps. 133:1 * Heb. 12:14 * Ps. 139:23-24

1. How have you experienced the ministry of the Holy Spirit? 

2. What is the role of fellowship within this transformation? 

Your answer: 

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GCI believes:

The life of a Christian is characterised by trust in and loving allegiance to Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us. Trust in Jesus is expressed by belief in the gospel, by baptism, and through participation in our Lord's works of love. Through the Spirit, Jesus transforms the hearts of believers, producing in them his love, joy, peace, faithfulness, meekness, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control, righteousness and truth.

GCI believes:

God transforms us over time through corporate worship (including Word and sacrament), private worship (including prayer, Bible reading and study), fellowship with God's people, pursuit of holiness of life, witness toward those who do not know Christ, and acts of love toward all. All these take effect in us only by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who frees and enables us to share in the regenerated and renewed humanity of Jesus Christ.

15.7

What is sanctification?

* Heb. 2:11; 10:10, 14; 12:10, 14 * Eph. 4:24;
* 1 Cor. 1:30 * 2 Cor. 7:1

Describe your desire to grow in trust of Jesus.

Your answer:

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15.8

What is glorification?

* Rom. 8:30 * 1 Cor. 15:42, 49 * Rev. 20:5-6 *
Phil. 3:10-11

How do you yearn or hope for the future, "not yet" dynamics of the Christian life?

Your answer:

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*GCI believes:
Sanctification is the dynamic relationship with God that begins to take place as we receive the good news of our justification. By the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, we begin to share more in the life of Christ—growing deeper in relationship with him, trusting more and more in him in every situation in life, and so becoming more and more conformed to him.*

*GCI believes:
Sanctification anticipates receiving from Christ our glorification, which completes our sanctification. While our sanctification points to or leads to our glorification, it will not be fully experienced until we pass through death and Christ returns. Only then, in the new heaven and new earth in the age to come, will we benefit fully in Christ and so share fully in his glorified human nature for all eternity.*

*Comment:
Many scriptures link glorification with resurrection. In our new bodies, we will share fully in Christ's nature and glory.*

15.14

Why should Christians be loyal to God above all others?

- * Deut. 6:5, 14 * 1 John 5:21 * Ex. 34:14
- * Rom. 1:22-23 * Phil. 2:4 * Matt. 6:24; 10:37
- * Prov. 9:10

What are some ways you express your trust in the triune God?

Your answer:

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15.15

Why should Christians submit to and respect those in authority?

- * Eph. 5:21 * Rom. 12:10 * Eph. 6:2 *
- * Prov. 1:8 * Lev. 19:32 * Luke 2:51 *
- * 1 Pet. 2:17 * Acts 5:29

How is having respect for others (whether they are in authority or not) showing love?

Your answer:

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GCI believes:

For a Christian, no loyalty should come before loyalty to the triune God. We should worship and serve only God, expect all good from God alone, and love, fear and honor God with all our heart, mind and strength. To treat or trust anything other than the triune God as though it were God, is to practice idolatry. To assume that one's own interests are more important than anything else, is to make them into idols, in effect making an idol of oneself.

GCI believes:

Though we owe reverence and worship to God alone, we respect those in positions of authority, including our parents. There are limits to obeying those in authority, including parents. No mere human being is God. Blind obedience is not required of us, for everything should be tested by loyalty and obedience to God, according to God's Word. When it seems as though we should not obey, we should always be alert to possible self-deception, and pray that we may walk in the truth of God's will.

15.18

Why should Christians not lie?

- * Zech. 8:16-17 * 1 Pet. 3:16 * Prov. 14:5;
- * James 4:11 * 1 Pet. 4:8 * Rom. 3:13, 15
- * Prov. 31:8-9 * Matt. 7:1-2

In the scriptures above, we are asked to speak up for the rights of the poor. How is that related to lying? 

Your answer: 

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15.19

What is the Christian view of marriage?

- * Gen. 2:18-22 * Matt. 19:4 * Eph. 5:22-23
- * 1 Cor. 7:1-5 * Rom 1:24-27 * 1 Tim 3:2

In what ways does "a unity—a difference and a harmonious coordination of being and action in holy loving" describe Christ's Bride, the church? 

Your answer: 

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*GCI believes:
God forbids us to damage the honor or reputation of our neighbors. We should not say false things against anyone for the sake of money, favor or friendship, for the sake of revenge, or for any other reason. God requires that we speak the truth, to speak well of our neighbors when we can, and to view the faults of our neighbors with tolerance when we cannot, and to be true to our word. Lying dishonors God and destroys trust between human beings.*

*Comment:
Ignoring the plight of the poor can be equal to pretending it doesn't exist. On the contrary, we are to stand up for the poor and make their challenges known.*

*GCI believes:
As revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and as stated by Jesus, God established marriage as an exclusive, sacred union between one man and one woman. That union is a unique, living witness that reflects and honors God's covenant relationship with his people in Jesus Christ. It is a union that involves a unity—a difference and a harmonious coordination of being and action in holy loving. That unity, which normally has the potential to be fruitful by generating new-born life, bears witness to the life-giving nature of the triune God through the union and communion of the Father and Son in the Spirit. Christian marriage, lived as a witness to God's faithfulness, honours God and builds trust between human beings, especially between men and women.*



SECTION 16
LAST THINGS

16:1

What is meant by Jesus' "second coming"?

* John 14:3 * Rev. 1:7 * Matt. 24:30 *
* 1 Thess. 4:15-17 * Rev. 12:10-12; 22:12

Do we need to wait until Jesus' second coming to enjoy placing our trust in him? 

Your answer: 

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16:2

What is "the resurrection of the dead"?

* John 5:25-29 * 1 Thess. 4:13-17

What comfort do you take from a resurrection of the dead? 

Your answer: 

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GCI believes:

The Holy Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ, who came to earth first (his "first coming") through his virgin birth, will come again in what is often called his "second coming." The glorified human Jesus will return bodily to earth in power and glory to judge the dead and reign over all nations in the fullness of the kingdom of God. This return will inaugurate the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment, which will bring to an end all evil and usher in the reward of a new heaven and new earth to be enjoyed by all who place their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and humbly receive his welcome into his eternal rule and reign.

GCI believes:

When Jesus returns, he will resurrect back to a new kind of bodily life all who have died throughout human history. This is commonly referred to as the "general resurrection."

