



## Common Questions

Many people are open to believing in something spiritual or religious and even in Christianity, but they have questions. Maybe they wonder if God exists or if Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. In this section, you will find responses to some of the most common questions people have as they consider the claims of the Christian faith.

### Does God Exist?

Think about a person you've talked to or emailed but never met. How do you know that person really exists? You know because you've seen enough evidence to convince you of it—perhaps a photograph or knowing an acquaintance or hearing that person's voice.

The same is true with God. We believe in Him because He has given us enough evidence to prove that He exists. In other words, He hasn't hidden Himself from us; instead, He has revealed Himself or made Himself known to us. God wants us to know Him—and has done everything He needs to do to make that possible.

How has He done this? One way is through His Word, the Bible, which He has given to us to better understand who He is. Another way is through the physical world He created, with all of its beauty and complexity and wonder. Isn't it more logical to believe God created it than to believe it happened by chance? The Bible says, "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" (Romans 1:20).

But God also revealed Himself to us in an even greater way: by coming to earth and becoming a man. That man was Jesus Christ—God revealed in human flesh, "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Jesus was fully man but also fully God.

Still, some will say science doesn't support God's existence because it can't be proven through a chemical formula or some other complex equation. But think about this: happiness, beauty and love can't be proven or measured by a laboratory experiment, either, yet that doesn't mean they aren't real. In fact, many well-known and accomplished scientists are convinced that science alone can't explain where we come from or why we're here. They realize that science itself points to an all-wise, all-powerful Creator. The Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands" (Psalm 19:1).

God doesn't just exist, but He loves you and wants a relationship with you. That relationship is possible through Jesus Christ, who came to demonstrate God's love by dying on a cross and rising again three days later. His death paid for our sins and provided a way to eternal life. Don't remain filled with doubt, but turn to Christ and open your heart and life to Him.

## What Is God Like?

The Bible gives us a full revelation of what God is like. There are hundreds of things we could say about God as revealed in the Bible, but here are four to focus on:

**First**, the Bible declares God to be Spirit. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is talking to a woman at the well. He makes a straightforward statement about God when He says simply, "God is Spirit." You might envision a sort of cloudy vapor, but that is not a picture of God. You can find out what Spirit is from these words of Christ after His resurrection: "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39, NKJV). Spirit is the opposite of body, something that is not limited by a body.

The Bible declares that God is Spirit, that He is not limited to body, shape, force or boundaries. He is absolutely immeasurable and unfathomable to eyes that are limited to physical things. He can be everywhere at the same time. He has unlimited wisdom, power, love and mercy.

The Bible teaches that there was no time when God did not exist. He is eternal—He has no beginning or end—and unchanging—He is the same today and forever.

**Second**, the Bible reveals God as a Person. Everywhere in the Bible we read: "God loves;" "God says;" "God does." Everything that we attribute to a person is attributed to God. A person is one who feels, thinks, wishes, desires and has all the expressions of a personality. God is not bound by a body, but He is a person. He feels, thinks, loves and forgives.

**Third**, the Bible declares that God is a holy and righteous Being. From Genesis to Revelation, God reveals Himself as a holy God. He is perfect in every detail. He is too holy to endure sinful living because He is a good, perfect God.

If we could ever get a vision of God's majestic righteousness, what a tremendous difference it would make in the way our nations live. If we could once see the appalling difference that separates our unrighteousness from God's perfect righteousness, it would change our way of living immediately. We all fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).

The Scripture declares God to be Light in whom there is "no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). It is impossible to understand the Bible unless you have a clear understanding of the holiness of God. His holiness determines all His other attributes.

Because God is holy, a gap exists between God and us, the sinners. The Scripture says, "your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2, NKJV). Not only is the sinner separated from God, but God is separated from the sinner. Because God is holy, He can have nothing to do with sin.

Before sin came into the world, humanity and God had fellowship with each other. Now that fellowship is broken, and it is impossible for a sinner to have any contact with God unless it's through Jesus Christ. People do not possess, nor can they acquire, the sinlessness that is necessary to access God. Christ, however, came to make such access possible.

**Fourth**, God is love. Many people have misunderstood that part of God's nature. The fact that God is love does not mean that everything is sweet, beautiful and happy and that God's love could not possibly allow punishment for sin.

God's holiness demands that all sin be punished, but God's love provided a plan of redemption and salvation for sinful people. It was the love of God that sent Jesus Christ to the cross: "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).

No matter what sin you have committed, no matter how dirty, shameful or terrible it may be, God loves you. But it is up to you to believe in Jesus Christ, ask forgiveness for your sins and receive His gift of eternal life.

Some people might say: "I still can't understand God. Therefore, I can't receive Him." I can't understand how a black cow can eat green grass and produce white milk, but I drink milk. I don't refuse to turn on my radio because I can't understand how it works. Every day, we do thousands of things that we don't fully understand.

It is impossible for limited human minds to understand God completely. That's where faith comes in. By faith, I receive His plan for my redemption. I trust Christ as my Savior.

If you don't believe we have a sufficient revelation that answers the question of what God is like, you will never be satisfied because all discussion outside of the Bible—God's Word—is speculative. Every other idea about God is the product of the imagination or reasoning of a mere man; your guess is as good as anyone else's.

## **Is Jesus God?**

Some say Jesus Christ was just a man, or maybe a great teacher. But He was and is much more than that. The Bible says Jesus is unique in both His person and His purpose. He wasn't just some spiritual individual during His time on earth; He was both God's Son (John 3:16) and God Himself—God in human flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). Yes, He was fully man, but He was also fully God (Colossians 2:9).

## **The Claims**

Jesus claimed to be God. It might be hard to understand how this could be true, but it's important to remember that God is much bigger and more powerful than we can comprehend. We do know that Jesus said He existed before Abraham (John 8:58). He claimed that He and His Father are one (John 10:30), and that He is equal with the Father (John 5:17-18).

Not only did He claim to be God, but He also claimed to have the power of God. He said He has the authority to judge the nations (Matthew 25:31-46). He claims the authority to raise people from the dead (John 5:25-29) and to forgive sins (Mark 2:5-7)—things only God can do (I Samuel 2:6; Isaiah 43:25).

Further, Jesus says He has the power to answer prayers (John 14:13-14), and that He will be with His followers always (Matthew 28:20). The New Testament equates Jesus to the creator of the universe (John 1:3), and in John 16:15, He says, “All that belongs to the Father is mine.”

## But Where’s the Proof?

Claiming to be something, as Jesus claimed to be God, doesn’t make it true. Where’s the evidence that He is God?

Jesus’ identity isn’t based solely on what He says, but on what He does. And He has left a lot of evidence that He is God. That evidence includes fulfilled prophecy and recorded miracles in which Jesus reversed the laws of nature. He also lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15), something no one else has done.

The ultimate proof of His divinity, however, was His resurrection from the dead after His death on the cross. No one else has ever risen from the dead on his own.

## Did Jesus Ever Say, ‘I Am God’?

If someone said to you, “I am God,” would you believe him? Many people who believe in one God would think the person is blaspheming. Even if Jesus said the exact words, “I am God,” many people would not have believed Him or even heard what He had to say. Yet, He did give us reasons to believe such a claim without using these words.

In Luke 4:8, Jesus says, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’” He said and showed many times that He is the Lord. Jesus says, for example, that He is “the first and the last” (Revelation 1:17, 22:13), which God the Father says in Isaiah 44:6.

But maybe you’re looking for a place in the Bible where Jesus says, “I am God; worship me” in those exact words. If we suggest that Jesus could only claim to be God by saying that one sentence, we might also ask where He says, “I am a great teacher, but not God,” or, “I am just a prophet; don’t worship me.” The Bible doesn’t say that, either.

The good news is that Jesus told us He is God in many different ways! He has made it clear that He and God the Father are one (John 10:30), and says in John 14:6, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Who else could claim these things except God?

## Does That Mean There Are Multiple Gods?

Believing Jesus is God doesn’t mean there are multiple gods. It can be difficult to understand, but followers of Jesus believe in one God in three persons (God the Father, God the Son—Jesus, and the Holy Spirit). God is one but has three roles, just like a person today might be a father, an employee and a husband. Each person of God (the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) has a separate function, but all are united as one God—one in purpose, essence and nature, and equal in power and glory.

## How Can Jesus Be God if He Is God's Son?

If Jesus is God's Son, does that mean God had a wife?

God has never had a wife. Calling Jesus God's Son is an expression of His role in relation to God the Father. Unlike us, Jesus was not conceived by two earthly parents; He was born of a virgin through a miraculous work of God. He was born holy, without sin.

Being born of a virgin might seem impossible—even Jesus' mother, Mary, asked, "How will this be?" (Luke 1:34)—yet God is all-powerful and made a way for the holy Jesus to be born a human. In Matthew 1:20, an angel tells Mary's fiancé, Joseph, that what is conceived in Mary "is from the Holy Spirit." Jesus was not born out of a sexual relationship between God and Mary, but instead out of a miracle by God through the Holy Spirit. Jesus was both fully God and fully human.

It is also significant that the most thorough Gospel account of the virgin birth was written by Luke, a medical doctor. If anyone knew the impossibility of a virgin birth, it was Luke—yet, after careful research, he concluded that it was a fact. The God who was powerful enough to create the universe was also powerful enough to bring Jesus into the world without a human father. His miraculous birth is just one more testament to His deity.

## Why Should We Care Who Jesus Is?

There is one way to heaven, one way to be free from your sin and to have a relationship with God. That's through Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." To have eternal life in heaven, you must put your trust in Jesus. Here's why:

We all sin, meaning we all fall short of God's perfect standard. The consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23). That means eternal separation from God. But because Jesus lived a sinless life, His death on the cross provided the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Because He defeated death by rising again, we can have eternal life in the presence of God when we put our trust in Him.

Hundreds of people saw and believed in the risen Christ after His death and resurrection, and countless people in the past 2,000 years have discovered that only Jesus can meet the deepest longings and needs of the human heart. In Jesus Christ alone "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

## Can We Trust What the Bible Says About Him?

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is God, and there are many reasons we can trust the Bible. (Find "[Is the Bible true?](#)" under the Common Questions section for five of them.)

Not only do we have many reasons to believe that the text of the Bible is true, but many will find that reading the Bible allows God to speak to them—perhaps not audibly, but through His words.

While there are different translations of the Bible, the same core message is the same—that God loves us and freely offers us eternal life if we accept Jesus as our Savior. Different translations exist in an effort

to make the Bible understandable to various audiences; however, the major doctrines—and the person of Jesus Christ—remain the same.

If you're curious about Jesus or what the Bible says about Him, read the book of John in the Bible. It's a great place to start.

## Is Jesus the Only Way to Heaven?

How is Christianity different from every other religion in the world? The answer focuses on Jesus Christ, "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

Christ means "anointed one." It is the term for the ancient Hebrew word Messiah — the anointed one whom God would send to save His people. The first believers of the early Christian church recognized Jesus as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Their period of world history was full of discouragement and despair. The promised Messiah shone as a beacon in the darkness, and His light has never dimmed: "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).

Today, as world leaders struggle with seemingly insurmountable problems, this darkening and menacing situation accentuates the brightness of the One who proclaimed, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Jesus alone can offer eternal life because He is the only one who lived a sinless life and provided the perfect sacrifice for our sins by His death on the cross. He lived on earth as man, but was also divine. Because He was divine, He rose again three days after His death—the only one ever to die and come back to life on His own—then ascended into heaven. While the founders of various non-Christian religions of the world have died and been buried, Christ is very much alive!

Jesus was the only one to claim to be God and the only one to prove it. In His words, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Because the Bible is God's inspired Word and God cannot lie, it does not contradict itself or teach falsehoods. It is in this very Scripture that Jesus is revealed.

**Jesus made a way for you to be with Him forever in heaven. Read more at [PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net).**

## What Is Truth?

Some people think there is no absolute truth. "Truth" for them is simply what they think. Everything is relative, and what is true for them might not be true for others.

People have all kinds of ideas about truth. Whatever your view is, you would be wise to consider what Jesus Christ taught about truth. He taught not only that there is truth, but also that He *is* the Truth. In His words, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He also taught about lies and said Satan is the father of lies.

Satan's lies started in the Garden of Eden. When God created man and woman, He placed them in a beautiful and perfect environment. God said, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 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 2:16-17).

Then Satan came along in the form of a serpent and said, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?' ... You will not certainly die" (Genesis 3:1, 4).

In our generation, people question whether the Bible is really the Word of God. They put doubt in people's minds, asking, "Did God really say that?" (See "[Is the Bible true?](#)" for more.)

Adam and Eve had to make a choice between God's truth and the devil's lie. They chose the devil's lie. And today our sinful nature also sides with the lie instead of the truth. Jesus said, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19-20).

From the moment we are born, we have a tendency to sin. Our moral universe is out of focus, and we won't get it back into focus until we come to Christ. We accept lies as truth and truth as lies. We don't know what's right and what's wrong.

We don't have to be taught to sin; we inherit it. The question is, what will we do about it? How can we escape the deception and delusion that plague our world?

Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). He also said, "I am the ... truth" (John 14:6).

Jesus told the truth about many things, including repentance—asking forgiveness for your sins. He said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:3). Unless we turn to Christ and try to change our sinful lives, we will suffer. We will be eternally separated from God. But if we put our faith in Christ, we can enjoy eternity with Him in heaven!

Regardless of what people say they believe about truth, the fact is that every day, we live our lives on the basis of things we believe are true. We step onto airplanes that we believe will fly. We flip switches that we believe will bring desired results.

Yet in Jesus Christ we have the most profound truth. He is the only One who can bring peace and joy and the total satisfaction you have been searching for.

## Is the Bible True?

It's easy to quote the Bible and call it truth, but how do we *know*? Is there proof? Here are five reasons why we can trust what the Bible says:

1. The Bible contains four Gospels, or books about the Good News of Christ and salvation. Those Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The authors knew a lot about Jesus' ministry: Matthew was a tax collector who became one of Jesus' disciples, or followers; Mark worked

with those who started the first churches; Luke was a doctor who carefully investigated the life of Christ and wrote in great detail; and John was also one of Jesus' disciples. The Gospels include eyewitness accounts of Christ's ministry, historically accurate details and were written shortly after Christ's ministry. Non-Christian sources and archaeology also confirm historical facts that appear in the Gospels.

2. Between 25,000 and 30,000 handwritten copies of the New Testament survive today. Ancient church fathers quoted from the New Testament so much that even if these copies were destroyed, nearly all the books could be put back together. Some critics say these copies contain thousands of variants, or differences in text. However, nearly all of these variants are minor, like differences in spelling or using "Jesus" instead of "Lord." None of them change the core message of the New Testament.
3. All four Gospels tell about Jesus' ministry, but include different details. Does that mean these four accounts are in conflict, that they aren't true? The authors wrote to different audiences for different reasons. Matthew wrote to the Jews to prove Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. Mark wrote to Roman Christians to emphasize Christ's teachings and heart for serving others. Luke wrote to Gentiles (non-Jews) to show that Jesus, by living a life without sin, paid the price for our own sins. And John showed new believers that Jesus is the Son of God and those who believe in Him will have eternal life. Each author had a different style of writing, but all four accounts present the same basic truth. The Gospels also include embarrassing accounts, like the disciples failing at times to understand Jesus' teachings. Those testimonies would not have been used by those who called Him Lord if they weren't true.
4. Even without copies of the New Testament, people throughout the centuries have passed on stories of Christ by word of mouth. Plus, there were so many eyewitnesses to Jesus' teachings—think feeding the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish—that an inaccurate detail could easily be crushed.
5. Humans wrote the Bible and humans make mistakes, right? God used the writers to convey His message, guiding them through visions, dreams and their own experiences. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed." God did not move the pen in the writer's hand, but guided him through the process; He inspired the text. Just because humans make mistakes doesn't mean they can't write truthful documents.

Many people reject the Bible without ever actually reading it. But since the Bible claims to answer life's deepest questions, doesn't it make sense to at least listen to what it has to say? Even if you read a paragraph at a time, God can teach you the Bible's truth and use it in your life. You will also discover that Jesus Christ was a real person who loves you and that life's greatest joy comes from following Him.

## **How Do I know I'm Saved?**

### **A Message from Billy Graham**

Some people doubt that they are actually Christians. They *want* to be, but feel like they are missing the joy of the Christian faith.

The dreadful uncertainty that haunts many people grows out of misunderstanding what the Christian experience is. Some people don't seem to know the nature of Christian conversion, while others have been misinformed concerning conversion and seek an experience that is not biblical. Many confuse faith with feeling.

Faith always implies an object—that is, when we believe, we must believe something. That something I call the “fact.” Now let me give you three words that will help you understand the Christian life: *fact*, *faith* and *feeling*. They come in this order, and the order is essential. In this order, you will have the joy and confidence of one who can say, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12).

First, you are saved through a personal faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as defined in the Scriptures. The Gospel refers to the news of Christ's death and resurrection in order to pay the penalty for our sins and provide a way to eternal life.

Though it might at first seem dogmatic and narrow-minded to you, the **fact** remains that there is no other way to be saved from your sins than by God's grace through your faith in Christ. The work of Christ is a fact, His cross is a fact, His tomb is a fact and His resurrection is a fact.

It is impossible to believe anything into existence. The Gospel did not come into being because men and women believed it, and Christ's tomb wasn't empty three days after His death because His followers believed it. The fact preceded the faith. We are psychologically incapable of believing without an object of our faith. Christians do not call upon people to believe something that is not credible, but to believe in the fact of history. Trusting in Christ for your eternal salvation is trusting in a fact—not in a figment of someone's imagination.

**Faith** is the second of these three words. Faith is rationally impossible where there is nothing to believe. Faith must have an object. The object of Christian faith is Christ. Faith means more than agreeing with the claims of Christ; faith involves the will—a decision to believe in Christ. If you say with your mind and your heart, “Yes, I believe in Christ and receive what He has done for me”—that He died for my sins—then you have eternal life. Faith, then, means surrender and commitment to the claims of Christ. It means acknowledging sin and turning to Christ. We do not know Christ through the five physical senses, but we know Him through the “sixth sense” that God has given every man and woman—the ability to believe.

**Feeling** is the last of the three words, and it must remain last in your thinking. I believe that earnest and honest seekers for the salvation of God have unrest and uncertainty when they think they must have some kind of emotion to make conversion a true experience. If you are seeking salvation as it is presented through the Scriptures, you will want to know what kind of experience the Bible says you should have.

Maybe you went to a church altar, to an inquiry room, or knelt beside your radio or TV when an invitation was given to receive Christ. You heard the message, and you knew that you were a sinner in need of a Savior. In your lost and hopeless condition, you looked to Christ for salvation. You believed that He could and would save you. Maybe you read His invitation to sinners: “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

I have read carefully through the New Testament to see just what kind of experience you are entitled to. I have looked to see what the nature of the experience of conversion is, and I have found that the New Testament reveals only one: the experience of faith.

Believing is an experience as real as any experience, yet multitudes are looking for something more — some electric sensation that will bring a thrill to their physical bodies, or some other spectacular event. Many have been told to look for such spiritual thrills, but the Bible says that a man is “justified by faith” (Romans 3:28), and not by feeling. A person is saved by trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross and not by bodily sensations and religious ecstasy.

Still, you might say, “Is there no place in saving faith for any feeling?” Certainly there is room for feeling, but we are not saved by it. Whatever feeling there may be is the result of saving faith, but feeling never saved a single soul.

When I understand something of Christ’s love for me as a sinner, however, I respond with a love for Christ, and love has feeling. Those who love Christ also have a confidence in Him that raises them above all fear.

To have a guilty conscience is also a feeling, and the Bible teaches that Christ cleanses the conscience: “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14).

To have a guilty conscience cleansed and to be free from its constant accusation is an experience, but it is not the cleansing of the conscience that saves you. It is faith in Christ that saves. A cleansed conscience is the effect of a right relationship with God.

Joy is a feeling as well. So is inward peace. Love for others is a feeling. Concern for the lost is a feeling. But these feelings are not conversion. Again, the only experience you can look for and expect is the experience of believing in Jesus Christ.

Finally, someone might say, “I believe the historic facts of the Gospel, but nothing has changed for me. I don’t think I’m saved.” Perhaps you are not, for the faith that saves has one distinguishing quality: Saving faith is a faith that produces obedience. It is a faith that brings about a way of life. Some have successfully imitated this way of life for a time, but for those who trust Christ for salvation, that faith brings about a desire to live out that inward experience of faith. It is a power that results in godly living.

## **What Does it Mean to Be Born Again?**

How can you be “born again” if you’re already living? Aren’t you born only once?

Being born again doesn’t mean a physical rebirth; it’s a spiritual one. It refers to a change of heart—from indifference or hostility toward God to a love for Him and a desire to live out His best for us.

But how does it happen?

First, we have to understand our current human condition. There's a problem we all face, and Jesus said it begins in our hearts. The problem is something called sin, which means to miss the mark—to fail to do what we ought to do.

Whether we realize it or not, we strive to fix this problem ourselves—to somehow compensate for it or push it out of our minds, yet there's still something missing deep down inside. Nothing will fully satisfy us unless we have Jesus in our lives and the eternal hope of being with Him forever in heaven.

There's a story in the Bible about a man named Nicodemus. He was a religious leader and a good man, and one night while talking to Jesus, Nicodemus asked Him what he needed to do to go to heaven. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7). In fact, Jesus said, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jesus was telling Nicodemus that no matter what good he did on the outside, he needed changing on the inside. That can only happen through a supernatural act of God when His Holy Spirit convicts us of wrongdoing and brings new life to our very souls.

So what do we need to do?

First, we must admit our sin—that we can't live up to God's perfect standard on our own. Then we must ask forgiveness for that sin and repent, which means to make every effort in turning away from that sin. Finally, we ask Jesus to be part of our lives.

That's when God's Spirit penetrates our hearts to guide us and help us be more like Him. That's when we're born again.

God Himself puts it this way: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezekiel 36:26). From then on, He gives us a new purpose and new goals for living. We no longer live for ourselves but for Him (II Corinthians 5:15).

**Today, you can experience spiritual rebirth; you can be born again. Visit [PeaceWithGod.net](http://PeaceWithGod.net).**