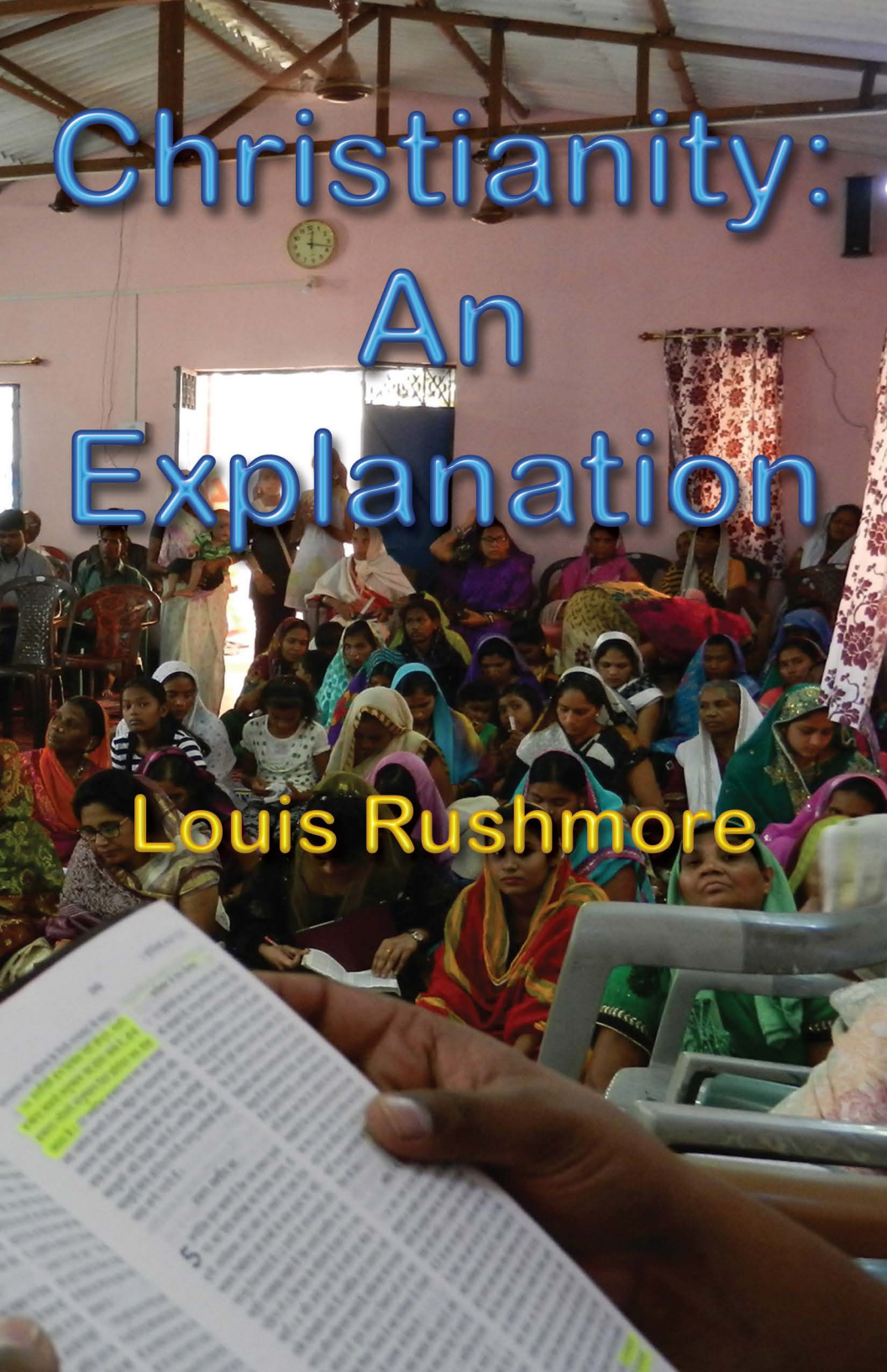
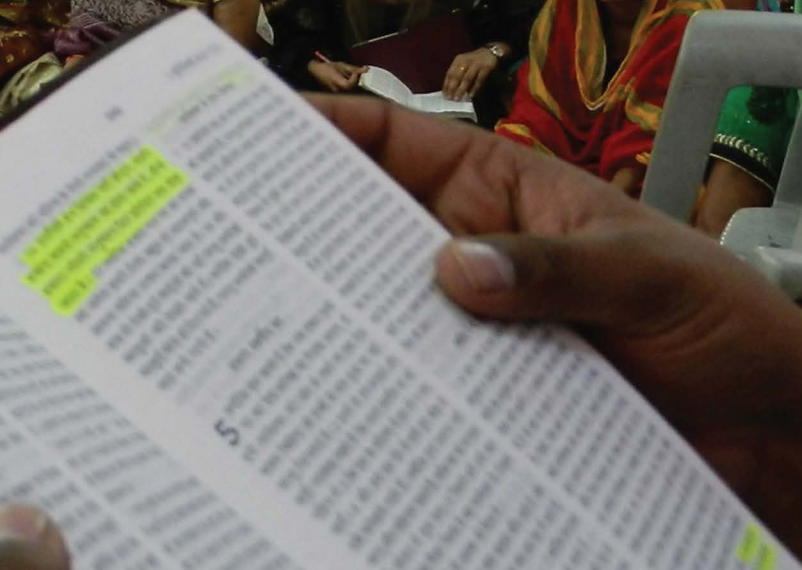


Christianity: An Explanation

Louis Rushmore



Christianity: An Explanation

Louis Rushmore

© 2015 Louis Rushmore
Website: www.gospelgazette.com
Email: rushmore@gospelgazette.com

World Evangelism Media & Missions
705 Devine Street
Winona, Mississippi 38967

Dedication

Bonnie Sue Rushmore
December 25, 1956—May 18, 2015



A book dedication to my late wife Bonnie Sue Rushmore hardly seems an adequate acknowledgement of all she had become as a devoted wife, a loving mother, a conscientious mentor, an edifier of souls and a tireless servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the time of her marriage to me at the ripe old age of 16, my dear Bonnie has followed and accompanied me from the time I myself was only 19-years-old. Through the years, we traipsed the world together during my years in the United States Air Force, our nearly 42 years of Christian ministry and about eight years of foreign mission work. She and I made a feeble attempt to rear three precious children to adulthood. Bonnie touched the hearts and souls literally of thousands of people across the planet through personal and public teaching as well as through her prolific writing of religious articles and books. Accolades and sorrow poured in from hundreds of mourners worldwide, some who had only met her through her writings, through which she and her Christian service live on yet even among readers who have never met her personally. Anything I ever did in this material world or as a child of God, Bonnie was the other half of me helping to accomplish any good that might be attributed to me. On so many levels, there is a tremendous void that cannot be filled in my life, the lives of our children, among Christian friends and among the soldiers of Christ in a sin-embattled world. We finished rearing each other, and she made me the man that I have become, and without her a part of me is missing. I shall always love you in the highest sense of that word. I miss you my sweet Bonnie. We all miss you and long for an eternal reunion someday – maybe not so far into the future. I am ready, Dear.

Louis Rushmore

That's My Mom

Robert Rushmore

“Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies” (Proverbs 31:10). *That's my mom!*

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband...” (Proverbs 12:4). “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her...” (Proverbs 31:11). *That's my mom!*

“Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come” (Proverbs 31:25). *That's my mom!*

“She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness” (Proverbs 31:26). *That's my mom!*

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her... a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised” (Proverbs 31:28, 30). *That's my mom!*

“In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Timothy 2:9-10). *That's my mom!*

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind... Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth...” (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7-8). *That's my mom!*

When God describes a good woman, a virtuous woman, He describes my mom. She was everything a God-fearing woman is supposed to be. A faithful Christian. A devoted wife. A loving mother. So much more. Truly, her price is far above rubies. I Love You—I Miss You!

Author's Preface

Christianity: An Explanation is the second volume in a two-book series. *Christianity: An Introduction* by Wayne Barrier is the first book in the sequence, and it is an outreach book. As such, it is a much smaller volume and satisfactory for mass distribution to acquaint populations domestic and foreign with the fundamentals of the Christian faith and how to become children of God. The two books treat the same topics to different degrees, and they overlap enough to take the student of God's Word on a continuation of learning about the essentials of becoming Christians and ardently practicing Christianity.

Christianity: An Explanation is a special Bible study book for **truth seekers**. Over the course of 26 lessons – two quarters of class material, *Christianity: An Explanation* is designed to take the reader on a journey from being a non-Christian (e.g., children of Christian parents or someone exploring primitive Christianity) or reinforcing one's conversion to fully acquainting him or her with crucial fundamentals of the Christian faith (Hebrews 6:1-2). Hence, *Christianity: An Explanation* leads anyone with an open mind to lay a rock-hard foundation on which **true conversion** and **durable conviction** can be nurtured to heightened plateaus. This makes *Christianity: An Explanation* an ideal selection for a new converts class, too.

If the congregational goal is to convert its adolescents, this is the class book that is a must have. If a church wants to revitalize within its members the internal enthusiasm that manifests itself in zealous demonstration through Christian living and Christian service, *Christianity: An Explanation* is the book for which it has been looking.

In addition, *Christianity: An Explanation* is a go to **resource book** for an abundance of topics that need to be a part of one's basic understanding and appreciation of Christianity. Doubtless, the wealth of material may exceed available class time, but the teacher will always find a suitable reserve from which selections can be made for adaptation to local settings. For instance, sufficient studies are at hand to supply midweek classes, too. Furthermore, teachers and preachers also will find fully developed, rich lessons on a variety of subjects that can stand on their own in other class venues or from the pulpit.

Christianity: An Explanation has been carefully designed through the collaboration of seasoned and experienced minister/missionaries (i.e., Wayne Barrier and Louis Rushmore) with a combined ministry experience exceeding 80 years. First, a complex skeletal outline was molded to address essentials of Christian knowledge. Secondly, the flesh was meticulously crafted and affixed to the outline, which is still discernible from the graduated headings and subheadings throughout the volume. *Christianity: An Explanation* took about two years to write, but largely it is very much the product of fruitful Bible studies over several decades. Obviously, this study book does not address every biblical topic that one could possibly imagine, and yet, *Christianity: An Explanation* contains a thorough explanation of the **Christian faith** from which truth seekers can develop or ramp up a genuine and hardy **personal faith**.

If every child of God had as a basis the invaluable information contained herein, any congregation of which such children of God were members would be more nearly what our Heavenly Father expects of His churches. These congregations would more successfully impact their respective communities with the Gospel of Christ by their Christian deportment and by overtly approaching them confidently with God's Holy Word. If you are interested in seeing your local work thrive, *Christianity: An Explanation* is the book for you.

Moreover, this manuscript is perfect for translation into foreign languages to help stabilize and grow mission plantings. As missionaries, brother Barrier and I imagine that *Walking for Christ* in various native languages could easily take the place of numerous smaller books on a variety of biblical topics. *Christianity: An Explanation*, then, can be an effective and cost efficient tool to further overseas mission work. We plan to implement it for that purpose immediately.

Christianity: An Explanation is the latest and the best book I have written. I am not ashamed to permit this treatise to be the witness of my efforts for the cause of Christ after I one day leave this mud ball of a world for a more glorious and permanent dwelling. I sincerely hope that you dear Reader and as many others who may happen upon it derive edification from it or use it as a valuable tool in converting the lost and building up the kingdom of Christ.

~ Louis Rushmore, February 5, 2015

Table of Contents

Part 1: What Is Christianity?	9
Introduction.....	9
Chapter 1: Bible Descriptions of a Christian	9
Members of the Body of Christ.....	10
Subjects in the Kingdom of Christ.....	10
Members of the Family of Christ.....	11
Disciples.....	11
Believers.....	11
Saints.....	12
Christians.....	12
Chapter 2: How to Become a Christian	13
Added to the Church.....	13
Faith.....	13
Repentance.....	14
Baptism.....	14
Biblical Steps to Christianity.....	15
Chapter 3: The Christian & the Church	16
Member of the Church of Christ.....	16
Placed in the Church by the Lord.....	16
Born Again of Water & of Spirit.....	17
New Creature.....	17
Fellowship of Believers.....	18
Growth Process for the Child of God.....	19
Chapter 4: Christianity	20
A Way of Life.....	20
A Total Commitment.....	20
Following the Example of Christ.....	21
Following the Teaching of the Scriptures.....	21
Part 2: The Textbook of Christianity	22
Chapter 1: The Bible – The Word of God	22
Inspired Writers.....	22
The Will of God.....	22
Complete & Thorough.....	23
Accurate.....	24
Powerful.....	24
Chapter 2: The Bible – Patterns & Models	26
How to Become a Christian.....	26
How to Worship.....	26
How to Live.....	29
Work of the Church.....	30
Role of the Individual Christian.....	31
How to Operate – Governance.....	33
Chapter 3: Bible – Responsibility of the Christian	34
Know What Is Taught – All Scripture.....	34

Know How to Study & Understand	34
Know How to Rightly Divide the Bible.....	39
Know How to Define Faith.....	41
Know How to Teach Others	42
Chapter 4: The Bible – Outline	43
Old Testament.....	43
Between the Testaments	44
New Testament.....	44
Other Writings	45
Part 3: The Church.....	46
Chapter 1: In Prophecy & Fulfillment.....	46
Circumstance of Beginning.....	46
Time of Beginning.....	47
The Fulfillment of the Promise.....	47
Chapter 2: Establishment.....	49
Christ and His Life	49
The Death, Burial & Resurrection	49
First Century.....	49
Chapter 3: Government.....	51
Leadership	51
Rule.....	65
Local	65
Universal.....	66
Chapter 4: Worship	67
Assembly.....	67
Acts of Worship	67
Role of Members.....	74
Purpose.....	75
Chapter 5: Work	76
Mission	76
Purpose.....	79
Works of Ministry	79
Chapter 6: Spiritual Blessings in Christ	82
Providence	82
Prayer	84
Comfort & Care.....	85
Spiritual Life versus Physical Life	87
Victory in Christ over Sin, Death & Satan	89
Part Four: The Walk	92
Introduction.....	92
Chapter 1: First Steps	93
Scripturally Saved	93
Attitude of the New Christian	95
Place of Refuge – God’s Care.....	96
Chapter 2: Growth.....	98
In Faith	98
In Works	103

In Service	104
In Knowledge.....	105
In Value	106
Chapter 3: The Role of Every Christian	107
Work of Ministry.....	107
Edify Brethren & Non-Christians	107
Support the Body.....	108
Assist Brethren & Non-Christians	108
Attitude toward the Lost	108
Attitude toward Government.....	109
Chapter 4: Family	110
Roles of Each Family Member	110
Rearing Children	110
Marriage.....	113
Priority	118
Part 5: Background.....	119
Chapter 1: God.....	119
Attributes	119
Relationship to Man	119
Godhead – Three Beings.....	120
The Father.....	121
Chapter 2: Christ.....	122
The Pre-Incarnate Jesus Christ	122
The Incarnation of Jesus Christ	126
The Deity of Christ.....	130
In the Beginning.....	133
Earthly Ministry.....	138
Master Teacher	141
The Death of Christ.....	144
Resurrection	147
Ascension.....	149
Creator and Sustainer of Creation	151
Lawgiver & Prophet.....	153
High Priest.....	155
Head of His Church, Body & House	157
Messiah & King.....	158
The Preeminent Christ.....	162
The Sacrifice of Christ.....	164
Justification.....	165
Sanctification	166
Savior.....	166
Redemption	168
Forgiveness.....	171
Mediator, Intercessor & Advocate	171
Judge	173
Authority	175
The Second Coming.....	177

Homily: He Is My Everything.....	180
Chapter 3: Holy Spirit.....	181
The Person	181
The Church & the Holy Spirit.....	182
His Role with the Bible	184
Work of the Holy Spirit	185
Indwelling of the Holy Spirit	187
Chapter 4: Baptism	190
Word Meaning	190
Scriptural Importance	190
One Baptism.....	191
Chapter 5: Faith	192
Word Meaning	192
Saving Faith.....	194
One Faith.....	195
Chapter 6: Satan – Man’s Greatest Adversary	197
Introducing Satan	197
Freewill	197
Names of Satan	198
The Devil Is Real	198
Satanic Methods & Goals.....	199
Dualism	199
Summary.....	199
Homily on Satan: A Roaring Lion.....	200
Chapter 7: The Ministry of Angels.....	202
Introduction to Angels	202
Definition & Examples.....	202
Origin & Nature	202
Angel Organization	203
Cherubim.....	204
Seraphim.....	204
Archangels	204
Gabriel	204
Other Angels	204
The Angel of the Lord (Jehovah ASV).....	204
The Ministry of Angels	205
Guardian Angels.....	206
Summary.....	207
Chapter 8: Sin	209
Origin	209
Cure for Sin	209
Wages of Sin.....	210
Who Is a Sinner?.....	210

Part 1: What Is Christianity?

Introduction

Christianity has to do with Jesus Christ, and the word “Christ” appears prominently in the word “Christianity.” This world religion began nearly 2,000 years ago in A.D. 33 with the establishment of the church in the city of Jerusalem (Acts 2:47). Christianity is the third and final, progressive installment of God-authored religion; Patriarchy and Judaism preceded and prepared mankind for the introduction of Christianity. “But before faith [system of faith or Gospel of Jesus Christ] came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25).

Christianity is the fulfillment of many Old Testament passages that prophesied the replacement of Patriarchy and Judaism with a God-given system of religion in which the forgiveness of sins could be obtained. The first subtle indication a Savior would vanquish Satan and rescue mankind from sins is found in Genesis 3:15. Much later, promises of redemption were made by God to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3; 22:17-18) as well as later to his son Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and still later to his grandson Jacob (Genesis 28:14).

Christianity revolves around the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is unique in that He never died again; the Christ broke the prison bars of death, thereby giving hope to all humanity that they, too, will resurrect someday from the grave (1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Philippians 3:10-11). “[Jesus] whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:24 NKJV). By His resurrection, Jesus “abolished death” (2 Timothy 1:10), that is, its hold on souls which otherwise would have prevented them from resurrecting someday.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a cardinal principle of Christianity (1 Corinthians 15), and it is tied directly to the salvation of souls. For instance, the resurrection of Christ appears in references to God’s plan for the redemption of mankind. “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). “There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21). If the Savior had not resurrected from the grave, Christianity would be empty and meaningless, and no one could obtain the forgiveness of sins; we would be hopelessly lost. “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Christianity is the only God-authorized religion today, and the only world religion whereby souls can be saved from sins and be made ready for eternity (2 Corinthians 5:10; Amos 4:12; Hebrews 9:27).

Chapter 1: Bible Descriptions of a Christian

The word “Christian” only appears in the Bible three times (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), but descriptions of Christians are everywhere throughout the New Testament. “Christian” is transliterated from the Greek “*christianos*,” which means “a follower of Christ.” The word “Christian” was used for the first time about ten years after the establishment of the Lord’s church, about which one can read in Acts 2. “And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And **the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch**” (Acts 11:26). By this time, Jews (Acts 2), Samaritans or those whose ancestry included Jews and non-Jews (Acts 8), and Gentiles or non-Jews (Acts 10) had heard the good news of the Gospel of Christ. The new name “Christian” was given in fulfillment of a 700-year-old Old Testament prophecy that God would give a new name to His followers after the beginning of the spiritual kingdom or the church and the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in it. “For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see

your righteousness, And all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the Lord will name” (Isaiah 62:1-2).

From the first occasion of the use of the word “Christian” in Acts 11:26, one notices that it was used as a synonym for the word “disciple.” Likewise, other words and phrases in the New Testament are used interchangeably to refer to Christians. Immediately after using the word “Christian” for the first time when referring to the “disciples” in Antioch of Syria, the words “disciples” and “brethren” were used interchangeably (Acts 11:29); numerous times afterward, many biblical contexts use “brethren” to refer to Christians. The setting of Acts 26 uses the words “saints” and “Christians” to refer to the same people (Acts 26:10, 28); frequently throughout the balance of the New Testament the word “saints” refers to Christians. In addition, several New Testament Scriptures denote Christians as the “children of God” or “sons of God.” “For you are all sons [“children” KJV] of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). Therefore, whenever passages of Scripture throughout the New Testament refer to the same persons with the words “Christian,” “disciples,” “saints,” “brethren,” “children of God” and similar references, one can find descriptions of Christians.

Members of the Body of Christ

The word “church” means “assembly,” and it can refer biblically to a local assembly of a congregation for worship (1 Corinthians 14:23, 34), to a local congregation in a geographical location, such as a city (1 Corinthians 1:2) or to the universal church over which Jesus Christ is the Head, which usage spans all locations of the church past, present and future (Ephesians 5:23).

The New Testament uses synonyms for the church, one of which is the term “body.” The “churches of Christ” (Romans 16:26) and “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27) are the same thing. Jesus Christ is both Head of the church and Head of the body. “And He put all things under His [Jesus Christ’s] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). “And He [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18).

Therefore, all who are members of the church are also members of the body of Christ. “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Members of the body of Christ differ in their abilities and opportunities, but each member of the body of Christ is essential to the proper function and coordination of that spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Subjects in the Kingdom of Christ

Several figurative references to the saved under Christianity emphasize different characteristics of the divine organization into which our Lord Jesus Christ placed them. The **church**, which means assembly, highlights the concept of being called together for a common purpose – in this case, called out of the world by the Gospel of Christ. The **body** of Christ underscores the participation and interdependency of members of the body.

Another figure employed for the same divine institution is “the kingdom of Christ” (Ephesians 5:5). Jesus Christ affirmed that He is King (John 19:35-37). The nature of His kingdom, though, is **spiritual – not physical and earthly** (John 18:36). However, most professed Christians today miss that biblical truth and either attend to their religion under the trappings of a physical, earthly kingdom, or historically their religion ruled countries and commanded armies. In addition, every proponent of some form of millennialism in which one looks for a literal reign of Christ on earth in Jerusalem steadfastly subscribes to the notion of a physical kingdom rather than a spiritual kingdom. Nevertheless, “Jesus answered, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here’” (John 18:36). The Roman governor Pilate acknowledged that the kingdom of Christ is spiritual and not physical when he pronounced Jesus innocent, which he could not have done while an appointee of the Romans had our Lord been a revolutionary. Among Jews generally, even the

apostles mistakenly longed for a physical kingdom of Christ (Acts 1:6), and mankind today often makes the same mistake.

Every government has citizens, and the kingdom of Jesus Christ is no different. Yet, it may be more useful for us to recognize that *citizens* of a kingdom are really more properly *subjects* – unconditionally subject or obedient to the king. With that in mind, Christians are subjects in the kingdom of Christ – unconditionally subject or obedient to King Jesus. A kingdom is not a democracy or parliamentary form of government; our Lord Jesus is absolute Monarch, and no one can challenge Him successfully. He has the last word at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 7:21-23).

Members of the Family of Christ

Christians are members of the church and of the body as well as subjects in the kingdom of Christ. Yet, they are also members of the family of Christ or of God. The church is called “the house of God” in 1 Timothy 3:15 and 1 Peter 4:17, and it is called “the household of God” in Ephesians 2:19. “House” and “household” imply the idea of “family.” Christians are family members with Jesus Christ as well as with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ is our older Brother (Hebrews 2:11, 17). Furthermore, He is natural born whereas Christians are adopted sons and daughters (Galatians 4:5-7; 2 Corinthians 6:18). “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26). “Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:5).

Christians are a part of the family of Christ or of God. This family is represented by the local congregation of which Christians are members, the larger spiritual family throughout the world – the “brotherhood” (1 Peter 2:17) as well as the Godhead (Romans 1:20) in heaven. “. . . I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Disciples

For about ten years before the new name Christian was given as recorded in Acts 11:26, the members of the church were simply referred to as “disciples” (Acts 6:1-7; 9:1, 19, 25-26, 38). However, even after the name “Christian” was applied to church members, the term “disciples” continued to be used interchangeably with “Christians” and other synonyms for the followers of Christ (Acts 11:29; 13:52; 14:20, 22, 28; 15:10; 18:23, 27; 19:9, 30; 20:1, 30; 21:4, 16).

The word “disciple” means a learner or a pupil. Christians as disciples are learners, and Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. Christianity or the Gospel of Christ is the subject of learning, and we ever need to be students of it (1 Timothy 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:15). “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Believers

The word “believers” means to have faith or to trust. This term also referred to Christians. “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (Acts 5:14). “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Of course, these believers or Christians have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior (John 8:24), and they trust Him fully. Especially Christians have faith in and trust Christ with their eternal souls. Consequently, true believers do their best to comply with all of our Lord’s instructions in the New Testament.

Saints

Still another description of Christians is that they are “saints” (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1). “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the **saints who are in Ephesus**, and faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1). “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the **saints** in Christ Jesus who are **in Philippi**, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). “To the **saints** and faithful brethren in Christ who are **in Colosse**...” (Colossians 1:2). The word “saints” occurs in the New Testament referring to Christians more twice as often as the term “disciple” referring to Christians. Remember, the word “Christian” only appears three times in the Bible. Ironically, the words “saints” and “disciples” are used more frequently than the new name “Christian” in the New Testament, but contemporary men nearly use “Christian” exclusively for the “children of God.”

Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church’s concept about saints, which they have passed on to the world, “saints” and “Christians” are interchangeable references to the saved, or to “members” of the church and the body of Christ, family members of the spiritual family of God, subjects of the kingdom of God or Christ, “disciples” and “believers.”

The word “saints” means pure, holy, morally blameless and set apart for a holy use. It is from the same word family from which we get “holy.” Certainly, Christians ought to recognize that they are to be pure, holy, morally blameless and set apart for a holy use by Jesus Christ. “Saints” particularly adds valuable insight into what it means to be a true follower of Christ – a Christian.

Christians

The biblical description of Christians involves being called out members for inclusion in an *exclusive, divine organization of saved souls*. They are members of the body of Christ, members of the family of God, members of the one true church of the Bible over which Jesus alone is the Head, subjects or citizens of the kingdom of Christ, disciples of Christ, believers in Jesus Christ and saints (holy ones).

The word “Christians” is used far too loosely today and in non-biblical ways. Only those who have complied with the divinely given scheme of redemption are Christians or among the saved. Only those who are practicing the Gospel in their lives regarding salvation, worship, Christian living, Christian service and Christian doctrine are faithful Christians.

There were no denominational Christians in the first century. It was not until nearly 600 years after the establishment of the Lord’s church in Acts 2 that mankind officially organized a manmade church as a rival to the Lord’s church; that was the Catholic Church. Almost 1,000 years later the second manmade church developed, and between then and now, men have manufactured thousands of churches. All of these are unauthorized counterfeit churches that rival each other as well as rival the one true church of the Bible.

Christians are Christians only. The Bible knows nothing of denominational, interdenominational or nondenominational Christians.

Chapter 2: How to Become a Christian

There are many religious theories on how to become a Christian, and most of them involve merely a mental acknowledgement of the existence of Jesus Christ, or briefly put, *faith only*. However, Scripture quickly dismisses *faith only* as the means by which one becomes a Christian. “You see then that a man is justified by works [of obedience], and **not by faith only**” (James 2:24).

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself summarized the divine plan of salvation in a brief statement prior to His Ascension. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16). The simplicity of that declaration mirrors the simplicity of $1 + 2 = 3$, something so simple that no one can misunderstand it. Not any man or council of men or women, but to Jesus Christ alone everyone must turn for salvation. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6). Our Lord further said, “‘Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber’” (John 10:1). Other, manmade, plans of salvation rob men and women of true redemption and provide false hope.

Jesus Christ will have the last word as each of us appear in front of His Judgment Seat (2 Corinthians 5:10) before He assigns us to our respective eternity (Matthew 25:21, 23, 30, 34, 41, 46). Attempting to negotiate with Jesus at that time will be useless (Matthew 7:21-23). Attempting to dissuade our Lord from the plan of salvation that He uttered in Mark 16:16 by saying that we voted on that and changed it to *faith only* will meet with dismal failure.

Added to the Church

Joining the church is an idea of human origin; it did not come from God. Underlying the phrase “joining the church” is a misplaced focus on mankind as though he is responsible for his own salvation.

Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, every soul on earth is *invited* to become a member of the Lord’s church, but only the Savior *adds* members to the body of Christ or the church. “...the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

The invitation of our Lord is *conditional* upon *obedience* to the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). “And having been perfected, He [Jesus] became the **author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him**” (Hebrews 5:9).

The only biblical sense in which someone can join a church is when a person who has already been added to the Lord’s church or spiritual body by Jesus simply endeavors to be identified with a local congregation in a city that he is visiting or to which he has moved. “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

Faith

The Book of Romans is widely recognized as the New Testament volume that maybe more than any other New Testament book speaks about faith. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Yet, it is *not a faith only* type of faith addressed throughout Romans. The first chapter and the last chapter of Romans categorize everything written between them as an *obedient faith*. “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name” (Romans 1:5). “...according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith” (Romans 16:26).

The close association between faith or belief and obedience is apparent from the episode in Numbers 20:7-12 where Moses struck a rock to procure water for the wilderness wandering Israelites instead of speaking to the rock as God had instructed him. “Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because **you did not believe Me**, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them’” (Numbers 20:12). Obviously, the consequences of not demonstrating obedient faith are very serious.

The faith that is part of man's participation in his own salvation is faith that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. "Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not **believe that I am He**, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). "Believe" is a verb form for the noun forms of "belief" or "faith."

Repentance

Repentance is a necessary part of the scheme of redemption about which one can read in the New Testament. "I [Jesus] tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). However, repentance is the most difficult part of the plan of salvation because it requires a person to admit that he or she is wrong and needs to amend his or her life to conform to the Gospel of Christ. Pride, sometimes, can interfere with repentance.

Repentance is an outgrowth of biblical faith. Without faith first, one has neither point of reference for nor incentive to repent of past sins. Faith followed by repentance is the natural sequence of these elements in the divine plan of salvation.

Worldly repentance and *biblical repentance* are not the same thing. Being sorry for getting caught and being sorry for one's sins, and hence changing one's conduct, are radically different. "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

True, biblical repentance is something that begins on the inside of a person, which then, works itself outward to produce reformed conduct. Faith is an internal thing that sparks an internal reaction that eventually manifests itself outwardly, too. Reformation of conduct may be as gradual as repeated efforts to conform to biblical instruction and as also gradual increases in awareness of the extent of biblical instruction. Transformation into one exhibiting Christian traits does not typically happen overnight, especially if one has conformed extensively to the world around him or her (Romans 12:1-2). This scenario is not an excuse to continue sinning, but rather an explanation to Christian onlookers as to why a new convert may not appear to have mastered walking in Christ, yet.

Baptism

Almost any religious person who purports to espouse Christianity can be prevailed upon to acknowledge that in order for one to be saved, a person must have faith in Christ, repent of past sins and be willing to acknowledge publicly that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). However, the vast majority of people absolutely refuse to accept that baptism pertains to salvation. Interestingly, though, more Scriptures teach the role of baptism in redemption than about any other aspect of the divine, redemptive plan. It must be that providentially, God anticipated precisely where in the plan of salvation humans would offer the most resistance, and therefore, He provided the most instruction regarding salvation about the subject of baptism.

First, remember the summary of the redemptive plan that Jesus expounded immediately before His Ascension. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:16). We noted earlier that the simplicity of this statement by our Lord is comparable to $1 + 2 = 3$. Applying simple math to Jesus' words results in "believes" + "baptized" = "saved." Nothing could be more authoritative respecting the plan of salvation than the very words of Jesus Christ Himself! The world often practices "believes" = "saved" + "baptized," if one optionally chooses. See the difference? The difference has eternal consequences.

All of the cases of conversions in the Book of Acts include baptism in water for the remission of sins as a part of the redemptive plan. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...'" (Acts 2:38). "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). One reads about the conversion, culminating in baptism, of the Samaritans (Acts 8:12), Simon the Samaritan sorcerer (Acts

8:13), the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:36-39), Cornelius (Acts 10:47-48), Lydia (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33), Crispus and other Corinthians (Acts 18:8) and Ephesians (Acts 19:5).

Faith, repentance and confessing faith in Christ lead *toward* redemption, but baptism is the *point at which* one's sins are removed. Baptism saves from past sins. "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by **water**. The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save** us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:20-21 KJV).

Jesus Christ places baptized believers into the church or the body of Christ (Acts 2:41, 47). "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:41, 47 NKJV). The church is the body of the saved; one can no more be saved and not in the church than he can be in the church and not be saved.

Baptism enables one to contact symbolically the saving blood of Jesus Christ, whereby sins are removed. Our Lord shed His blood during His crucifixion and death (John 19:34). Baptism places one spiritually into the death of Christ wherein His blood was shed. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5). Since one is saved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 1:5), baptism is essential because through it one is placed into the death of Christ, wherein He shed His blood.

Baptism is also the way souls get "into Christ" and "put on Christ." "Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ** Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). "For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have **put on Christ**" (Galatians 3:27). Baptism is essential to salvation.

Biblical Steps to Christianity

There are five steppingstones to salvation in the Christian Age. **First**, one must resort exclusively to the Bible and the New Testament in particular for religious instruction. The Old Testament has served its primary purpose and has been replaced with the New Testament (Romans 7:6-7; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14). The New Testament is the source material from which Bible faith springs. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Secondly, faith that Jesus is the Christ, Lord and Savior (John 8:24) must develop from study of the Word of God. "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

In the **third** place, Bible faith must lead one to repenting of past sins. **Fourth**, one must be willing to acknowledge publicly his faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:32-33). **Fifth**, penitent believers must be baptized (immersed or buried, Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). In the **sixth** place, every Christian needs to practice Christian living and Christian service as long as he or she lives, and even if practicing Christianity results in one's premature death (Revelation 2:10).

The first five steppingstones lead to and result in salvation from past sins (Romans 3:25) and can be accomplished in relatively little time. Step number six, though, is lifelong and amounts to walking with Christ by "walking in truth" (2 John 4), "walking in the fear of the Lord" (Acts 9:31), "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4), "walk properly" or "honestly" KJV (Romans 13:13), to "walk by faith" (2 Corinthians 5:7), to "walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16), to "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2), to "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8), to "walk in the light" (1 John 1:7), to walk as Jesus Christ walked (1 John 2:6) and to "walk after his commandments" (2 John 6).

Chapter 3: The Christian & the Church

Member of the Church of Christ

Denominational names fill signboards at the entrance of some towns and the yellow pages directories of phone books. Nearly every major traffic intersection in many cities appear to be religious shopping centers. Most of those church names glorify some man, a denominational doctrine or some religious method. Distinguished from all of those is the Lord's church about which anyone can read upon the pages of the New Testament. It goes by different names of divine rather than of human origin. The divine names for the Lord's church describe the Christian's relationship to and glorify deity, with the exception of the word "church" by itself.

In the strictest sense, the Lord's church does not have a name. Instead, *several* descriptive terms that identify the church of the Bible. The basic word "church" means "assembly" and describes the call to gather together (1 Corinthians 11:20) of the children of God. There was **only one church** when the simple term "church" was first used after its establishment (Acts 2:47). As of yet, there were no denominational churches in existence to compete with the Lord's church. Simply to refer to the church in a religious context, before the rise of denominations, was understood to pertain to the Lord's church.

When writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul called them "the church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Writing to Timothy, the apostle called the church "the house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15). The apostle Paul called the church "the body of Christ" on other occasions (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). Sometimes in the New Testament, the church is referred to as "the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12), whereas other times the phrase refers to the heavenly reward (1 Corinthians 15:50). Again, the apostle Paul called the church "the kingdom of the Son" (Colossians 1:13).

However, there is a name for the Lord's church in the New Testament that corresponds to the new name for those who comprise it. The **new name for members** of the church, of course, is "**Christians**" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16), and the **new name for congregations** is "**churches of Christ**" (Romans 16:16).

If one is truly a member of the Lord's church, likewise, he is a member of the church of God, the house of God, the body of Christ, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son and the churches of Christ. Each of these designations refers to the same divinely instituted organization – the church. Yet, not every *church* that may wear a biblical name is the Lord's church, because it may lack other divine characteristics of the church of the Bible (e.g., salvation, worship, etc.). Every congregation of the Lord's church, though, certainly will want a divine designation instead of a denominational name.

Most if not all congregations of the Lord's church today wear the name churches of Christ (i.e., church of Christ for a single congregation) to glorify the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. For the same reason, typically the children of God today usually refer to themselves as Christians, although "saints," "brethren," "disciples," etc. mean the same thing. Glorify Christ by wearing His name as individual Christians and members of the churches of Christ.

Placed in the Church by the Lord

Noted already, it is Jesus Christ who places one in His church (Acts 2:47). Admission to the church of the Bible is **not** a matter of **voting** on candidates by those who are already members. Membership in the Lord's church is **not inherited** from one's parents. Inclusion in the Lord's church does **not** occur through **christening babies**. Instead, Jesus Christ puts into His church those who obey the Gospel plan of salvation that He uttered (Mark 16:16) and that the apostle Peter preached on the birthday of the church (Acts 2:38). On that Pentecost, those who complied with the preaching and were baptized (Acts 2:41) were saved and added to the church by Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). One cannot place himself or herself into the Lord's church, and there is no other way to become a member of the church of Christ than to be added by our Lord.

Born Again of Water & of Spirit

Our Lord Jesus Christ discussed being “born again” in John 3:1-8, which follows.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**” Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Obviously, it is essential to one’s eternal wellbeing to be “born again... of water and the Spirit,” because otherwise the soul will be lost forever. Being born again is the *entry point* into the kingdom of God, which refers to the Lord’s church in this life, followed by admission to heaven in eternity.

Therefore, *being born again of the water* corresponds to baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) or to wash sins away (Acts 22:16). Being born into the kingdom of God relates to salvation (1 Peter 3:21) from past sins (Romans 3:25). “The like figure whereunto even **baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21 KJV).

Being born of the Spirit refers to the spiritual side of inclusion in the kingdom of God or the Lord’s church and salvation. Whereas baptism is a visible, human, obedient response by the one being saved, there is an invisible side to one’s salvation that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13 NKJV). Acts 2:47 teaches that Jesus Christ adds the saved to the church, but in John 3 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, the Holy Spirit places one into the body of Christ or the church. Rather than being contradictory information representing opposition between Christ and the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit each have a role in the admission of saved souls to the kingdom of God or the church.

Anyone who has not been baptized, which means immersed (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12), for the forgiveness of sins has not been born again of the water and of the Spirit – and is not saved. Faith, repentance and confessing Christ precede baptism, but baptism is the point at which one is saved and added to the church. Being born again of water and of the Spirit refers to conversion at baptism. One learns how to be born again from studying and complying with the Word of God: “having been **born again**, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, **through the word of God** which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

New Creature

One who is “in Christ” is “a new creature” (KJV) or “a new creation” (NKJV). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). A Christian has put away the old man of sin, that is, sinful ways are no longer the normalcy for his or her life. “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6). (Sin sometimes creeps into the lives of Christians, too (1 John 1:8, 10), but they do not make sinning a way of life for them.)

Christians arise from the watery grave of baptism as new creatures walking in a new life. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Christians have “...put off, concerning... former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”

(Ephesians 4:22). New creatures “do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Colossians 3:9-10).

Christians need to act like new creatures! “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

Fellowship of Believers

Christian fellowship or fellowship between believers is *horizontal* between Christians or believers and *vertical* between Christians and the Godhead. “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). By “believers” here, we mean “Christians.” Merely believing in the existence of Christ, for instance, is not enough. “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!” (James 2:19).

The basis for fellowship between believers or Christians and between Christians and the Godhead is “the apostles’ doctrine” or teaching (Acts 2:42), that is, the Gospel or New Testament. Passages refer to both the fellowship between brethren and between Christians and God. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). “...when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship...” (Galatians 2:9). To maintain that fellowship, the Christian must practice his or her Christianity faithfully. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

On the other hand, Christians are not allowed to have religious fellowship with those who are not in fellowship with God, either because they are not Christians (1 Corinthians 10:20; 2 Corinthians 6:14) or because they are unfaithful Christians (1 Corinthians 5; Titus 3:10). “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition [precepts or ordinances] which he received from us. ...And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14).

In either case, faithful Christians should “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (Ephesians 5:11). Christians or non-Christians with whom we come in contact, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 9-11).

From a practical application, then, Christians are disallowed from extending religious fellowship to non-Christians, such as denominational people, and other world religions (e.g., Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, etc.). In addition, faithful Christians need to refrain from fellowshiping brethren who are false teachers (Romans 16:17-18; 1 John 4:1) and Christians from whom the church has withdrawn fellowship. “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person” (1 Corinthians 5:11).

The word “fellowship” means partnership, and the biblical context in which it appears determines its specific application. Not only does “fellowship” refer to the hallowed partnership between Christians as well as between Christians and the Godhead, it is used in various other ways in the New Testament, too. Sometimes, it refers to the collection (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4), whereas it elsewhere pertains to the communion or Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16). Each of those ways in which “fellowship” is used in the New Testament involves a *partnership*. As believers or Christians, we have a common fellowship or partnership.

Growth Process for the Child of God

The first century church was hindered greatly by children of God who failed to grow spiritually and mature. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

There was a solution to the problem of spiritual immaturity, and that same solution will work today, too. “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). In other words, Christians need to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV).

Studying and digesting the Word of God “daily” (Acts 5:42; 17:17), among other things, will lead the child of God to don the Gospel armor (Ephesians 6:11-17) and adorn one’s Christianity with the Christian graces.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:5-11 NKJV)

The child of God’s spiritual growth is a never-ending pursuit throughout the entirety of one’s life. We will never have learned everything one could learn from the Word of God. Not even the apostle Paul thought that he had already arrived and would not need to continue striving toward perfection. “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).

Chapter 4: Christianity

A Way of Life

Christianity is the culmination of 4,000 years of divine preparation of humanity for the unveiling of Almighty God's plan for redeeming mankind (Ephesians 3:1-11). "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). Just as Judaism, for instance, infiltrated every aspect of the faithful child of God's life (e.g., religion, life, service, morality, politics, etc.), Christianity ought to become *a way of life* for the Christian, influencing each facet of his pursuit of salvation, worship, Christian living, Christian service, morality and interaction with the ballot box, too.

A Total Commitment

No one could doubt that God the Father and the Son of God, Jesus Christ, are totally committed to saving the souls of mankind. God sent His Son to earth to die on the cross as the only possible suitable sacrifice to redeem fallen humanity (John 3:16). "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all..." (Romans 8:32). Our Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily forfeited the glory and honor due him as Deity or God () and left the splendor of heaven to come to earth. The Creator left behind the trappings of Deity and donned the human form of the created or creation. "...Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). He became mankind's vicarious, sacrificial Lamb through His ignoble and excruciating death on Calvary's cross (Luke 23:33) for each of us. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:18-20).

Every Christian ought to reciprocate toward the Heavenly Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, with a totally committed Christian outlook and practice respecting every part of his or her earthly existence. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19); that is reciprocity! Likewise, the total commitment of the Father and of the Son toward us ought to be met with our total commitment toward them.

Each waking moment of every day, irrespective of where we are or what we may be doing should be overshadowed by the conscious awareness that we are not our own, but that we belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19). Conscientious acknowledgement that we as Christians belong to God will mold our every interaction with God and man, and it will lessen the number of occasions that we slip and fall into sin. In other words, we need to precede and follow up our conversion by the Gospel with **conviction** – which manifests itself in active service. Mental acknowledgement alone amounts to a lifeless and dead faith. "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ... You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. ... For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:20, 24, 26).

Part of the total commitment to Jesus Christ involves prioritizing one's life so that nothing and no one comes between oneself and serving our Lord. The child of God must "...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matthew 6:33). "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-39). Christians must love themselves and their respective spouses (Matthew 19:29), parents and children, but we must love the Son of God **foremost and first**. Furthermore, it must show in our lives by our conduct toward family (1 Timothy 5:8), fellow Christians (1 Peter 2:17), those outside of Christ (1 Timothy 3:7; Acts 5:13; Matthew 5:16), on the job (Colossians 3:22-24), at school and everywhere.

Jesus is number one, and everyone and everything else, including ourselves comes afterward. Not national pride or political preferences, not vanity respecting our ethnicity (Galatians 3:28), but **Jesus alone must be first in our lives**. By extension, then, the entire Godhead and the church ought to loom largest in our very existence and earthly pursuit – in part, because earth is not our ultimate pursuit, but heaven is (Hebrews 11:16).

Following the Example of Christ

Jesus Christ left a perfect example and a high goal toward which each Christian ought to strive diligently every day. Not only regarding humility or suffering, but in all things, Jesus Christ is our example to imitate. “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Our Lord is also the perfect example for us to emulate because He is the only person who ever lived a sinless life. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

How can someone make a practical application of following the example of Christ in his or her life? Well, one can learn to imitate Christ by studying regularly about Him in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. In addition, it is biblically valid to find encouragement in following the example of Christ by following the example of fellow Christians who are especially discernible as following the example of Christ in their lives (1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Hebrews 6:12). By inspiration, the apostle Paul penned, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Following the Teaching of the Scriptures

Jesus directed those of His day during His earthly ministry to search the Scriptures to learn about Him. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). Otherwise, the Holy Scriptures is the source book by which we “know that we know” (1 John 2:3) about salvation, Christian worship, Christian living, Christian service and Christian doctrine. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God’s Word can free a man or a woman from the guilt of sin. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Furthermore, the Bible is man’s roadmap from earth to eternity, and heaven ought to be the destination toward which he purposely and daily makes his Christian pilgrimage (Hebrews 11:10, 13; 1 Peter 2:11). We mortals need to read that roadmap daily to discern biblical truth (Acts 17:11).

Part 2: The Textbook of Christianity

Chapter 1: The Bible – The Word of God

Though the English word “Bible” does not appear in the volume to which we refer as the Bible, the Greek word from which we get the word “Bible” does appear in the New Testament Scriptures. One can easily see the resemblance between the Greek “*Biblos*” and the English “Bible.” It means the inner bark of the papyrus plant, which was used to make paper sheets or a scroll for writing. Whereas its usage originally held no religious connotation, the use of some form of *biblos* (i.e., *biblion*, *biblia*, *biblou*) to refer to Holy Scriptures largely displaced consideration of its use non-religiously. Occasions of use in the New Testament most of the time denote sacred writings from God. Acts 19:19, which refers to magic books is an exception.

Note the following. “The book [*biblos*] of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). “But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book [*biblos*] of Moses...” (Mark 12:26). “As it is written in the book [*biblos*] of the words of Isaiah the prophet...” (Luke 3:4). “Now David himself said in the Book [*biblos*] of Psalms...” (Luke 20:42; see also Acts 1:20). “... As it is written in the book [*biblos*] of the Prophets...” (Acts 7:42). “...Whose names are in the Book [*biblos*] of Life” (Philippians 4:3; see also Revelation 3:5; 20:15). *Biblion* appears 34 times in the Greek New Testament, translated as “book” usually and referring to sacred writings from both testaments, just like *biblos*. Once, though, *biblion* is translated as scroll, and twice it is translated as “writing” (Matthew 19:7) and “bill” (Mark 10:4) regarding providing written transaction of divorce under the Law of Moses. Overwhelmingly from these observations, the Bible aptly refers to the Word of God.

Inspired Writers

Approximately 40 human penman over a span of about 1,600 years were *divinely inspired* by God through the Holy Spirit to write the Bible. These writers represented a wide spectrum of cultures and geographical locations, and yet, the Bible is completely harmonious because God is its true Author.

The Bible attests to its divine origin. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Any writing that does not claim divine origin can automatically be dismissed as being from God. Young’s Literal Translation of the same passage reads, “every Writing [is] **God-breathed**, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for setting aright, for instruction that [is] in righteousness, that the man of God may be fitted — for every good work having been completed.” “Inspired” means “God-breathed.”

The Bible or Word of God came from God through the Holy Spirit to mankind who employed secretarial skills essentially to convey God’s message; the Holy Spirit, though, did operate through the vocabularies of the human penman, but the word choices are God’s. “...no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV). “As He [God] spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, Who have been since the world began” (Luke 1:70).

The Will of God

God has never left mankind without sufficient instruction. In the first period of time, usually referred to as Patriarchy, God provided oral instruction through the fathers of selected families. For instance, God conversed directly with Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:16; 3:9-19). It is evident that instructions for proper worship also had been conveyed to Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3-5; Hebrews 11:4), either directly or indirectly from God; the faith attributed to Abel in Hebrews first necessitates instruction via the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Later, God sent Abram (later called Abraham) from his home in Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan (Genesis 12:1-3).

Still later under Judaism, God provided written teaching in addition to oral instruction that He still provided to selected individuals (Exodus 17:14). “Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying: ‘Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you’” (Jeremiah 30:2). “For it is written in the law of Moses...” (1 Corinthians 9:9). “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4).

Presently, everyone now living is and for the past nearly 2,000 years has been amenable to God’s written instructions contained in the New Testament. The will of God for mankind is now codified or collected in the New Testament or Gospel of Jesus Christ. Humanity is without excuse for observing from the created universe that God exists (Romans 1:20), and since the will of God is readily available in written form, mankind has no excuse for not obeying God, too. In the New Testament alone, one can learn how one’s sins can be removed, how God wants to be worshipped today, about Christian living, about Christian service and about Christian doctrine. From the will of God on the pages of the New Testament one can know of the blessings that God reserves for the faithful on earth and in heaven. Only in the New Testament can a person discover the prohibitions that God mandated.

The will of God is for everyone to be saved. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). However, even in this verse of Scripture one notes that salvation is **conditional** upon all that would be involved in “repentance.” Here, “repentance” stands for everything to which New Testament Scripture attributes saving power – leading to remittance of sins and the point at which sins are forgiven. The will of God is for everyone to be saved, but mankind must participate through obedience in his own salvation. “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who **obey Him**” (Hebrews 5:8-9; see also 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17).

Complete & Thorough

The Bible or Word of God is complete and thorough so that it lacks nothing that humanity needs to make preparation for final Judgment (Amos 4:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). “His divine power **has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). All revelation that God intended to provide under Christianity has already been provided and providentially preserved and made available to humanity in the New Testament portion of the Bible. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was **once for all delivered to the saints**” (Jude 3).

Therefore, no new revelation remains to be delivered.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But **even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed**. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

Furthermore, we humans are forbidden from modifying in any way the Word of God, subtracting from it or adding to it. “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19). This truth respecting the Book of Revelation has always been true regarding the Word of God in every period of time. “**You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it**, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). “Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

The Bible in general and the New Testament in particular for Christians provides practical guidance for everyday living and for living as Christians. The Word of God is man's roadmap throughout this life and from the temporal present to the eternal hereafter.

Accurate

The Word of God, the Bible, is the most validated book of all books that have ever been written in the history of the world. There is no other manuscript that has as many thousands of manuscripts and copies to verify its message as does the Bible. The Word of God – the Bible, has been accurately preserved or is accurate from consideration of it as a literary work. It conveys the original message of its Divine Author – God.

The Word of God – the Bible, is also accurate doctrinally in as much as it will be the standard by which every soul answers for himself or herself on the Judgment Day. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). “In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:16).

Powerful

The Word of God is powerful, able to convert sinners into Christians. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is **the power of God to salvation** for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16). The Word of God exposes the innermost thoughts and desires of a person. “For the word of God is living and **powerful**, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**” (Hebrews 4:9). The Word of God will either take us to eternal paradise in heaven, if we let it, or it will condemn us to a devil's hell (Matthew 25:41).

The Source of True Unity

Bible believers must distinguish between pseudo-unity with its misguided thrust and identify the source of true unity. Souls are at stake!

Let me illustrate. An ecumenical effort among several denominations in a community results in the formation of a youth center. Purportedly, the youth center is organized to give youngsters something to do and a place to go after school, which might keep them from mischief. Many months later, the youth center announces that its purpose is to win the town for Christ. It calls for **unity** of religious people to close the town's numerous bars and gambling facilities. This ecumenical stepchild of local denominations, which has begun to walk and talk, announces a fundraiser for itself. Providing alternative activities for young people to steer them from trouble is a worthy goal, and so are the goals of closing local bars and gambling establishments. However, is this ecumenical unity and the trappings associated with it the religious unity indicated in the New Testament? **No it is not!**

Consider this second illustration. The masthead of stationery for a ministerial alliance reads, “We have agreed to disagree.” A ministerial alliance is an ecumenical meeting of denominational representatives who cannot quite bring themselves to disregard their respective denominations. Is this the type of unity about which the New Testament teaches? **No it is not!**

There is only one source of true religious unity! It is not the banding together of diverse religious people to address common howbeit maybe worthy goals. It is not the ridiculous mental gymnastics of agreeing to disagree! What, then, is the source of true religious unity?

The Bible alone, and especially the New Testament for our age, is the true source of religious unity. Period! End of story! Not the Bible plus something else, and nothing less than the Bible.

The apostle Paul by inspiration wrote about “the unity of the [Christian] faith” (Ephesians 4:13-14). While the New Testament was still being written, God provided miracle-assisted church leaders (Ephesians 4:11-12). After the New Testament was complete, miracles were no longer needed. Miracles were designed

to confirm new revelation from God (Mark 16:20). Further, miracles were never intended by God to either be a permanent fixture of Christianity or to survive past the completion of the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). With the completion of the New Testament, we have the Christian faith once and for delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and everything humanity needs spiritually (2 Peter 1:3). The effect of completed revelation (the New Testament) was “the unity of the faith” without confusion by manmade doctrines and human schemes (Ephesians 4:13).

Through true, biblical unity, the Lord’s church can stand as a band of religious people for truth and against evil. Nothing short of or different from the Lord’s church can adequately represent godly people in opposition to sin. “Brethren” rather than denominational counterparts stand together in unity (Psalm 133:1; Matthew 23:8). The early church demonstrated Christian unity as it stood together as Christians “were of one heart and one soul” and “had all things in common” (Acts 4:32). Paul wrote that the early Christians had “the same mind one toward one another” (Romans 12:16). Consequently, “with one mind and one mouth” they glorified God (Romans 15:6). The same apostle admonished the early church to “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among” them (1 Corinthians 1:10). Religious people who are truly united “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27; 2:2).

Ironically, were every religiously inclined person to accept the Bible alone (i.e., today the New Testament), denominationalism would not exist. The only legitimate religious conviction that anyone can have is religious conviction growing out of what the Bible and especially the New Testament teaches. Not only would there be no denominations if religious people were to rely on the Bible for the source of religious unity, there would be no other world religions either. There would be no Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, etc. If every religiously inclined person in a community accepted the Bible alone as the sole source of true religious unity, there would be no denominationalism. More than one of the same church, the church of the New Testament, might exist in a community, but neither denominationalism nor other world religions would exist. More than one congregation of the church for which Jesus died might exist owing to differences in culture or language (e.g., various synagogues in the same city, Acts 6:9). “...there were no fewer than 480 synagogues in Jerusalem, and all nationalities had their own, it is possible that the five different classes here named had each their own synagogue...” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). Or, more than one congregation of the Lord’s church might exist in a community owing to differences of opinion on non-doctrine preferences (i.e., not salvation issues), Acts 15:36-41). In addition, multiple congregations in a city might be necessary to efficiently accommodate efficiently the number of Christians residing there.

Every religious person ought to be able to rally around the Bible – the Word of God (for us today, the New Testament). This would result in *true unity*. This would fill the pews of the Lord’s church in any community and depopulate the pews of denominationalism. True unity based on the Bible alone would provide for a strong, united church to both stand for Christ and resist the inroads of Satan in any community.

How much does the Bible, especially the New Testament, mean to you, or does some other creed book or family tradition mean more to you than the Word of God? Only within the Word of God can one find the solution to man’s sin problem. The Law of Pardon was summarized by Jesus himself in Mark 16:16 when He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” See also Acts 2:38. The apostle Peter concisely stated a Second Law of Pardon for Christians who commit sin after being baptized (i.e., repent and pray, Acts 8:22; see also 1 John 1:9). **The source of true unity begins and ends with the Bible alone, especially the New Testament for people living today.**

Works Cited

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.

Chapter 2: The Bible – Patterns & Models

The Bible provides patterns or identifying characteristics, which if each person will apply to himself or herself, that will lead one to become a Christian, to worship God in His own appointed way, to live a proper Christian life and to be a fruitful worker in the Lord's church. In addition, The Bible's patterns and models will enable the child of God to manage the Christian home better and to organize a local congregation in accordance with divine instruction in the New Testament.

How to Become a Christian

No manmade pattern or model for salvation – becoming a Christian – can satisfactorily substitute of the divinely authored scheme of redemption. Of course, that has not prevented mankind from trying, and consequently, many hundreds of alternative and contradictory remedies for sin have been put forth – without the authority of the Godhead.

Jesus Christ alone has all authority in heaven and on earth. “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’” (Matthew 28:18). He Who possesses all authority in heaven and on earth further declared, “**He who believes and is baptized will be saved...**” (Mark 16:16). In addition, it is before the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ each must appear before hearing his or her assignment in eternity to heaven or hell (Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The only sensible conduct spiritually is to take our Lord at His word – believe and be baptized to be saved from past sins or to become a Christian.

In greater detail, a person must first turn to the Word of God for information and instruction (for all living today, the New Testament). “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). One, then, must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God or Savior – the Messiah. “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Next, a person must repent of past sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30). In addition, one seeking forgiveness of sins and to become a Christian must be willing to confess Jesus as Lord. “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). All of these things lead “unto” or in the direction of salvation, but remission of sins occurs following the previous steps just noted at baptism or immersion (Colossians 2:12) in water (1 Peter 3:21). “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...’” (Acts 2:38). “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

After becoming a Christian, the child of God needs to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). Sin, though, will sometimes enter into even the life of a Christian. When that happens, we learn also from the New Testament how Christians can receive forgiveness of sin, too. “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you” (Acts 8:22). “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Book of Acts could be called the Book of Conversions. Throughout the volume one finds the pattern or model for becoming a Christian by observing what first century people did to become Christians. Each of the conversion accounts in the Book of Acts culminates in baptism. Read it for yourself ().

How to Worship

The New Testament contains a *divine pattern* for worshipping God. At the inauguration of Judaism, God gave patterns to his people for the construction of the Tabernacle, its furniture and instruments, and their worship (Exodus 25:9; Ezekiel 43:10; Hebrews 8:5; 9:23). There is no less direction for worshipping God under the New Covenant than there was under the Old Covenant.

John 4:24 says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Whereas worshipping God in *spirit* pertains to a proper attitude, worshipping God in *truth* corresponds to

adhering to the pattern for worship of the divine law now in effect. The word “spirit” as used in this verse has to do with the emotional, spiritual, internal investment of a soul in worshipping God. Yet at the same time, the worshipper must worship God in “truth” or according to divine instruction. Unfortunately, mankind has severely corrupted worship so that God is no more pleased with it than he was with corrupted worship under Patriarchy and Judaism. For instance, God rejected Cain’s worship (Genesis 4:3-5) and killed two Jewish priests for offering corrupted worship (Leviticus 10:1-2).

The New Testament has superseded the Old Testament and is the religious law to which all people today are amenable (Hebrews 8:6-13; Ephesians 2:15). It is important to note that a person must turn to the New Testament alone to discover how God wants to be worshipped today. If one does not distinguish between the Old Testament and the New Testament properly, he or she would not even know on which day God demands to be worshipped. The Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments, served its primary purpose (Galatians 3:19, 23-25) and has been replaced by God with the New Testament. “But now **we have been delivered from the law**, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless **the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’**” (Romans 7:6-7). The Old Testament has been “abolished” (Ephesians 2:15), “taken...out of the way...nailed...to the cross” (Colossians 2:14) and passed away (2 Corinthians 3:6-11). Therefore, we today under Christianity worship God on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2) instead of on the seventh day of the week or the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8).

There are similarities and dissimilarities between Old and New Testament worship practices. For instance, the New Testament neither requires nor authorizes the worship of God with sacrificial animal offerings, lighted candles or burning incense. One must turn to the New Testament alone to identify how God desires people living in the Gospel Age to worship Him. There are **five avenues of worship** prescribed in the New Testament through which God desires to be worshipped today. *Each* of these must comprise Christian worship *each* first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The New Testament, though, does not dictate any particular order in which those worshipful activities must occur.

Communion

Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper or communion following His observance of that year’s Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-30). The Lord stated that the latter supper of which he said “this is my body” and “this is my blood” was to be repeated for “remembrance” of him (Luke 22:19). The apostle Paul called this supper “the communion” (1 Corinthians 10:16). In correcting abuses of the communion by the Corinthian church, Paul urged the Lord’s Supper not be observed lightly, but remembering “the Lord’s death” as often as (or each time) they observed it. Acts 20:7 provides an apostolically approved example of the day on which and the frequency with which Christians are to observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) or Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16) – each first day of the week. There is no more doubt that the early church observed communion weekly (on the first day of the week) than faithful Jews observed the Sabbath weekly (on the seventh day of the week) (Exodus 20:8-1). There is no more doubt the early church observed communion weekly (on the first day of the week) than the early church observed (and contemporary churches observe) collecting a contribution weekly (on the first day of the week) (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Through that observance, Christians keep alive the memory within them of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for them (1 Corinthians 11:26); it is a memorial to the death of our Savior in our place (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The Lord Jesus initiated the Supper with items available in the Jewish home during Passover – unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (grape juice), and Christians continue to be use the same elements in Christian worship today.

Giving

Though God required Old Testament people to give of their means for the support and progress of Judaism, there is a fundamental difference between then and how God desires New Testament people to support Christianity. Free will offerings were welcome under Judaism (Deuteronomy 12:6; Exodus 25:2;

35:29), but God also commanded the people to *tithe* or give ten percent of their increase to God (Leviticus 27:30-34). The tithe **has not** been reinstated by God in the New Testament. Instead, New Testament giving is: (1) always a freewill offering (2 Corinthians 8:12), (2) regulated in part by what one purposes in his heart to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7) and (3) regulated in part by one's prosperity (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The last Scripture reference also details the first day of the week (implying the first day of each week) as the day on which the collection should occur.

On the first day of every week, a collection or contribution is taken up by each congregation. The specific occasion for the collection in 1 Corinthians 16 was for benevolent needs, but a freewill offering according to one's prosperity is the only apostolically approved example in the New Testament for financing the work of the Lord's church. Since the church has other financial obligations in addition to benevolence, it follows the same procedure to finance those occasions, too. The church of the Bible did not rely on business ventures, bake sales, carwashes and the like to finance itself, and neither does the Lord's church in modern time resort to any of those measures to fund it.

Preaching & Teaching

Teaching and preaching is essential to the establishment and maintenance of Christianity as they were also to Judaism. Judaism was not just the religion of the Jews. It was their way of life, at home, in public, as well as when they worshipped God. The Jews were taught from childhood through adulthood God's Word (Nehemiah 8:1-8). "And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them" (Joshua 8:34-35).

Edification of the children of God is a primary responsibility of the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:11-12). Preaching and teaching is important enough to train others to do it, too (2 Timothy 2:2). Though teaching and preaching can be accomplished privately from house to house, it is certainly a part of the public worship (Acts 20:20). The context of Acts 20:7 not only indicates the frequency with which the early church observed communion, it also notes preaching comprises part of the Lord's Day worship. "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

Praying

Praying to God has always been basic to worshipping God, and this is the case in the Gospel Age as well. Several passages attest the regularity with which the early church prayed and further was exhorted to pray (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 3:12). "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

The key in acceptable prayer is "according to his will." All prayers are answered according to the will of God. If our prayer requests coincide with God's will, He answers our prayers essentially with a "Yes." Otherwise, the answer to our prayers may be "No," "Maybe" (depending on unfolding circumstances) or "Later." Commonly, if God does not grant our requests per the degree and schedule of our petition, we complain that our prayers are not answered. God answers all prayers, but sometimes we just do not like His response. Prayer was a part of first century assemblies by the Lord's church (1 Corinthians 14:15).

Music

The most obvious contrast between worshipful music employed by the Lord's church versus denominations is the absence of mechanical instrumental music in the church. This difference results from a sincere effort to practice precisely what the New Testament *authorizes*. Of the two possible types of music, vocal and instrumental, the New Testament commands vocal music or singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Every example of worshipful music employed by the New Testament church is void of instrumental

music (Matthew 26:30 [church was not begun yet]; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13).

Additionally, among the different sounds that can be uttered, only singing is able to “teach” and “admonish” (Colossians 3:16). Humming, whistling and other vocal sounds that *cannot teach* and *admonish* are not authorized in Scripture. Therefore, they are sinful in worshipful music.

What God may have allowed under the Old Testament or what God may permit in heaven does not affect worshippers amenable to the New Testament. The New Testament is the law of God now in effect. Man has been released from the Old Law (Romans 7:6-7; Colossians 2:14), and while living on earth, does not come under the scope of some future heavenly legislation.

The *commandment* to sing in worship (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19) specifies a type of music to the exclusion of everything else or any combination with something else. Had God not specified what *kind* of music he wants, man could make his own choice, but God made the choice Himself.

Some might prefer instrumental music to a cappella music (singing) and find it more entertaining. Given the opportunity, mankind doubtless would greatly alter Christian worship and Christianity. This is precisely what has been attempted through denominationalism. It is, however, reasonable for God, the object of our worship, to be worshipped in a way pleasing to Him. Worship was never intended to be vented toward the worshipper for his entertainment. Biblical worship is directed toward God. Hence, our personal preferences in the case of worshipful music dare not be instituted in place of what God clearly requires of us.

Singing was a part of first century assemblies by the Lord’s church (1 Corinthians 14:15). Singing without mechanical instruments of worship was the way the first century worshipped because that is precisely what is specified in and authorized by the New Testament (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16-17). It was hundreds of years after the establishment of the Lord’s church before men began adding instrumental music to Christian worship – in clear violation of what the apostles had installed in the church, though mechanical instruments had been available by then from near the dawn of time (Genesis 4:21).

Summary

Often contemporary churches derive their worship practices from a confusion of formerly authorized practices under Judaism combined with selected avenues of New Testament worship, well stirred with the seasoning of personal preference. All living souls are amenable to the New Testament and will be judged one day by it (John 12:48). Therefore, each soul should worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The worship practices of the Lord’s church, then, are not intended to be *different*, but identical to what God through the New Testament requires.

Men are neither authorized to subtract from nor add to Christian worship. Yet, mankind has added ceremonies, doctrines, clerical robes, candles, incense, etc. to worship, and most denominations do not observe the Lord’s Supper weekly (though they take up a collection at least weekly). Worship is meant to honor, adore and praise God, rather than primarily satisfy man. Biblical worship proceeds vertically to God and horizontally to fellow worshippers, but for it to be acceptable to God, it must be “in spirit and truth.”

How to Live

Living as a Christian falls into two broad categories – how to live and how **not** to live. There are certain behaviors that should not persist in the lives of Christians. “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:12). “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife” (2 Timothy 2:22-23). “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that

those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9). This is a sampling of common sins that those who would be faithful Christians must expunge from their lives. Study the New Testament to know more fully the ways that must not characterize the children of God.

After a Christian removes from his or her life sinful behaviors, there are positive attributes that he or she ought to add. Many passages of Scripture that warn about sins that need to be deleted from one’s life immediately follow up with countermeasures of laudable traits with which Christians ought to infuse their lives (Titus 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:22-23). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:22-24).

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. (2 Peter 1:5-10).

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Study the New Testament to discover other Christian traits that the child of God ought to make his or her own.

Christians ought to be among the best spouses (Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:19), parents (Colossians 3:21; 1 Timothy 5:14), employers (Colossians 4:1) and employees (Colossians 3:22). Non-Christians should be impressed with the Gospel light shining in the lives of Christians, whereby they, too, desire to be Christians. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Work of the Church

Only those things that God through the New Testament has assigned to the church constitute the work of the church. Just what has God authorized the church to do in its realm of work? Usually, the work of the church is classified or categorized into three broad areas, namely, evangelism (Mark 16:15), edification (1 Corinthians 14:12) and benevolence (Galatians 6:10). Naturally, there are subcategories of work as well that help accomplish them.

In part, the work of the church can be defined by noticing what it is not. It is not the work of the church to engage politics, though biblical teachings certainly would have Christians participate in the form of government under which they live in a responsible way in harmony, for instance, with Bible morality. Christians should vote in democracies where they can support candidates who champion godly values. Further, some biblical issues may be political issues as well (e.g., abortion, gambling, alcoholic beverages, etc.).

It is not the work of the church to operate businesses such as insurance agencies, sugar factories, bottling companies, tourist sites, etc. The church, though, may find itself involved in enterprises to facilitate work that God expects the church to do (e.g., owning and selling real estate *as necessary*, publishing and

distributing Gospel literature, benevolent operations, etc.). It is not the job of the church especially to entertain youth or anyone else. That is the responsibility of the home or of individuals.

The primary work of the church is telling lost souls about the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the aim of leading them to obey the Gospel, whereby their past sins are removed and they become Christians. As though it were a final reminder immediately preceding His Ascension, Jesus Christ uttered what we often call the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; cf. John 20:21). Evangelism will be discussed more fully later in this book.

Spiritual maturity of Christians to a large degree depends on the work of elders, preachers and teachers to edify fellow Christians. One of the qualifications of elders is “able [“apt” KJV] to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2); likewise, preachers such as Timothy share that responsibility (2 Timothy 2:24). Of course, the very designation of teacher implies teaching (1 Corinthians 12:28). Teachers of the Christian faith are those who have attained spiritual maturity (Hebrews 5:12). Teaching others the Word of God is a serious undertaking for which God will more carefully scrutinize them, probably since they affect other souls (James 3:1). “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the **edification of the church** that you seek to excel” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

Benevolence is another area in which Christians and the church have a responsibility. Obviously, no congregation can by itself relieve all of the needy even in its own city, but Christians are supposed to exhibit concern for the less fortunate. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). A facet of final Judgment involves whether we are benevolent toward those who are less fortunate than ourselves (Matthew 25:32-46; James 2:14-18). There are areas where individual Christians may have opportunity and responsibility to be benevolent, besides opportunities for a local congregation to do the same.

Role of the Individual Christian

Act Like a Christian

The role of the individual Christian is to be all that he or she can be for the Lord wherever one may live on earth and in whatever circumstances in which he or she may find himself or herself. Christians have the responsibility to act like Christians at all times and in all places. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk as children of light**” (Ephesians 5:8). “If we live in the Spirit, let us also **walk in the Spirit**” (Galatians 5:25). “But if we **walk in the light** as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; **who once were not a people but are now the people of God**, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:9-12)

Develop Christian Maturity

First, especially a new Christian must grow and mature in the Christian faith. “As newborn babes, desire the pure **milk** of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Every new convert must begin as a baby in Christ, irrespective of his or her chronological age when baptized into Jesus (Galatians 3:27). Yet, one is not supposed to remain a baby in Christ indefinitely. “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of

righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). God expects Christians eventually to master more complex doctrine within Scripture to become mature or spiritual strong and so that he or she can teach other people portions of the Gospel that they do not know yet (2 Timothy 2:24).

Therefore, the child of God needs to study God’s Word daily and especially determine by it whether the teaching and preaching one hears is true to Holy Scripture. “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**” (Acts 17:11). “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Though the whole Bible, with an emphasis on the New Testament under which we live today, is appropriate for study, the child of God can begin to develop Christian maturity by acquiring for himself or herself the Christian Graces.

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

To the Christian Graces, we can add the Fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Purposely Groom Oneself for Greater Christian Service

Youthful Christians need to obey their parents (Colossians 3:20) and other authority figures (Titus 3:1) in their lives (e.g., teachers, police, laws of the land, etc.). To the degree that they are capable and have opportunities, young Christians need to accept many of the responsibilities of other Christians, too.

Most men and women will marry someday. Therefore, **Christian men and women** need to groom themselves with God’s Word so that they might be better prepared to be godly husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-33) as well as fathers (Ephesians 6:4) and mothers (Titus 2:4-5). The New Testament even specifically instructs **older men and women** regarding their Christ-like conduct (Titus 2:2-3).

Generally, Christians ought to learn God’s Word sufficiently to be able to teach non-Christians and Christians (e.g., how to become a Christian, teach children, teach women, teach adult classes, etc.). Some Christians need to utilize their abilities to make greater preparation to be preachers (also called evangelists and ministers) (Romans 10:13-15). Others need to prepare themselves to be deacons (special servants of the church) or elders (overseers for Christ), as well as wives of preachers, deacons and elders.

All day, every day – **every waking moment**, the child of God has the responsibility to be Christ-like (i.e., act like a Christian). In every place under every circumstance, the Christian ought to represent Jesus Christ in a favorable way – in example, speech, etc. Each Christian can do something and is obligated to do what he or she can do in the church of our Lord. The apostle Paul used the example of a human body to show that individual Christians have differing but essential abilities and responsibilities that are necessary for the Lord’s church to be spiritually coordinated (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:4-5). “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ...Now you are the body of

Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). *The role of the individual Christian is to be a component part of the body of Christ in whatever way he or she can be useful in the service of Jesus Christ.*

How to Operate – Governance

Often not realized, the organizational pattern of the church is that of an *absolute monarchy*. It is not a democracy or parliamentary arrangement. All of the legislation has already occurred, and it is not subject to critical review or modification by its members.

Jesus Christ, of course, is the King of His kingdom of which Christians are its citizens (Colossians 1:13). He is Head of the church and of the body of which Christians are members (Ephesians 1:22-23). Jesus Christ has all authority “in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18), and He rules from heaven (Ephesians 1:20-22). “Who [Jesus Christ] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him” (1 Peter 3:22).

On earth, fully organized congregations of the Lord’s church are guided by elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17). These men also are called in Scripture bishops (1 Timothy 3:1), overseers (Acts 20:28), presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14), pastors (Ephesians 4:11) and shepherds (1 Peter 5:4).

A plurality of men (at least two) who meet biblical qualifications are appointed by fellow members to serve only over the congregation of which they are members (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Remember, the rules have already been legislated and appear in the Bible; elders are responsible for guiding the local congregation in accordance with those instructions. Though elders possess no authority to make doctrine, they have biblical authorization to direct their respective congregations, and members are biblically obligated to submit to them (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Fully organized congregations are also served by deacons, likewise who must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Deacons are special servants to the church and for the church, whose duties primarily involve seeing to the physical details of church work (Acts 6:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:13). Deacons do **not** share with the elders the decision-making role for the congregation.

Every congregation has its teachers (Ephesians 4:11), too, whose responsibility is to contribute to the edification of members with the Word of God. It is a grave and serious undertaking to be a teacher of God’s Word, which should not be considered lightly (James 3:1). False teachers condemn themselves and those that follow their teachings (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1). Not everyone is suitable to be a teacher (1 Timothy 1:7). Teachers do **not** share with the elders the decision-making role for the congregation.

One or more preachers – not necessarily located, fulltime preachers – serve in a similar capacity as teachers of God’s Word. This area of service is called in the New Testament “preacher” (Romans 10:14), “evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5) or “minister” (Ephesians 3:7). “Preacher” emphasizes the formal, public nature of being a herald of the Gospel. “Evangelist” focuses being an announcer of the good news of the Gospel and is usually thought of as acquainting non-Christians with God’s plan for their redemption; yet, in any case, an evangelist is a Gospel preacher. “Minister” underscores the servant-like quality of being a Christian teacher of God’s Word. Preachers, evangelists or ministers do **not** share with the elders the decision-making role for the congregation.

All members participate with each other under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and guided by His decree – the New Testament. Aside from the elders of a congregation, all of the members share to varying degrees the work of the local church, depending upon respective opportunities and capabilities.

Every congregation is independent (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). As far as the Bible and our Lord Jesus Christ are concerned, there is no earthly religious organization larger than the local church.

Chapter 3: Bible – Responsibility of the Christian

Know What Is Taught – All Scripture

There is a significant difference between Bible reading and Bible study. However, regular Bible reading can result in a valuable familiarity with the Bible, which is a good foundation on which to build Bible study. Sometimes Christians commit themselves to reading the Bible through from cover to cover at least once annually, which can be accomplished easily by reading some of the Bible every day. Many church leaders encourage their respective congregations to read the Bible daily, but ultimately, **it is the personal responsibility of each child of God to feast on the Word of God and thereby to grow spiritually** (1 Peter 2:2). There was a general problem of spiritual immaturity in the first century church (Hebrews 5:11-14), which led to a widespread departure of Christians from Christianity (Hebrews 10:25); the epistle of Hebrews was written to stem the tide of apostasy by Jewish Christians. Yet, Gentile Christians likewise exhibited the problem of spiritual immaturity. “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Elders, deacons, preachers and teaches can provide the information and additional opportunities beyond personal investment to learning God’s Word, but they cannot make anyone avail themselves of Bible knowledge. Individual Christians must take responsibility for themselves to know what is taught in Scripture.

We learn from the apostle Paul the extent to which Christians need to acquire scriptural knowledge. He affirmed that he had preached “all the counsel of God” (KJV) or “the whole counsel of God” (NKJV) (Acts 20:27). Christians must familiarize themselves with both testaments of the Bible. True, our emphasis must be upon the New Testament because it is the law of God that pertains to Christianity and by which we will be judged (John 12:48). Howbeit, the Old Testament led up to the New Testament (Galatians 3:24-25), it is the foundation on which the New Testament rests (Matthew 26:56; Luke 1:70; Acts 3:11-26; Romans 3:21), and much of the New Testament would be unintelligible without knowledge of Old Testament Scripture to which the New Testament often alludes (Acts 24:14; Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; 1 Peter 2:7).

Christians definitely need to know and understand as much of the New Testament as they possibly can. Understanding the Old Testament, though, will enhance greatly one’s comprehension of the New Testament.

Know How to Study & Understand

Reliable Bible Translation

The student of the Bible must have one or reliable translations of the Bible from which to study. Unfortunately, not all Bible translations are reliable. One-man translations, denominational translations, paraphrases and so called translations that do not resort to the original Bible languages from which to translate (e.g., English to English or English to Burmese) are nearer to human commentaries than they are to Bible translations on which one can depend to learn the Word of God. One-man translations lack the checks and balances of combined scholarship to validate the efforts as accurate. Denominational translations may represent a denomination’s doctrine inside the Bible text. Paraphrases and versions of the Bible that do not translate the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts are commentaries under the guise as Bibles.

In addition, the philosophies a translating team will determine the degree of reliability of a translation. In the first place, be wary of a version of the Bible for which one can neither identify the translators nor the attitude toward Holy Scripture by which they proceeded to make the translation. Secondly, note the basis on which the translating process occurred. For instance, was so called “*dynamic equivalence*” or a “*literal*” approach taken? The former acknowledges no necessity of conveying to the reader the translation of the words in the original languages, but rather attempts to put forth *what the translators think* would be the important message for people living today. Thereby, the reader loses the connection between the words he

reads and the words that God through the Holy Spirit prescribed the human penmen to write. Dynamic equivalence does not permit the Bible student to conclude for himself or herself the interpretation of God's Word and what application, then, ought to be made today. On the other hand, Bible translations that are more literal attempt to make valid interpretations, more or less word for word, between the biblical languages and contemporary languages. Bible students, then, can assess God's Word for themselves and make the applications accordingly.

We recommend Bible translations that are more or less literal over those that do not preserve the words of the original biblical languages in which they were conveyed from the mind of God to mankind. The most literal English translation is the *American Standard Version* (ASV). Other reliable translations that are a little less literal, therefore a little less choppy, include the *King James Version* (KJV) and the *New King James Version* (NKJV). The NKJV's word choices more nearly correspond to contemporary English vocabularies. The *New International Version* (NIV) is an example of a translation based on dynamic equivalence and in which some denominational wording appears instead of biblical words.

Remember, how *easily understood* a translation may be is not more important than *how accurate* it is in conveying the divine message to humanity. Preparation to appear before the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 7:21-23) is too important to risk being misled by an unreliable Bible translation.

Context

Context is the single most helpful aspect of Bible study, and context comprises all valid considerations to understanding a verse of Scripture. The verses immediately before or following a particular verse being studied are part of the **biblical context**. Biblical context also includes the chapter of the Bible book, the Bible book and the entire Bible. Context extends to the **timeframe** in which a verse of Scripture occurred or to which it referred. The **geography** (i.e., where) and the **topography** (i.e., the elevation) of a passage may provide valuable insight for correctly understanding it. **Who was speaking or writing to whom** and specifically **when** may be important to useful biblical interpretation. Certainly, knowing about the **history** or events and **culture** surrounding the people associated with the message also can shed light upon a verse. After all, the goal of biblical interpretation is first to understand what the original recipients of a message from God were expected to understand. Afterward, then, we can evaluate the teaching to determine whether it is something that is applicable today, too. However, one cannot conclude whether a biblical message applies today without first coming to understand how the original auditors of Scripture understood it.

There are additional helps and hindrances to correct biblical interpretation. Hindrances to correct biblical interpretation include: (1) desiring to please others or oneself (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4), (2) reading the Bible **without expecting to understand it**, (3) not having a predetermination to accept God's Word as authoritative **in whatever it specifies**, (4) backdating present circumstances to the ancient, biblical past (i.e., we must avoid overlaying the past with the template of the present).

Helps to correct biblical interpretation include using as much **objectivity** as possible, knowing the **type of biblical literature** (e.g., history, prophecy, prose, literal, figurative) being studied and using **sound reasoning**. "Always interpret according to the **known purpose** of the author" (Dungan 172). The **Bible is its own best commentary**; difficult biblical passages can be more easily understood by consulting the Bible in other passages that are more easily understood about the same subject.

It is not the case that generally mankind is unable to understand divine instruction, but rather he understands it well enough to know that in many instances he does not like it. The Bible is not so vague as to be overpowered by examination by honest hearts. "If the Bible does not **mean what it says**, there is no way by which we can know what it does mean" (Dungan 60).

How Does God Communicate with Mankind Today?

Almighty God made both mankind and the Bible. In both instances, God opted for **words** as the means by which communication occurs. Animals, rocks and plants lack the capacity of verbal communication, but God made humans with the **innate ability to communicate with words**. The divine message, likewise, is made up of words by which God communicates with mankind – in the form of the Bible. More specifically for the

Gospel Age, God primarily communicates with mankind today through the New Testament, since it has replaced the Old Testament as the law of God now in effect (Romans 7:6-7; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14). The incomplete, partial revelation provided through miracles has been replaced with a complete or mature counterpart – the New Testament (1 Corinthians 13:8-12).

Within both man’s verbal skillset and the Bible, there are three avenues of communication, which everyone from the youngest speaking child through the adult uses without giving it much thought. In no particular order and every day, all of us use **commands or direct statements, approved examples and implications** from which we are obligated to arrive at warranted conclusions without adding or subtracting additional information. God has used the same techniques of verbal communication within the Bible. Therefore, everyone approaching God’s Word with an honest heart has a distinct advantage and can expect to understand what God expects of us regarding the plan of salvation, Christian worship, Christian living, Christian service and most Christian doctrine. Though some more difficult areas of the Bible may be more difficult to understand – especially figurative language that the original recipients more easily understood than we nowadays, mankind today can know that he knows everything that he must know to become a child of God and make adequate preparation to meet God in Judgment. God chose to use the mechanism of verbal communication between humans to communicate His will to mankind through the Bible (Romans 10:13-15). Divine instruction is *not* cloaked in God-words (so-called, “God-speak”) and mechanisms of communication different from the ordinary ways people communicate and comprehend communication.

Since no part of the Bible is directly addressed to any person living today, one must first see an implication in Scripture that some of it applies to humanity today. Secondly, one must *infer* that some commands or direct statements *apply* to people *today*. The entire New Testament (Gospel) is irrelevant and non-applicable (i.e., a dead letter) *unless* correct biblical interpretation includes divine implication, from which mankind is obligated and capable of drawing only warranted (necessary) inferences. One must correctly *infer* from divine *implications* even from among commands or direct statements in the New Testament as to which commands or direct statements apply today (e.g., “desire spiritual gifts” 1 Corinthians 14:1, not valid today). Some New Testament commands, but not all of them, are applicable today (e.g., “thy kingdom come,” Matthew 6:10, not applicable today).

Commands or Direct Statements

Some *biblical commands* are **general** in nature – the details for fulfillment of the command are not specified in Scripture. *Mark 16:15* has two general commands within it – “**go**” and “**preach**.” Since “how” we are to “go” into all the world with the Gospel is not specified, we must decide for ourselves which types of transportation seem expedient to us (e.g., animal, motorcycle, car, bus, plane, boat, walking, etc.). Since “how” we are to “preach” is not specified, we must choose the means by which we will communicate God’s Word (e.g., live oral presentation, TV, radio, Internet, literature, etc.).

Other *biblical commands* are **specific** since the details of how the command must be fulfilled appear in Scripture. For instance, the direct statements or commands respecting the kind of worshipful music God requires of Christians is so specific that it rules out every other kind of music for Christian worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). On the other hand, “make music” would have been a general command had God authorized that, which could be satisfied by playing and singing, playing instead of singing or singing only. “Use vocal music” would have been somewhat of a general command as well – authorizing humming, whistling, making the sounds of instruments or singing. The biblical direction in the New Testament to “sing” is specific instruction that authorizes “singing,” but it does not authorize playing mechanical instruments of music or other vocal sounds besides singing.

Approved Examples

The apostle Paul required first century Christians to follow *apostolically approved examples*. “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (NKJV). “Follow my **example**, as I follow the **example** of Christ” (NIV) (1 Corinthians 11:1). “Brethren, join in following my **example**, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a **pattern**” (Philippians 3:17 NKJV).

We learn from an *apostolically approved example* that the *Lord's Supper* is to be observed by Christians *weekly* on the *first day of each week* (Acts 20:7). There is no other verse of Scripture to which one can turn to learn this information. Therefore, to ignore approved examples would *do away with any biblical authority* regarding the day on which and the frequency with which God desires Christians to observe the Lord's Supper.

Approved examples, for instance concerning worshipful music, *support biblical commands* on the same subject. Examples of worshipful music after the establishment of the Lord's church only promote singing (Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; Hebrews 2:12). Even the example of Jesus and His disciples during our Lord's ministry and immediately before the beginning of the church was singing, rather than playing or playing and singing (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26).

Implications and Inferences

Consider the nature of implications and inferences. A square with a 5-inch long side obviously has a perimeter of 20 inches, and the area within the square is 25 square inches. One evaluates the available evidence or information, recognizes the implication and correctly infers the perimeter and the area. **Absolute, objective truth can be known through implication and inference!** The fact that a person *can reason incorrectly* does not mean that reason cannot be trusted.

"Inference may be used legitimately in the ascertaining of facts, and also in the conclusion reached from them. ...Abraham went down from Canaan into Egypt; when he came out from that country Lot returned with him. Though it is not said that Lot went into Egypt with him, we infer it" (Dungan 91). "...[T]hat which is taught implicitly is just as binding as that which is taught explicitly" (Warren, "Logic" 64). **Careful consideration of sufficient evidence can yield definitive knowledge.**

Only *inference* from *biblical implications* can account for the *refusal* of Christians in the New Testament record and in early church history *to obey civil government* whenever government interfered with the practice of Christianity (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Acts 4:17-21; 5:29). If first century Christians had not so reacted, then Christianity would have vanished from planet earth centuries ago, *almost at its inception*. Christians are obligated to obey the law of the land, except when doing so would require disobeying God.

The requirement of the church to assemble implies certain responsibilities for which Christians must make inferences (Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 20:7). *A place must be selected* in which a local congregation can assemble (e.g., public building, rented space, an outdoor location, someone's home, church-owned property, etc.). *Times* to assemble must be selected and made known to the congregation in order for it to assemble together. Someone must be responsible for selecting the location and times of assembling (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

The Bible Is Authoritative

The Bible must be viewed as authoritative respecting whatever topic that it addresses. There would be no reason for God to provide divine revelation unless both God was able to provide discernible communication, and further, He designed mankind with sufficient faculties to understand it (2 Timothy 2:15; John 8:32). God gave divine revelation (the Bible) to communicate with mankind, and God intended for His revelation to be understood. Correct biblical interpretation is helped along by acknowledging that God has a right to make demands of mankind, and that He has done that through the Bible. Without correct biblical interpretation, one could not organize a local congregation, conduct its worship in an acceptable manner to God or practice anything else with regard to Christianity.

The Bible is of divine origin, it has been divinely transmitted, and it has been divinely preserved. The Word of God is to be revered because it is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16, lit. "divinely breathed" *Biblesoft's*; *Robertson's*; *Vincent's*). Therefore, the student of God's Word realizes that the Bible does not contradict itself. Yet, one must distinguish between historical inclusion of information versus divine instruction appearing in the Bible to arrive at correct biblical interpretation (e.g., King Solomon's sins versus divinely inspired instruction).

One must determine to understand what the Bible means **and** be willing to make any needed application to himself or herself. Irrespective of how inconvenient it may be, one needs to follow the *evidence* wherever it leads. All divine instruction (e.g., salvation, worship, Christian living, Christian service, etc.) and promised blessings (e.g., eternity in heaven) that are applicable to mankind today can only be learned from properly interpreting the New Testament. Without proper biblical interpretation, one cannot have proper biblical faith. **Mankind is obligated to try to understand divine revelation.**

Without proper or valid interpretation, how could one know: (1) what *blessings* God reserves for his creation – man, (2) what *prohibitions* God expects mankind to respect, (3) how God desires to be *worshipped*, (4) how one can *become a child of God*, (5) how God expects mankind to practice *Christian living*, (6) *Christian service* or (7) what God expects men to believe and do regarding *other Christian doctrine*? “The true canon of Scripture has been established. ...The text we have is reliable. ...The text of the Bible can be adequately translated and understood” (Flatt 65-66). **Our job is to understand it, live it and present it to our fellow humans.**

Summary

God’s Word can be known – biblical interpretation is not all that complicated. There is little difference between biblical interpretation and the common, everyday interpretation that people, from small children to adults, exercise through ordinary communication between each other. This skill is the core of **all** communication. The difficult part is obeying the Word of God when our desires differ from divine instruction.

There is definitive application of God’s Word that God requires of all people. The Bible was never intended to be subject to different interpretation than what God expected the original recipients to understand and do (2 Peter 1:20). Correct biblical interpretation may be inconvenient, but we must be prepared to obey God in any case. Anyone preaching, teaching or otherwise affirming a doctrine is obligated biblically to defend that doctrine with a correct interpretation of God’s Word. Further, to a degree, every Christian needs to be a defender of the Christian faith (Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15).

Successful verbal communication between persons (divine or human) derives from commands or direct statements, approved examples and implications. Orderly thinking, rather than disorganized thinking, is essential to correct biblical interpretation. Can we know how to become the children of God in this age? Can we know how God wants to be worshipped? Can we know how God wants us to live our lives? Can we know how God wants us to serve Him while we are on earth? Has God not left us sufficient instructions to answer these questions with certainty? Has God not made mankind sufficiently able to understand divine revelation respecting these matters just mentioned? Only through proper biblical interpretation can one adequately order his or her life on earth and prepare for eternity.

God has provided verbal communication to mankind through the Bible. It is the responsibility of mankind to handle it correctly, interpret it accurately and apply it to his or her lives.

Works Cited

- Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*.
Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
- Dungan, D.R. *Hermeneutics*. Delight: Gospel Light, n.d.
- Flatt, Bill. “The Function of Presuppositions and Attitudes in Biblical Interpretation.” *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practice*. F. Furman Kearley and others eds. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986.
- Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman, 1985. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1997.
- Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1997.

Know How to Rightly Divide the Bible

“Be diligent to present [“Study to shew,” KJV] yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15 NKJV). First, one must note that there are two testaments or major division in the Bible – the Old Testament and the New Testament. Secondly, the Bible student needs to recognize that two different systems of religion appear in the Old Testament – Patriarchy and Judaism. Third, one must acknowledge that the New Testament is the law of God now binding upon everyone now living and who shall ever live after this; each person in final Judgment will be judged by the law of God under which he or she lived and died (Revelation 20:12). In the fourth place, a person needs to realize that even some New Testament instruction no longer applies today (i.e., such as miracles, 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; “the present distress,” 1 Corinthians 7:26) because the circumstances no longer exist.

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

It would be difficult to over emphasize the necessity of properly discerning partitions in the Bible whereby it can be correctly understood. Before I became a Christian, the Bible was an unintelligible jumble of words that I did not even know how to approach sensibly. I was barely aware that the Bible was comprised of two divisions or testaments, and I did not know which to begin reading or why. Arriving at genealogies of unfamiliar names in Genesis 5 and Matthew 1, I simply gave up in frustration. In addition to that, I had always been told that the Bible was a *dead letter* anyway. It also appeared upon casual inspection that the Bible was self-contradictory. It was little wonder, then, that it seemed that anyone could prove or disprove anything from the Bible.

After study, however, all of this disillusionment turned out to be self-inflicted because I did ‘not rightly divide the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2:15). The Bible is mysterious and dark as long as one does ‘not rightly divide the word of truth.’ The trouble, though, lies not with God or His message to mankind, but with anyone who through ignorance or stubbornness does ‘not handle aright the word of truth’ (2 Timothy 2:15 ASV).

First, one must rightly divide the Word of Truth by noting the respective roles of the Old Testament and the New Testament. No other single observation contributes more greatly to rightly dividing the Word of Truth than noting the respective roles of the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is not possible to practice correctly both the Old Testament and the New Testament at the same time. When people try to practice both testaments at the same time, they find the Bible contradictory. Therefore, mankind often selects items from both testaments of the Bible to meld into a religion with which he is pleased – ignoring unselected things in both testaments. Mankind has no valid concept of authority in religion or how God has communicated His will to humanity when he fails to recognize the respective roles of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament covers two periods of time – Patriarchy and Judaism. Patriarchy began in the Garden of Eden and was replaced for the Jews at the inauguration of Judaism at Mt. Sinai (Genesis-Exodus). For Gentiles (non-Jews), Patriarchy may have continued to either the cross of Christ or until the Gospel was preached to Gentiles (Acts 10-11).

The New Testament covers one period of time from the incarnation of Christ through the present and until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The New Testament replaced the Old Testament – Patriarchy and Judaism (Matthew 5:17-18; Romans 7:6-7; 2 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:15). Anyone who looks to the Old Testament for religious instruction instead of looking to the New Testament is seriously misguided and spiritually jeopardized. “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4). The purpose of the Law (Old Testament) was to prepare humanity for the coming of Jesus Christ, who brought the Truth or Gospel.

But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law [Old Testament or Judaism], kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:23-25)

Moses passed on to humanity what he received from God, whereas Jesus Christ as a member of the Godhead personally brought the Gospel or New Testament Truth (John 1:17).

Hence, rightly dividing the Word of Truth involves turning to the New Testament exclusively for religious instruction. That means one today cannot turn to the Old Testament (Patriarchy or Judaism) for religious instruction. However, the Old Testament is the foundation of the New Testament and contains numerous principles still useful today (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3; 10:1-11). Further, people today are not authorized to turn to manmade creeds or doctrines for religious instruction.

Second, one must rightly divide the Word of Truth by contrasting salvation in the New Testament from all other plans of salvation. One today must turn to the New Testament exclusively for information about salvation. No one today should suppose that building an ark like Noah built will save anyone (1 Peter 3:20). Animal sacrifices characteristic of Patriarchy and Judaism cannot save anyone today either (Exodus 29:36, atonement). Manmade religion also is unable to save anyone, but instead, people must obey the New Testament doctrine (Gospel) “And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). “But God be thanked, that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which you were delivered” (Romans 6:17).

Strictly speaking, there was no absolute salvation available under the Old Testament – Patriarchy or Judaism. Sins under the Old Testament were never absolutely forgiven, only overlooked annually (Hebrews 10:1-4). Had there been forgiveness of sin available under either Patriarchy or Judaism (the Old Testament), Jesus Christ would not have had to come to earth from heaven and die sacrificially on the cross, but Jesus died on the cross to reconcile mankind to God (Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 1:20). Our Father in heaven sent Jesus into the world to save mankind, not because mankind was already saved (John 3:17). Furthermore, since sins could not be forgiven under the Old Testament, and only the sacrifice of Jesus made it possible for sins to be remitted, no plan of man can take the place of the divine plan for human redemption.

Third, one must rightly divide the Word of Truth by contrasting New Testament worship with all other ways of worshipping God. Through rightly dividing the Word of Truth, one today can know how **not** to worship God. Old Testament worship is not authorized for worship of God today (e.g., candles, incense, animal sacrifices, instrumental music, etc.). Neither is manmade worship authorized for worship of God today (e.g., deviation from New Testament worship by excluding or adding items to worship). The apostle Paul warned Christians at Colosse that exchanging divine worship for their own preferences was “will worship” (i.e., man’s will substituted for God’s revealed will) (Colossians 2:23).

Today, one can know how to worship God by appealing exclusively to the New Testament. Four of the five acts of New Testament worship appear in Acts 2:42 (i.e., teaching or preaching, contribution, Lord’s Supper and prayer). Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 also address New Testament worship acts of the Lord’s Supper, preaching or teaching and the collection. Singing hymns, psalms and spiritual songs is a fifth act of New Testament worship; Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 instruct about divinely appointed Christian music in worship, whereas 1 Corinthians 14:15 and 26 provide a New Testament example of singing in worship. The New Testament authorizes nothing besides these five activities for worship for today.

Fourth, one must rightly divide the Word of Truth by contrasting Christian living with all other ways to live one’s life. The Old Testament is not a suitable source of instruction for Christian living. For instance, polygamy that God overlooked in the Old Testament is not permissible under Christianity (Genesis 4:19; 26:34; Exodus 21:10; 1 Samuel 1:2; 2 Chronicles 24:3; Matthew 19:3-6; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Jesus restored God’s original plan for marriage, and qualifications for elders stress monogamy rather than polygamy. In addition, the Old Testament is not a suitable source for instruction about how to deal with idolaters, which was to kill them (Deuteronomy 7:1-5).

One today must turn exclusively to the New Testament for instruction in Christian living. The New Testament teaches to refuse some things in one’s life and to seek virtues (Titus 2:12; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:22; 2 Peter 1:5-9; Philippians 4:8). In the New Testament, lists of sins to avoid also teach how to properly live the Christian life (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8). The best ideas of feeble humans are not worthy to substitute for what the New Testament teaches respecting Christian living (Jude 4).

Fifth, one must rightly divide the Word of Truth by contrasting Christian service with all other ways in which someone may attempt to serve God. Service acceptable under the Old Testament does not guarantee acceptability under the New Testament. Noah was commissioned to build an ark, but no one today by turning to the Old Testament has that same commission. Moses was commissioned to build the Tabernacle, and Solomon built the Jewish Temple, but no one today by turning to the Old Testament has those responsibilities.

Christian service is authorized in the New Testament. The Lord's church has works of ministry, including: evangelism, edification and benevolence (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26; Galatians 6:10; 2 Corinthians 9:13). Nothing less than or more than what the New Testament authorizes qualifies as Christian service, though the means of fulfilling works of ministry may vary somewhat in methodology (e.g., various modes of transportation and communication). Christian service may be performed collectively as congregations and individually as Christians (James 1:27).

Summary

Without rightly dividing the Word of Truth, the Bible is unintelligible and appears contradictory. First, one must discern between the respective roles of the Old Testament and the New Testament. One must discern from the New Testament what is authorized for worship, Christian living and Christian service. Only by rightly dividing the Word of Truth can one know assuredly how to receive the forgiveness of sins. Unbaptized believers must be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3-5; Acts 22:16). Erring Christians must repent and pray (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Know How to Define Faith

Bible faith is both a God-given system of faith and personal faith that derives from that system of faith. This system of faith is otherwise known as the New Testament or the Gospel. Galatians 3:23-25 is an example of "faith" being used as a synonym for the New Testament or the Gospel. In similar fashion, our Lord's brother used "faith" to represent the New Testament or the Gospel. "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Consider also, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were **obedient to the faith**" (Acts 6:7; see also Acts 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 1:23; Colossians 1:23; 2:7; 1 Timothy 5:8; 6:10, 21; Titus 1:13). So, "faith" refers to the Gospel of Christ as well as one's confidence in the Gospel (2 Corinthians 5:7).

In the second place, Bible faith is **not** a blind leap in the dark! Instead, Bible faith is based on *biblical evidence*. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). There is an essential relationship between the Word of God and Christian faith.

Thirdly, Bible faith is **obedient**, as we observed above in Acts 6:7. The Book of Romans is about faith, but that faith is sandwiched between verses in Chapter 1 and Chapter 16 that identifies Bible faith as being obedient faith. "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name" (Romans 1:5). "But now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for **obedience to the faith**" (Romans 16:26). Therefore, when Romans 5:1 reads, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," we know that the type of faith that justifies is obedient faith. After all, Jesus Christ is Savior to them who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Furthermore, "**not by faith only**" (James 2:24), but by active, living – a doing or obedient – faith a person is saved (James 2:14-26). The writer of Hebrews described the living and active faith of those whose names appear in the Bible's Hall of Fame of Faith in Chapter 11.

The mere academic faith characteristic of *the faith only doctrine* of most denominations is not Bible faith because it requires no activity and no obedience. Among other things, Bible faith leads to baptism and salvation. "He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

Know How to Teach Others

It is simply impossible to teach someone else what the one teaching does not know himself or herself. Yet, we ought to be able to pass along to others what we do know from God's Word. There is nothing more fundamental and something that every Christian should be able to pass along to non-Christians than how one becomes a child of God. There may be many finer points or meatier matters (Hebrews 5:12-14) of Christianity with which a Christian may not be familiar. Yet, what the New Testament teaches about the forgiveness of sins and becoming a Christian is so basic to one's Christianity that he or she ought to be able to inform others what the Gospel teaches in that regard. Namely, every Christian can relate the relationship of the Bible to faith (Romans 10:17) that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God (John 8:24), to repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), to confessing Jesus to be the Christ, Messiah or Son of God (Romans 10:9-10), to baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21) and to faithfulness even if faithfulness would cost one his or her life (Revelation 2:10).

Teaching can take several forms from friendly conversation, to giving away or leaving in public places religious literature, to formal efforts to evangelize a neighborhood, to teaching Bible classes, etc. One good way to learn how to teach is to assist another Christian who teaches in a classroom or in a non-Christian's home. This way, eventually you can be the teacher and mentor another child of God who one day may also graduate to being the teacher.

Early Christians took their Christian faith everywhere that they went, and subsequently, they helped spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:4). Other Christians in the first century made conscientious efforts to acquaint non-Christians with the Gospel of Jesus Christ – sometimes traveling purposely beyond their own neighborhoods. “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

So, one can be self-taught or mentored by more experienced Christians to know how to teach God's Word. In addition, congregational classes and college or school of preaching courses can usually more quickly and more thoroughly help one become an effective teacher of God's Word. Above all, one learns best by **doing**.

Chapter 4: The Bible – Outline

First, the Bible is sectioned into two distinct parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Both testaments were received by divine inspiration (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 1:11-12), but they were separated by about 400 years during which there was no new revelation from God. The former of the two is specifically called “the Old Testament” in 2 Corinthians 3:14. Another word for “testament” is “covenant,” which means a contract (1 Kings 8:21). Hebrews 8:13 refers to the New Testament as “a new covenant,” making “the first [covenant] old.” When instituting the Lord’s Supper, Jesus Christ referred to the latter covenant as “the New Testament” (Matthew 26:28). The apostle Paul and other divinely inspired writers of the first century were “ministers of the New Testament” (2 Corinthians 3:6). Our Lord and Savior “is the mediator of the New Testament” (Hebrews 9:15).

Within the Old Testament one finds two distinct, God-given systems of religion – Patriarchy (meaning father rule) and Judaism. Patriarchy began in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and continued for about 2,500 years for all mankind until Judaism was inaugurated for the nation of Israel; Patriarchy continued for non-Israelites until both Patriarchy and Judaism were replaced with Christianity. Biblically authorized Judaism continued for 1,500 years before the commencement of Christianity; religious Judaism practiced contemporary people is not authorized by God through the Bible. Christianity began nearly 2,000 years ago and continues today; one reads about it upon the pages of the New Testament.

The New Testament replaced the Old Testament (Romans 7:6-7; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14). Christianity has replaced both Patriarchy and Judaism. The New Testament and Christianity sits atop the foundation of the grooming of mankind by God with the Old Testament over a span of about 4,000 years (Romans 15:4). The Old Testament gives perspective and meaning to the New Testament, but it is to the New Testament that humanity today must turn for divine instruction in religion.

Old Testament

Aside from the Book of Psalms, which by its very nature as a collection of songs, the Bible was not given to mankind divided into chapters and verses. In addition, some of the Bible books were once consolidated, for instance the books of 1 and 2 Kings were original a single volume (1 Chronicles 9:1). However, the Bible does somewhat refer to larger groupings of Bible books, similar to what we will note below (Deuteronomy 31:26; Acts 7:42). There are 39 books in our current arrangement of Old Testament Bible books.

Law

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy comprise the books of law. They were written by God’s prophet Moses, and they are sometimes called the Pentateuch, where “penta” means “five,” and “teuch” came to mean “scroll” or “book.” Genesis is a book of beginnings, and it details creation by God and man’s early history. The remaining four books have to do with the inauguration of Judaism.

History

Books of Israelite history include **Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah** and **Esther**.

Poetry and Wisdom Literature

Poetry and wisdom literature include the books of **Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes** and **Song of Solomon**.

Major Prophets

The concept of “Major Prophets” versus “Minor Prophets” pertains to the length of the respective volumes – longer volumes versus shorter volumes, rather than to the significance or importance of the respective books of the Bible. The Major Prophets include **Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel** and **Daniel**.

Minor Prophets

The Minor Prophets include **Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Nehemiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah** and **Malachi**.

Between the Testaments

Several uninspired books that were written between the testaments are valuable as historical documents from which one can learn about the period. However, since they are uninspired we do not look to them for religious instruction, especially today with the introduction of the God-given New Testament. These between-the-testament-books are generally called the **Apocrypha**, and since they are wholly written by human penman without divine inspiration, they may not be completely accurate either.

New Testament

The New Testament has 27 inspired Bible books within it. This section of Scripture introduces the incarnation of Christ, our Lord’s earthly ministry and sacrifice for the sins of humanity, the beginning of the church in fulfillment of Old Testament and New Testament prophecies, the early history of the church, the plan of salvation, Christian doctrine or teaching and prophecy of the ultimate victory of faithful followers of Jesus Christ through His ultimate victory over Satan. Especially the New Testament is God’s roadmap for mankind from earthly habitations to eternity.

Gospels

The Gospel records of **Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John** bear the names of their respective divinely inspired human writers. In them one finds the biography of Jesus Christ. As a biography would, the Gospel records include some historical information, too.

History

The Book of **Acts** is the lone solely historical volume in the New Testament. It covers about the first 30 years from the inception of the church of the Bible. An important focus throughout this treatise is the divine plan of salvation whereby people can have their past sins removed and become Christians. That aspect of the Book of Acts makes it particularly invaluable in mankind’s preparation to meet God in eternity.

Letters

Letters by inspired writers to churches and individuals include **Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John** and **Jude**. At least 13 of these epistle were written by the apostle Paul.

Prophecy

The lone prophetic book in the New Testament is the Book of **Revelation**. Filled almost completely with figurative language that was more easily discerned by its first century recipients, still readers today can find encouragement in the Book of Revelation because it teaches that Jesus Christ wins. That means, then,

that the followers of Christ win, too. The Christian hope is valid. We have every reason to complement our *desire* for an eternity in heaven with *expectation*.

Other Writings

In addition to apocryphal books between the testaments that were already mentioned above, there were some pseudepigraphal books written between the writing of the Old Testament and the New Testament. These are uninspired books falsely ascribed to inspired writers. There are also about 15 New Testament apocryphal books besides about 20 pseudepigraphal books as well. The books that comprise both testaments of the Bible were acknowledged by known Bible characters who were divinely inspired or by the people of God during times of miraculous validation. Otherwise, Bible books bear the marks of divine origin through their content and harmony with known Bible books.

We learn that not even every divinely inspired epistle has been preserved for us since the epistle of 1 Corinthians evidences that Paul had written to the Corinthian church an earlier letter (1 Corinthians 5:9), and Colossians refers to a letter to the Laodiceans (Colossians 4:16). Providentially, God has seen fit to provide multiple copies of every Bible book that He wanted preserved for humanity while at the same time preserving no copies of even inspired writings that He did not see fit to have preserved for us. God has made sure that thousands of manuscripts and partial manuscripts have been preserved as witnesses to the message of God for mankind. The Bible is the oldest best documented book on earth, besides being the only volume that can guide mankind accurately from this world to heaven.

Part 3: The Church

Chapter 1: In Prophecy & Fulfillment

Two factors primarily attest the divine origin of the church, namely: (1) The first conception of the church is attributed by Scripture to the mind of God before creation, and (2) The divine hand mandated and established the church by the power and the authority of heaven. The church of the Bible is the culmination of Old Testament prophecies, which cannot be said correctly about manmade churches. Following prophecy and fulfillment throughout the Bible reassures the Christian regarding the church of the Bible and clearly distinguishes it from denominational imitations and counterfeits.

Circumstance of Beginning

The church had its beginning in the mind of God before “the beginning of the world” (Ephesians 3:9 KJV).

To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the ages** has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be **made known by the church** to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the **eternal purpose** which He accomplished **in Christ Jesus our Lord**. (Ephesians 3:8-11 NKJV)

Even before God created mankind, He knew through His foreknowledge and omniscience that men and women would become sinners. Therefore, God devised a plan for the redemption of humanity before it was needed. “Who [God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began” (2 Timothy 1:9). “He [Jesus Christ] indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:20). “In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (Titus 1:2-3).

Numerous promises and prophecies fill the Old Testament regarding the eventual establishment of a spiritual kingdom, also called the church (Matthew 16:18-19; Colossians 1:13). The first hint of a spiritual victory for mankind appears in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; **He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.**” Speaking to the Devil, God advised him that the Seed of woman would strike a mortal blow to his head, and that the injury that the Devil or Satan would incur on the Seed of woman would be comparatively minor. This was a hint about the crucifixion of Christ (the comparatively minor injury) and the permanent resurrection of Christ (the comparatively mortal blow to Satan).

An important series of prophecies about the establishment of the kingdom or church were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:3-4; 28:13-14; cf. Joel 3:1-2; Luke 2:25-32). “...And in you **all the families of the earth shall be blessed**” (Genesis 12:3). Acts 3:25 makes the correlation between those prophecies and the establishment of the church as the fulfillment of those prophecies. The promises and prophecies were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before the Israelite nation formed and before there were any Jews. Notice that the prophecies declare that the promised blessing is not limited to the Jews, but it is for “all the families of the earth.” Patriarchy (i.e., the religion of Adam, Noah and Abraham) was a family-type religion; Judaism was a national-type religion, but Christianity is a universal religion, in which both Jews and non-Jews may be members.

The spiritual kingdom was to be established in Jerusalem, and that is precisely where the kingdom or church was established nearly 2,000 years ago (Acts 2) in about A.D. 33. Amazingly, the following prophecy

was made about 700 years before it was fulfilled; God can do that, whereas mankind's predictions cannot be made successfully hundreds of years before their (accurate and complete) fulfillment.

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2-3; cf., Micah 4:1-2).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ also declared that He was about to establish His church. Some of those to whom Jesus was speaking lived to see the beginning of the church or spiritual kingdom (Mark 9:1).

Time of Beginning

Prophecies also predicted *when* the spiritual kingdom or church would be established. Daniel 2:31-45 declared that during the *fourth world kingdom* from the time of an including Babylon that the Lord's church would be established. That prophecy also named the next two kingdoms that only the mind of God could foreknow – Medo-Persian and Greek. That fourth kingdom was the Roman Empire, about which one reads in the opening verses of the Gospel records. Divine prophecy was accurate respecting the historical information about the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, hundreds of years before those kingdoms took turns ruling the greater Mediterranean world.

At the right time, God sent Jesus Christ into the world to be its Savior. Our Lord promised to build His kingdom or church (Matthew 16:18-19). Acts 2:47 states that He began adding the saved to His church on the Pentecost following His Ascension.

The Fulfillment of the Promise

The church began in Jerusalem, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and promises first stated in Genesis 3, repeated to the patriarchs as well as the subject of numerous prophecies, some of which were just noted above. The promise of heavenly or spiritual blessings extends to all mankind, irrespective of one's lineage – "all the families of the world."

A new name for the people of God was promised once the Gentiles also were the beneficiaries of God's blessings. "The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, And all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the Lord will name" (Isaiah 62:2).

It was always God's plan to redeem fallen man through the church. Every prophecy that foretells the establishment of the kingdom refers also to the church. The establishment of the church or kingdom in complete fulfillment of numerous prophecies is remarkable testimony of the establishment of the church by God. Churches since Acts Two that were begun by men were not established according to prophecies of the church. God caused the *first church* to be built and established the *only church* corresponding to age old prophecies.

Unlike humanly devised churches, the church of the Bible has Christ alone as its Builder (Acts 20:28). Prophecy spoke of a "stone" cut from a mountain without the hands of men (Daniel 2:45), which stone is the "rock" (confession that Christ is the Son of God) of Matthew 16:16-18 on which Jesus promised to build His church, and the "foundation" of the church which is Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Jesus, "a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen of God..." is "chief corner stone" (1 Peter 2:4-8; Acts 4:11), making Jesus also Head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23), Head of the body (Colossians 1:18) and King of the kingdom (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Summary

Churches of human origin were begun by mere mortals instead of by the Holy Son of God himself. They were begun after the establishment of the Lord's church, most of them outside the era and influence of

the Roman Empire, and in the wrong cities. Human churches are out of harmony with prophecies about the establishment of the Lord's church. At best, churches of man's devising can only sadly mimic the one true church, the one of the New Testament. The seed for harvesting a crop of Christians and the Lord's church or "the churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16) is the unadulterated Word of God (Luke 8:11). When something else is planted in the hearts of men, or that heavenly seed is planted with an admixture of something else, a much different crop results. Speaking of these different crops, not the result of the Word of God, Jesus said, "...Every plant, which my heavenly Father has not planted, will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13).

Chapter 2: Establishment

The establishment of the church of the Bible could neither be stalled nor prevented by either the devices of Satan or the feeble efforts of mankind. “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and **the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it**” (Matthew 16:18). Christ’s church was established on earth exactly when the Godhead determined that it was time to establish it. “For when we were still without strength, **in due time** Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Furthermore, the church was established on earth through Jesus Christ, Himself a member of the Godhead (Matthew 28:19). The second person of the Godhead brought the Gospel to earth personally. “For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**” (John 1:17).

Christ and His Life

Jesus Christ and His life became the foundation on which the church came to be established. The whole Christian system is based upon Him. “For no other **foundation** can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is **Jesus Christ**” (1 Corinthians 3:11). Anyone can read about Christ and His life in the four Gospel records that open the New Testament.

The Death, Burial & Resurrection

The death, burial **and** resurrection of Jesus Christ, also about which one reads in the Gospel records, is the heart of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Short of the resurrection never to return to the grave, the life, death and burial of Christ would have proved ineffective in the redemption of humanity. We see the death, burial and resurrection of Christ transpired in the Gospel records. The balance of the New Testament pertains to the consequences of the sacrificial death of Christ followed by His resurrection and what they mean to the redemption of mankind. **The Lord’s church was launched on the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know – Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. ... This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:22-24, 32-33, 36-37)

The apostle Peter answered the multitude’s question in Acts 2:38, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” Acts 2:41 records that “about 3,000 souls were added,” and verse 47 says that “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” It is in Acts 2 that one finds the birthday of the church.

First Century

Especially the Book of Acts chronicles the early years of the church of our Lord after its establishment in Acts 2. For roughly the first eight years the early church was comprised of Jews and Gentiles who had previously proselyted to Judaism before later becoming Christians. The conversion of Samaritans, whose pedigree was partially Jewish and partially Gentile, appears in Acts 8:4-12. Then, Acts 10 notes the

conversion of Gentiles as well, after which a new name – Christian (Acts 11:26) – was given by God (Isaiah 62:2) for the followers of Christ.

Though instructed to take the Gospel to the entire world in the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16), Jewish persecution of the infant church accelerated that process (Acts 8:1-4). Irrespective of the catalyst, within one generation Christians took the Gospel message to the whole world (lands ringing the Mediterranean Sea and beyond) according to Colossians 1:23.

Through the Book of Acts particularly and from the other epistles making up the New Testament students of the Bible can observe the Lord's church throughout much of the first century. Constantly, as was the case under the former religious dispensations of Patriarchy and Judaism, there was a contrast between what God instructed to be done and what God's children practiced and taught. Consequently, most of the New Testament books were written to correct doctrinal errors, and from them we learn about both the unauthorized derivations from biblical instruction and the ideals God desired of the church. Hence, we can know clearly the fundamentals of Christian religion.

In addition, Christianity is supposed to be a way of life on earth that will ultimately lead us to a home in heaven. We have no excuse for not knowing the blessings reserved for the faithful on earth and in heaven, not knowing the prohibitions, not knowing how God wants to be worshipped, not knowing how to practice Christian living, not knowing how to exercise Christian service, not knowing most Christian doctrine and not knowing how to become a Christian or how erring Christians can have their sins forgiven, too. Therefore, what God chose to preserve in the New Testament of divine instruction to and about the first century church is the authoritative information to which every honest soul today must appeal to become and to be a faithful member of the Lord's church.

Chapter 3: Government

Leadership

The first church of Christ was in Jerusalem. Initially, the apostles of Christ guided the church there, but at some unannounced time, elders were also appointed in the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 11:30; 15:2; 16:4). Christianity spread from Jerusalem into all the world (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23), and with its spread, other congregations were established under the oversight of congregational elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1). Biblical teaching that every local congregation have its own elders is as important as every other New Testament instruction for the Lord's church and for the Christians who comprise it.

Each fully organized congregation of the Lord's church ought to be ruled by elders who were selected according to biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). However, by what means ought a congregation *without elders* be governed? Should a preacher rule the church in the absence of elders? Is it biblically permissible to select a committee to rule the church? Should the trustees govern the church? Does the treasurer have the right to make decisions for the local church? Should the popular vote of all members, men and women, decide matters for the local congregation? Are all faithful, adult male members responsible for deciding church matters? Scripturally, who ought to be responsible for directing the function of a local congregation that does not have elders?

Can a congregation exist scripturally without elders? Yes, it is apparent that congregations in the first century **existed** for a time before the appointment of elders (Titus 1:5). Equally obvious then, they also **functioned** without elders for a time. However, later, these congregations matured to a point where elders were appointed. The question remains, however, "By what means ought a congregation *without elders* be governed?"

No Elders, Yet?

So-called "**evangelistic oversight**" is not the solution to church government in the absence of elders. God designed the eldership to be composed of *a plurality of men*, which suggests that no single individual regardless of his virtues and exemplary qualities is suited for such a task. The preacher is not the boss, and he must not allow himself to be the one who makes all of the day-to-day decisions (*until the congregation decides to replace him with someone else*). Instead, as soon as possible, a preacher, minister or evangelist ought to guide men in the congregation toward spiritual maturity. The evangelist needs to empower and train other men to assume areas of responsibility and service – even if he could do it better and more swiftly himself. The preacher needs to train the congregation as though he is trying to work himself out of a job. However, in truth, there will always be more for God's ministering servant to do than he can possibly accomplish in a lifetime.

A **committee** is a no more suitable alternative for church government instead of elders. The only group of men whose number is less than all the male members of a local church, permitted by Scripture to rule that congregation, is an eldership. Sometimes preachers or other male members have little interest in installing a biblically qualified eldership because they know that they cannot meet the scriptural qualifications to serve in an eldership. Especially willful men who cannot serve as elders realize that their influence and ability to affect decisions would be minimized were an eldership to be appointed over a congregation.

Legal **trustees** are not a permissible option for church government in the absence of elders. Were it not that civil government may require congregations to incorporate and generally obey those laws of the land, churches of Christ would not have trustees since they are not addressed in the New Testament. Therefore, the function of trustees as such pertains to the physical realm and not to spiritual matters. Ideally, where law of the land requires trustees or some similar arrangement, the elders of a congregation ought to serve in that capacity. In that way, God's law and man's law would be fulfilled harmoniously.

Especially a **treasurer** must be cautious not to misuse his position (of service) whereby he attempts to rule the church. While an elder may be a treasurer, a treasurer (even if he is an elder, too) is not equivalent

to a plurality of men who serve as elders. Furthermore, expressing the attitude verbally or in action that the treasurer controls the congregation by deciding when and if to write the church checks is ungodly and sinful (3 John 9-10).

A **church vote** wherein women as well as men decide the affairs of the church violates the respective roles of men and women regarding spiritual matters (1 Timothy 2:12-14). Just as in the home (Ephesians 5:22-24; Genesis 3:16), likewise in the church (1 Corinthians 11:8-9), the Bible teaches female submission to male leadership. Clearly, male, adult members have the responsibility for the direction, function and decisions regarding the church in the absence of elders. When fully organized, a select, qualified and appointed group of men (an eldership) has this responsibility in each congregation. All adult, male members of a congregation without elders need to cooperate with each other regarding the function of the local church. Then, at the earliest opportunity, from among themselves, they are obligated to select biblically qualified men to serve as elders.

Elders Needed

Sometimes a congregation cannot have an eldership at a certain juncture in its history because it does not have two or more men who are biblically qualified, willing to serve as elders and men that the congregation respects well enough to follow. The biblical qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 both include certain male Christians and exclude other male Christians for consideration for appointment as elders. However, when two or more men satisfy the biblical qualifications for appointment as elders, **God's divine plan for the guidance of a congregation is for it to have elders.**

Notice Titus 1:5: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are **lacking**, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you." By inspiration, the apostle Paul referred to a congregation without elders as "wanting" (KJV) or "lacking" (NKJV). The same Greek word translated "wanting" or "lacking" in Titus 1:5 appears as "lacking" in Luke 18:22, "lack" in James 1:5 and "destitute" in James 2:15. Review each of these verses and determine if "wanting," "lacking" or "lack" and "destitute" matters. "So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, 'You still **lack** one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me'" (Luke 18:22). "If any of you **lacks** wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). "If a brother or sister is naked and **destitute** of daily food" (James 2:15). Yes, "wanting," "lacks" or "lack" and "destitute" matter.

Barnes, Poole and *Wycliffe* equate "wanting" in Titus 1:5 as "**left undone**" respecting the appointment of elders. Adam Clarke uses the word "**defect**" to describe a congregation without elders. Matthew Henry dismisses the possibility of the appointment of elders as being an optional matter: "Where a fit number of believers is, presbyters or elders must be set; their continuance in churches is as necessary..." Accordingly, it was the procedure of the apostle Paul to appoint elders in every congregation he established. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed" (Acts 14:23). "There is not a single argument made against the appointment of qualified elders in every church that will stand the test of God's word" (Phillips 275).

Every fully organized congregation will have biblically qualified elders serving and overseeing it (Acts 20:28). Any congregation that does not have elders is not fully organized according to the pattern for primitive Christianity discernible in the New Testament. Although the biblical qualifications for elders should not be taken lightly, it is possible to misconstrue them, making them so stringent that no mortal could qualify to be an elder. God designed local congregations of the churches of Christ to be ruled by elders who themselves are accountable to God for each soul of the congregation (Hebrews 13:17). Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd under which the under-shepherds or elders serve (1 Peter 5:1-4). That is divine law and pragmatic also for the well-being of any local church.

Defining Church Leadership

God did not leave the church without appropriate direction in religion. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church for which He died (Ephesians 5:23-25). The Word of God is the authority to which we must appeal,

by which we must live and by which we will be judged someday (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 6:46; Revelation 20:11-15). Elders (also biblically known as bishops, pastors, overseers, shepherds and the presbytery) have Christ's **authorization**, and they have the **responsibility** to guide the churches over which they are appointed (Acts 20:28). Elders possess the greatest responsibility in the world, which is watching for the souls of others (Hebrews 13:17). Consequently, the New Testament contains qualifications that **must** be met by prospective elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Even the terms that the New Testament applies to them indicate something about their qualifications and function.

Incidentally, the qualifications for elders are such that each Christian brother or sister, too, ought to strive to possess them for themselves as well. The exceptions among the qualifications are for women that they should be the "husband of one wife." Of course, Christian men or women may also choose to remain single as did the apostle Paul. Otherwise, though, the qualifications required for elders ought to be the goals of and acquired by every other child of God also. However, these virtues which for every child of God would be worthy goals **must be possessed already by Christian men who are appointed to the eldership**.

There often is confusion regarding elders (and comparable terms) because the biblical description of them differs widely from typical denominational application of them. One denomination dubs as elders unmarried boys who go door to door, two by two, to promote that denomination's doctrine. However, according to the Bible, elders are married! Another manmade religion styles as bishops unmarried men who rule over an extended geographical area. However, according to the Bible, bishops ruled together over a single congregation, and they were married men. Most denominations equate a pastor with a preacher, whereas the New Testament does not make that correlation. Instead, God's Word uses the term "pastors" interchangeably with the word "elders." Rather than participate in denominational confusion, we need to turn exclusively to the New Testament for the correct understanding of biblical words: elders, bishops, overseer, pastor and presbytery.

The New Testament applies various terms to the office of elders. "Elders" is translated from the Greek "*presbuteros*." However, it is translated "presbytery" in 1 Timothy 4:14. The word that is usually translated as "elder" means older, senior or more advanced in years. It denotes dignity, maturity and experience. The word relates to the practice under Judaism of selecting judges and rulers from among elderly men. The word "elder" or "elders" appears 69 times in the New Testament: 19 times referring to elders of the church, 34 referring to Jewish elders, 4 times referring to age and 12 times in Revelation to elders in heaven. Examples of elders in the New Testament church include: Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Timothy 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5; James 5:14.

The words "bishops" and "overseers" are translated from the Greek word "*episkopos*." The word means an inspector, overseer, watcher, guardian, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done correctly, to superintend, guardian of souls or one who watches for others' welfare. The Greek word denotes the function or the nature of the work. "*Episkopos*" is translated as "bishop" or "bishops," referring to elders in the church in 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:7 and Philippians 1:1. It is applied to Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2:25. "*Episkopos*" is translated as "overseer" in Acts 20:28 of the KJV and "bishop" in the ASV.

"Pastors" and "shepherds" are translated from the Greek word "*poiman*." It means herdsman, shepherd, pastor, manager, director or superintendent. This word denotes tender care and vigilance. It was applied commonly to the shepherd of sheep (Luke 2). "*Poiman*" is translated once as "pastors" referring to the offices of elders in Ephesians 4:11. Otherwise (outside the Gospel accounts), it is translated as "Shepherd" and applied to Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd (Matthew 25:32; John 10:11, 14, 16; Hebrews 13:20) under whom there are subordinate shepherds (1 Peter 2:25).

Biblical Qualifications for Elders

Now that we are acquainted with the biblical names of these elders, we need to examine closely the biblical qualifications that elders must meet in order to be selected and appointed. Those qualifications appear in two places in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. "They [qualifications for elders] are distributable into six natural divisions... They are distinguished as they relate respectively to experience, reputation, domestic relations, character, habits, and ability to teach and rule" (McGarvey 53).

“If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1)

The prerequisite to the qualifications of elders is that a man “desires” or “not by compulsion but willingly” (1 Peter 5:2) takes the responsibility of being one of God’s elders. “The eldership is not for men who have to be pressured to receive it and then pressured constantly and continuously to retain a place therein” (Taylor 86). “A brother’s motive for wanting to serve as a shepherd over God’s flock must be a proper one. ...No man is fit to serve as an elder as long as his motive for doing so is to boss people around...” (Campbell 20). “Desire” needs to arise from a genuine love for the opportunity to serve the Lord’s church.

The word rendered “office” (KJV) or “position” (NKJV) means “work.” Being an elder is not an office of prestige as much as it is an area of Christian service or work.

“A bishop then must be...” (1 Timothy 3:2)

The word “be” that prefaces all of the qualifications a man must have before he is a suitable candidate for appointment to the eldership pertains to the **qualities he possesses at the time of appointment**. Obviously, ongoing sin or impenitent sin in the life of an elder would disqualify him from continuing as one of God’s elders. However, some qualifications required by God of elders are not necessarily perpetual conditions. Does the graduation from home of one’s children nullify the qualification of having ruled his house well and having had faithful Christian children in his home? Does the death of an elder’s wife invalidate the maturity and experience attained throughout his married life?

Paul means that if someone (indefinite pronoun *tis*) can be found who meets the qualifications, then, that person should be appointed as an elder or bishop. The person being considered must possess the qualifications **at the time of being appointed**. This is indicated by the use of the first class conditional statement and by the meaning of the present tense in the indicative mood. ...many times that when the present tense is encountered someone would say, “that’s continuous action into the future.” This is a mistake. While the present tense may indicate that the action continues into the future (depending upon the type of present tense used), it does not always do so. ... First, it is not sufficient to identify a verb merely as present tense. We must ask, what kind of present tense is it? Second, the meaning of the verb and context in which it is used is extremely important. ... In the indicative mood, the progressive present indicates action in progress in present time. (Stevens)

The word “be” in Greek as well as in English is a linking verb or a verb of being. This type of word describes action that is in progress at the present time. The word “be” in Titus 1:6 does not address circumstances before or after the time during which someone’s virtues are considered respecting his possible appointment as an elder. This understanding has a direct bearing on the proper interpretation of the passages about the qualifications of elders.

Because this verb is in the indicative mood, we know that it depicts **action in progress in present time**. Why is this so important? You cannot use the present tense in Titus 1:6 to prove that twenty or thirty years **after a man has been appointed as an elder**, he must step down if his wife dies. Or, that if his children die in an automobile accident, he must step down because he no longer has children who believe. Or, that if his adult children fall away he is disqualified by that action and must step down from being an elder. An elder may elect to step down under these circumstances, but he is not compelled to do so by the present tense in Titus 1:6. (Stevens)

“Blameless” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

“Blameless” means not under accusation, irrefragable, unimpeachable. However, “blameless” does not mean sinlessly perfect. From a human perspective, elders may appear perfect – when compared with other men, but they are not without sin from time to time in their lives. Blameless means not worthy of public rebuke, a good citizen in the community and in the church. The prospective elder has “no glaring character defect” (Jackson 29). The following elder qualifications may be an explanation of what it means for a man to be “blameless.” “The eldership is a post of work and a realm of activity requiring men of honor, integrity and uprightness” (Taylor 68).

“Husband of One Wife” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)

Practices by pagans and even the children of God (1 Samuel 1:2; 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:13) historically sometimes included polygamy. The apostle Paul informed Timothy that a man having more than one wife was not eligible to be appointed as an elder. “Husband of one wife” literally means one wife at a time or not a polygamist, in addition to in the ordinary sense of being married. “[E]ither celibacy or polygamy disqualifies a man for the office of a Bishop” (Milligan 328). We can be doubly certain that a bachelor is not eligible biblically to be appointed as an elder since marriage is also implied in the subsequent qualifications in the list of “having his children in submission” and “having faithful children.” “The most likely meaning of this phrase is that the man is to have only one wife and not another woman in his life” (Olbricht). An elder is a one woman man. At the time of his selection to be an elder, he is married to one woman.

Does the death of an elder’s wife automatically disqualify him from continuing to serve as an elder? Some brethren would affirm fervently, “Yes.” An elder may voluntarily resign from the eldership upon the death of his wife, but does the New Testament require him to resign? Did he lose the experience of married life that qualified him initially to be appointed as an elder?

Another question raised regarding the eldership and domestic requirements is, “What should the elder do in case his wife dies? Should he resign the eldership the next Sunday?” Some have so affirmed but I am not of this number. When initially appointed he had the one wife and met the signal success the possession of that qualification. He may choose to resign and that is his prerogative. However, in my judgment, the Scriptures do not demand that he do so. ...He still has in his background the necessary experience within the family framework to make successful his efficiency in this realm of service that elders render. ...

Suppose an elder of two fine Christian children who are both in their late teens or early twenties are killed together while traveling in an automobile. Yesterday he had children; today he is void of children. Does this mean he can no longer serve? Not at all! He had children – obedient children – when appointed. He met the qualification. ...The very fact of their being taken in this tragic manner would not deprive him of the practical training in household direction characteristic of the past. (Taylor 85-86)

It is possible for a widower who has remarried or a man innocent in a divorce for fornication who remarries to be suitable for appointment as an elder (Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15). What God styles as innocence should not be held against him.

If his wife has died, and he has remarried, this same rule would apply to his relationship to his new wife. She is to be the one and only woman for him. The dead woman is no longer his wife. “The wife is bound by the law (*to her husband*, implied) as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39, NKJV). “But if her husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband” (Romans 7:2, NKJV). Jesus’ reply to the Sadducees who did not believe in a resurrection might also imply that after death the union of a husband and wife no longer exists (Matthew 22:23-30). If a man’s wife dies, the union is broken. They are

no longer husband and wife. If this were not true, remarriage would not be permitted. A husband or wife is no longer bound to their dead partner, therefore, if they marry again, they have only one wife or husband. A man can become an elder if, after his wife dies, he marries a woman who is scripturally free to marry him. The same is true of a man who is divorced and remarried for a scriptural reason. He would be qualified to be an elder. He is no longer bound to a woman who has been unfaithful to him, if he has divorced her. (Olbricht)

Still, a congregation must have confidence in its elders and may choose for itself whether to appoint a remarried widower or a remarried divorced man to the eldership.

Just because a man's wife has died or become unfaithful and he has remarried does not mean he is qualified to be an elder. If he does not measure up to the other qualifications, he should not serve. Also, if the congregation will not accept him because he has remarried, even though he had the right to do so, he should not be appointed to the position of an elder. Only those should be assigned the office who meet the scriptural qualifications and who are accepted as leaders by the congregation. (Olbricht)

“Steward of God” (Titus 1:7)

A “steward” is a manager or treasurer for another; he is an employee. Elders are in the employ of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:1-4). There are primarily two treasures for which elders are accountable to our Lord: (1) “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1) and (2) the souls of the congregation over which the elders serve (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Whereas the main area of stewardship entrusted to elders pertains to spiritual matters, elders are responsible for the physical circumstances relating to the local church (e.g., property, money). In addition, they must manage intangibles, too (e.g., opportunities to proclaim the Gospel near and far). The local congregation and all that pertains to it are in the custody of God's stewards – the elders.

“Temperate” (1 Timothy 3:2 NKJV) or “Vigilant” (KJV)

“Temperate” means not given to extremes. “Each elder must have proper control of his own manner of life. If he is unable to control his own thoughts, his own speech and his own daily deeds, how can he hope to be successful in aiding other people to control their manner of daily decorum in thought processes, in the selection of words and in the execution of daily deeds? An intemperate man would be a failure in seeking to bring out temperance in others” (Taylor 68).

“Sober-minded” (1 Timothy 3:2 NKJV) or “Sober” (KJV)

“Sober-minded” means of sound mind, under self-control or discreet. An elder is to be objective, impartial and fair thinking (Hodge 49). He is not to conduct himself impulsively. “An elder should not be wholly given to silly or childish things. It does not mean that a man should never have any humor, but a man who is never serious certainly ought not to be considered for this high office. Being an overseer over the house of God is a very serious business” (L.R. Wilson qtd. in Taylor 69). An elder is levelheaded. “He should be a man of a sound and well-balanced mind, possessing a large amount of good common-sense” (Milligan 330).

“Of Good Behavior” (1 Timothy 3:2)

“Of good behavior” means orderly. “The life of an elder should be well-directed. A man who is slovenly, careless, and haphazard in his work has no business trying to direct the work of the Lord. ...Some churches have very little system or order in their work” (L.R. Wilson qtd. in Taylor 70).

“Hospitable” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8 NKJV) or “Given to” or a “Lover of Hospitality” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8 KJV)

“Hospitable” comes from a word from which we get brotherly love. “Hospitality is love for strangers set to benevolent action. It is love on the lips translated into a dynamic demonstration of what Christianity enjoins in our treatment of other people. ...Elders **MUST** be people whose homes are havens of hospitality. ...In the area of hospitality, the wife of an elder must share with him a generous reception of guests. She holds the key to much of his success in this royal realm” (Taylor 78).

“Able to Teach” (1 Timothy 3:2 NKJV) or “Apt to Teach” (KJV) and “Holding Fast the Faithful Word” (Titus 1:9)

“Able to teach” and ‘holding fast the faithful word to convict gainsayers’ come from the Greek word that means to teach or preach in the public assembly. One of the qualifications for the appointment of elders includes boldly (if necessary) teaching the law of the Lord in the face of opposition (Titus 1:9). **Each elder** needs to be **an able and willing teacher** of the law of the Lord (2 Timothy 3:2), **in private or publicly**. An elder ought to be skillful in teaching. This, of course, requires an accurate knowledge of God’s Word. “Any man unable to stand before a group and teach the word of God is not qualified to be an elder or shepherd. ...Men who cannot – or will not – teach fail in one of the most important qualifications. ...If one is not skilled in teaching the truth, he can neither recognize nor refute the one who objects to truth” (Hearn, “Duties” 13).

“Not Given to Wine” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:8 NKJV) or “Sober” (Titus 1:8 KJV)

“Not given to wine” means to be abstinent, not given over to alcohol. “Without any fear of successful contradiction from any source I confidently contend that a man who imbibes alcoholic beverages is not fit for the eldership of God’s church. ...Liquor consumption in any amount and the eldership of God’s church are totally incompatible” (Taylor 56). There is no place in the eldership for a social drinker.

“Not Violent” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7 NKJV) and “Not Quarrelsome” (1 Timothy 3:3 NKJV) or “No Striker” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7 KJV)

“Not violent” and “not quarrelsome” come from different Greek words with the same definitions, not quarrelsome or violent, not prone to smite men. “Striking [is] ...the sense of one who strikes back at anytime at anyone who dares to disagree or who displease him; one who lashes out at all who refuses to cater to him. ...Some like to argue, dispute over things of little importance” (Gough 9). The repetitious warning using different but similar words stresses God’s emphasis that this temperament disqualifies one for consideration as an elder.

“Not Greedy for Money” (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7 NKJV) or “Filthy Lucre” (KJV)

“Not greedy for money” means to not be devoted to money, not to make it the object of one’s life pursuits (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus proclaimed that one cannot successfully serve both God and money with equal intensity (Matthew 6:24).

“Gentle” (1 Timothy 3:3 NKJV) or “Patient” (KJV)

“Gentle” means mild and reasonable. An elder must be someone who is approachable by any of the members of the congregation. He is not abrasive, and he is willing to listen.

“Not Covetous” (1 Timothy 3:3)

“Not covetous” means not a lover of money. The elder does not have an inordinate desire to obtain wealth. He does not permit even legitimate business practices to overpower his devotion to the cause of Christ. Certainly, an elder will not pursue illegitimate business practices to fulfill a love of money. A second reference among the qualifications for elders to the proper attitude toward money highlights a human deficiency as well as emphasizes an essential virtue in God’s elders.

“Not a novice” (1 Timothy 3:6)

“Not a novice” means experienced, aged as a Christian, not newly planted or a recent convert. A man being considered for appointment as an elder is not unproven, but he has a proven record of Christian service. He is an experienced worker for the Lord.

“A Good Testimony among Those Who Are Outside” (1 Timothy 3:7 NKJV) or “Good Report” (KJV)

“A good testimony among those who are outside” means that non-Christians would commend him for his goodness. A man whose past sins still overshadow his esteem in the minds of brethren and non-Christians lacks the esteem or confidence by brethren and non-Christians to be appointed to so important a responsibility as an elder in the Lord’s church. It may be that those past sins have been forgiven by God and man, yet the *consequences* of the past sins may persist and make it impossible to serve in some capacities, in at least the areas in which those things are known. “If a Church will not accept a man he cannot elder!” (Hodge 57). “**No man should be appointed an elder whose life and conduct are questioned, even by those of the world**” (L.R. Wilson qtd. in Taylor 73). If community members distrust a man, how can he serve effectively as an elder of a congregation whose mission is to make Christians from non-Christians in the community? Religiously, the community may dispute the Gospel truth we take to it, but the community should be able to acknowledge the integrity of the Lord’s church and its leaders.

However, if one’s past sins, for which he has been forgiven, *do not* undermine the confidence of the congregation over which he is being considered for appointment as an elder or the confidence by the community in his reputation, one’s past, forgiven sins would *not* prohibit a man from consideration for appointment to the eldership.

The apostle Paul was a murderer, yet he rose to a height of unparalleled Christian service in the first century. Most of his successes with the Gospel of Christ were in areas of the world where he had not committed Christians to imprisonment and death. He also penned more New Testament books than any other writer (13 epistles). The apostle Peter denied Christ but proved to be a valuable servant, among other things, preaching the first Gospel sermon each to the Jews and to the Gentiles. He also penned two New Testament books. In addition to being an apostle, Peter was also an elder (1 Peter 5:1).

“Rules his own house well, Having His Children in Submission with All Reverence” (1 Timothy 3:4) and “Having Faithful Children” (Titus 1:6)

“Rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” means his children are not accused of riot, not unruly or insubordinate. “Having faithful children” means trustworthy followers of Jesus; they are Christians.

Scripture establishes that having a single child satisfies the biblical requirement of “children” (Genesis 21:2, 7). “God wants obedient children in an elder’s house. The number is not the issue” (Hodge 53). Therefore, having one or more “faithful children” though one or more children are not “faithful” would not necessarily disqualify a man from consideration for appointment to an eldership.

These passages consider the conduct of an elder’s children residing in his home **at the time of his appointment** to the eldership. Scripture records the qualifications necessary for men to possess **before** they can be considered for appointment as elders in any congregation (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The passage

in Titus has this to say about an elder's children. "...having **faithful children** not accused of riot or unruly" (Titus 1:6 KJV). Yet, the context in which those children, among the qualifications of elders, is addressed is revealed in the 1 Timothy passage. "One who **rules his own house** well, having his children in submission with all reverence; (For if a man does not know how to **rule his own house**, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:4-5 NKJV).

It is obvious from these Scriptures that in order for men to qualify for selection as elders (as far as biblical references to their children), they must have kept their families under control, having Christian children who, incidentally, acted like Christians ought to conduct themselves. Those comprising his family were obedient Christians, demonstrating their Christianity generally and with respect to the home over which their father was head.

The Conduct of a man's household is evidence of his ability for directing the affairs of the church. If he does well with his household, he would do well in the church; but, if he does not do well with his household, he will not do well with the members of the church. The elder should have his children in subjection. **Unruly children will prevent any man from serving successfully as an elder in the church.** ...Any man who is unable to govern his children correctly by maintaining good discipline, is no man for oversight in the church. (Noel Merideth qtd. in Taylor 84-85 emphasis added).

Then, a question arises about the appointment of a man to the eldership whose children have already matured and left the home. Naturally, one would ordinarily expect one to meet the qualifications of an elder, including having faithful children (Titus 1:6), while his children are yet in his home. Obviously, from the time his children first obeyed the Gospel (really it starts before this) through the remaining adolescent years while they continue to live at home, one who would be an elder learns (through on-the-job-training) to rule his house. Learning how to guide the home was determined by the Holy Spirit to prepare an elder to help guide the family of God – with other elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Imagine for a moment if it were the case that the **window of opportunity** for a man to be an elder was limited to the period between the time his children became Christians and graduated from the home (maybe at age 18). If the oldest child obeyed the Gospel at 12-years-old and if either the elder or others expected two or more children to become Christians before the man became an elder, just how many years do you suppose one could possibly serve as an elder? From a pragmatic perspective, it appears that this scenario would greatly hinder the appointment and ongoing activity of an eldership. Further, neither the qualifications indicated in Scripture nor additional information regarding elders that may be gleaned from the pages of inspiration **teach** that one's qualifications for guiding the family of God, which he learned from guiding his own family, somehow evaporate once those children leave the house. Common practice among the churches of Christ, which is indicative of common understanding of the applicable passages regarding elders, **does not** interpret qualifications of elders in such a way as to embrace such a **narrow window of opportunity** for one to serve as an elder. As far as I can ascertain from Scripture, it would be unwarranted and without biblical support to limit the service of an elder to the three or four years his children may continue to reside in his house after two or more of them became Christians.

On the other hand, the conduct of an elder's grown children who no longer reside in his home does not necessarily disqualify one from being an elder. **The Scriptures say nothing that directly touches on whether the sins of an elder's adult children disqualify him from continuing in the eldership.** Mothers and fathers have much less control over their grown children. One's adult children have freewill and may opt to do as they please, irrespective of their upbringing. It is often the case that children will adhere to the training of their earlier years (Proverbs 22:6), or if they depart from it, they will eventually return. However, whatever courses our adult children pursue are ultimately their responsibility and doing. Any decisions resulting from such a scenario, by an elder or the congregation he serves, then, would be a matter of human judgment. Scripture stipulates that an elder must have faithful children when he is appointed.

The only passage of which I am aware that involves challenging an elder pertains to accusations regarding sins in his life. "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:19-20). As far

as Scripture is concerned, that one or more of an elder's adult children become unfaithful does not necessarily disqualify him from being an elder. Sin in the life of an elder is a different matter. However, especially if all of an elder's children became unfaithful, one might suspect that something was amiss while the children were yet in the home under the elder's control and responsibility. Under these circumstances, then, either an elder or the congregation that he serves might deem it best that he no longer serve as an elder.

Ruling one's house well would include assuming the responsibilities of husband and father in the home. The man who is not the head of his own home is not qualified to be an elder in the church. "An unruly, bossy wife disqualifies an otherwise good man. Thus, wives should help qualify their husbands. ...Sometimes children may disqualify their fathers." (Hearn, "Positive" 7).

"Not Self-Willed" (Titus 1:7)

"Not self-willed" means not arrogant. "He must be uncompromising in matters of faith and obligation, but not head-strong and unyielding in matters of judgment and expediency. Diotrephes was an example of such (2 John 9-11)" (Gough 9). "The self-willed person is for one man rule and he is that one man" (Taylor 61). A self-willed man is the adult version of a childish temper tantrum!

"Not Quick-Tempered" (Titus 1:7 NKJV) or "Not Soon Angry" (KJV)

"Not quick-tempered" means not overcome by passion, not prone to anger. "The eldership is a place for cool and calm minds – not for hot heads who possess a fiery and uncontrollable temper. Judgments rendered in the heat of fiery anger are not very likely to contain practical prudence or rational wisdom" (Taylor 63). Combustible personalities have no place in the eldership of the church.

"Lover of What Is Good" (Titus 1:8 NKJV) or "Lover of Good Men" (KJV)

"Lover of what is good" means a lover of goodness. "No finer index to a man's real character exists than an examination of what he loves and what he hates" (Taylor 80). The expanse of this love for what is good includes love for good men (e.g., Gospel preachers, Bible class teachers, deacons and fellow elders). The apostle Paul wrote in another place that people who derive pleasure from sinful things and sinful people are worthy of death (Romans 1:32).

"Just" (Titus 1:8)

"Just" means to exhibit righteousness. An elder is fair and impartial. He is innocent of wrong doing.

"Holy" (Titus 1:8)

"Holy" means pious and sanctified. "The holy person is one who is right with God" (Taylor 71).

"Self-Controlled" (Titus 1:8 NKJV) or "Temperate" (KJV)

"Self-controlled" means having power over one's appetites, cravings or urges. An elder is able to contain himself from improprieties or sins. He is self-disciplined.

The Work of Elders

"The duties of elders are clearly outlined in the New Testament Scriptures. No elder need plead ignorance with respect to his duties; no membership need be in doubt as to what are the duties of elders. While the duties are weighty and many, they may be learned from the New Testament" (Boles, *Churches of Christ* 24). "They are to work as caretakers of God's house (1 Tim. 3:5), overseers/superintendents of every aspect of a congregation's work (Acts 20:28), and shepherds of the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3)" (Campbell 20). Elders must possess already the qualifications stipulated by God so that they can perform the work of elders once appointed.

A congregation cannot rise above its leadership. How important are qualified elders? A congregation's spiritual growth, maturity and effectiveness respecting all aspects of Christianity rely heavily upon a qualified eldership leading it. The work of elders pertains to souls and has to do with people's eternities.

A baker bakes. A policeman polices. A preacher preaches. Abusing the English language a little, an elder elds or elders. The point is that there is divinely given work for elders to do in the congregation over which they have been appointed. Among their duties, elders are to exhort and convict those who contradict sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). They are to watch or guard souls entrusted to them as well as to rule (Hebrews 13:17). To rule implies authority or authorization. Elders are not permitted to make new doctrine, but they are responsible for applying biblical teaching in the lives of fellow Christians in their congregation.

“Take Heed to Yourselves” (Acts 20:28)

Elders must make sure that they are right with God before they can lead others correctly. Elders comprise an eldership – a molded unit that acts in unison before the congregation. There is no place in an eldership for chief elders, senior elders, junior elders or bullies. Neither do God's elders complain to brethren that they did not get their way when with the other elders. Disgruntled, going outside of and circumventing the eldership by an elder gathering supporters is precisely what the apostle Paul cautioned against (Acts 20:29-30). God's elders practice self-discipline.

“Take Heed to the Flock” (Acts 20:28)

Elders must also concern themselves with the conduct of each member of the church. If necessary, an infected and contagious sheep must be removed from the balance of the flock to protect it. Elders sometimes are responsible for initiating varying degrees of church discipline to save the sinner and preserve other souls from the infectious nature of sin. Elders must know and care for each sheep.

“Feed the Flock” (1 Peter 5:1-2 KJV)

The NKJV reads “shepherd the flock of God” in place of “feed the flock of God” in the KJV. A large part of what a shepherd does regarding his sheep is to feed them. Elders need to provide spiritual food for the flock of God. Elders will guide the congregation away from a hurtful spiritual diet toward spiritual food that is healthy and that will help the sheep mature.

Elders are to feed or edify the church (Acts 20:28). Elders may utilize resources to help them accomplish their duties. Human resources include deacons, teachers, preachers and missionaries (evangelists). “It is not wrong for elders to ask or accept advice from others in the congregation who may be as wise, or wiser, and more knowledgeable than they. Any sensible suggestion made by others should be given due consideration” (Hearn, “Duties” 14).

Take the Oversight (1 Peter 5:2 KJV)

Elders have the responsibility in overseeing a congregation to provide for its needs through tending to the individual members. They must also attempt to lead straying sheep back to the fold of safety. Overseeing a congregation is another way of impressing the need for elders to be God's stewards of His people. Oversight works out a lot better when the overseen voluntarily submit to the oversight of the overseers.

“Being Examples” (1 Peter 5:3)

Elders provide themselves as examples for brethren to follow. If the elders are what God wants them to be, their example will help brothers and sisters in Christ to avoid sin in their lives (1 Corinthians 11:1). Elders are to be examples, but they are to be more than examples. They are to shepherd or oversee their respective congregations (1 Peter 5:2), but without being dictatorial (1 Peter 5:3). “What is forbidden in the foregoing text is the abuse of authority, and not the proper use thereof” (Woods 30). Elders are to serve as examples

worthy of imitation by the rest of the church, ever mindful that they are answerable to the “Chief Shepherd,” Jesus Christ (1 Peter 5:4).

Watch for Wolves (Acts 20:29-30)

Elders must watch for false teachers who will lead brethren under their watch care away from sound doctrine (Romans 16:17-18; 2 Timothy 4:3). Dangers can arise from outside the church or from within the congregation. The apostle Paul told the elders from Ephesus that false teachers would arise from within the eldership (Acts 20:29). Alert elders analyze what preachers and teachers preach and teach to assure brethren are not harmed by false doctrine. At the first notice of wayward or weak doctrine, elders can act to prevent harm. From time to time, elders may need to observe the classes being taught so they can be aware of what is being taught.

Stop the Mouths of Idle Talkers and Deceivers (Titus 1:11)

Elders need to identify false teachers disguised as Gospel preachers and teachers before precious souls are infected with false teaching. Elders need courage to resist inroads of error among the people of God for whom they watch, and that error may appear publicly or privately. Every Gospel preacher and Bible class teacher ought to be aware that if necessary his elders will arise as he speaks to the congregation to correct or halt his presentation (James 3:1).

“Support the Weak” (Acts 20:35)

In every congregation there are babes in Christ who are unable to care for themselves adequately. Elders must protect and encourage spiritually weak members. The eldership must plan and execute the plan to nourish weakly members to full health (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Pray for the Sick and Administer to their Needs (James 5:16)

Every Christian has some responsibility toward fellow Christians, and any Christian ought to pray for the sick and do for them what needs to be done if possible. However, elders cannot avoid their heightened responsibilities to pray for the sick and to administer to their needs by delegating it to others, such as to the preacher. Elders cannot hire their work out to others.

Consider and Decide Matters for the Church (Acts 15:6)

Someone must make decisions about the affairs of the church. This ranges from spiritual matters to physical circumstances that involve the local congregation. God has designed that elders shoulder that responsibility. Elders exercise themselves in the area of expediency.

Select and Appoint Teachers and Preachers (1 Timothy 4:14)

Timothy was selected and appointed by an eldership. Commonly, elders select Gospel preachers, and they are responsible as well for each teacher in the congregation over which they have been appointed.

Watch for the Souls of the Church (Hebrews 13:17)

Nothing could be more significant than being responsible to God for the souls of others. Elders bear this great weight. That burden would be lighter if more church members would cooperate with their elders as they attempt to guide them toward the eternal shores of heaven. Elders must watch for souls in the same vein as the watchmen in Ezekiel 33:7-16 were responsible for warning the wicked from their sins. Elders are guardians of souls placed in their charge.

Elders must be about the business of providing for the spiritual welfare of each member. They are stewards of the souls in their custody, leading their congregation on behalf of our Lord. “The true shepherd

will know all the flock, who they are, how many there may be, where they live and what their spiritual condition might be” (Hearn, “Duties” 13).

Selection and Appointment of Elders

Elders are not self-appointed (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The men possessing the grave responsibilities are selected by fellow Christians in accordance with divinely inspired qualifications. Then, the Holy Spirit installs them (Acts 20:28) into the eldership (if they are truly qualified) when the congregation appoints them. Incidentally, elders are made, not born, and they can be unmade as well (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

“Make no mistake about it, this matter of overseership is serious business. It is not for little boys, it is not for non-leaders, it is not for those whose first love is anything but the Lord’s Cause, and it certainly is not for the faint of heart” (Campbell 20). Select and appoint elders carefully, because it is easier to appointment the right men to the eldership than it is to remove unqualified elders. The Lord’s church is too important and it costs too much (Acts 20:28) to risk damaging it by appointing unqualified men to be elders.

“The key to good elderships is in selecting only qualified men” (Hodge 45). The selection and appointment of elders should never be reduced to a popularity contest. Elders should not be selected and appointed based on political victories or business accomplishments. Elders should not be selected and appointed because of their family relationship to other persons, in or out of the Lord’s church. Academic achievements or the lack thereof alone ought not to be the criteria for one’s appointment as an elder. A man’s personal wealth should never be the reason for which he is considered for appointment to the eldership. Surely, the man who is domineering and brash toward fellow brethren is ill-suited to be the Lord’s elder. Churches of Christ set themselves up for dismal failure if their attention to qualification of elders revolves primarily around two questions: (1) “Is his marriage biblically correct?” and (2) “Does he have faithful children?” To be God’s elder, sundry spiritual qualities found in the biblical qualifications need to be addressed, too. A congregation should never settle for the “*best available*” (Hodge 46) candidates while diminishing the essentiality of the divinely given biblical qualifications for elders. “There are not perfect men! All qualities listed must exist in each elder to an appreciable degree. But the strength of elders is in number. What one lacks another supplies” (Hodge 47).

Enough information appears in the New Testament to clearly indicate that every congregation should have a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17). Yet, obviously before the appointment of elders in any existing congregation, the congregation operated with apparent Divine approval without elders for that interim. Further, the qualifications of elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-11; Hebrews 13:17) and the very terms used to designate them (i.e., pastors, Ephesians 4:11; overseers, Acts 20:28; shepherds, 1 Peter 5:1-4) indicate the function of elders. However, almost everything else regarding elders has been left by God in the realm of expediency. **We do not have any biblical information regarding the selection and installation process.** These details are not stipulated and, therefore, are not a matter of doctrine. Hence, neither are they a matter warranting undue alarm nor disagreement.

There is no method revealed in the New Testament for the selection and appointment of elders. ... There is no instruction given that teaches us how they were “appointed” or they were to be appointed. Since no Scripture teaches us *how* they were appointed, we are left free to appoint them in any way or by any method that does not violate a Scriptural principle and at the same time promotes Christian unity. (Boles, *Churches of Christ* 15)

Since there is no one method of appointing elders specified in the Bible, the example of the selection of deacons may be a good one to follow (Acts 6). The apostles advised the church to look out among them good men to serve in this capacity. Just so, the congregation, after being taught and instructed in these important matters, can select men to serve as elders. The method is not described in Scripture. (Hearn, “Selection” 5)

In the absence of elders, the Christian men of a congregation are responsible for the affairs of the church, until such time as the congregation has elders. The congregation has the responsibility to appoint qualified men to serve as elders. It would be biblically incorrect for a congregation to go without elders indefinitely if

qualified men are present in the congregation. It would also be anti-biblical for a congregation to opt for a form of government, namely a committee (or a single person, etc.), instead of the biblical prescription of elders (or in the absence of qualified men to serve as elders, the male members of the congregation).

Not merely pragmatic, but it is wise leadership of an eldership that will contribute to its own perpetuation. Whether additional elders should be installed before the resignation of an elder or the anticipated incapacity or death of an elder whereby the eldership were dissolved is a matter of opinion and expediency. Perhaps elders may put forth to the congregation for its consideration men that they recommend for appointment to the eldership. Surely, though, year-by-year, the shepherds of the local flock of God will prepare men and women spiritually for greater service. We would expect to find future elders and their wives among those groomed for servant-hood. Passing along (2 Timothy 2:2) the doctrine of Christ (Hebrews 6:1; 2 John 9) alone would go a long way to preparing dedicated Christians for populating the eldership with godly men, accompanied by godly wives. However, a congregation may not have elders yet. Or, it may be that a congregation's eldership has dissolved (perhaps because of the death of one of two elders). How does a congregation go about appointing elders when it does not currently have an eldership?

Whether suggested by an existing eldership or nominated by members of the congregation, Christian men must be examined before appointment to the eldership. Usually, the preacher, elders or teachers rehearse with the congregation over several weeks the biblical qualifications of elders. Hopefully after being refreshed respecting the scriptural credentials that God requires of elders, the congregation will be better prepared to select and to appoint elders in harmony with God's Word.

Typically in contemporary times, names of Christian men are announced to the congregation for reflection. Any men whose names are put forth who do not desire to serve as elders remove themselves from consideration. Often over the two following weeks, brethren are encouraged to publicize any concerns about nominations, and those apprehensions are studied. Sometimes brothers will remove themselves voluntarily at this time from possible appointment as elders. Otherwise, if misgivings about a nomination are resolved satisfactorily to the men or to the existing eldership, those brothers and others about whom no one expressed reservations are recognized as elders of the local church on a specified day. Other candidates for selection as elders, men about whom the men or the eldership cannot satisfactorily resolve complaints, are not recognized as elders.

Whatever procedure agreed upon by a local congregation is appropriate for the selection and appointment of elders, as long as it does not violate any biblical principles and teaching. They, however, must be appointed in harmony with divinely given qualifications for elders. Yet, some ceremony or officiating in keeping with local customs would go a long way to (1) heighten the realization of the solemnity and importance of the selection of elders and (2) formalize the selection of elders for all local brethren and sister congregations, too. In any case, a local congregation is responsible for the selection and appointment of its own elders. We have a precedent in New Testament Scripture for congregational selection of men for special functions within the church (Acts 6:3). In Acts 6:1-6, the congregation was given instructions respecting the qualifications of the men to be selected. The congregation was instructed to select men from among themselves based on the stated qualifications. Pragmatically, if a congregation is not satisfied with its leaders, it will not follow them; the church needs to select its own leaders. Then, the apostles appointed the men who were chosen by the congregation. Further, we have another biblical example of solemnizing a selection of men from within a congregation for special functions (Acts 13:2-3).

Conclusion

Obviously, God placed qualifications for elders in the New Testament because He deemed them to be important – essential rather than optional. Christians, then, must ascertain what the New Testament teaches about elders. Elders, the presbytery, bishops, overseers, shepherds and pastors are synonymous or interchangeable terms coming from three Greek words: “*presbuteros*,” “*episkopos*” and “*poiman*” (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). A plurality of elders always serve together over each fully organized congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:17). Incidentally, this means that each elder possesses equal authority with every other elder in his congregation; there are neither senior (chief

elders) nor junior elders. “These men are equal in authority, as well as having an equal say in all their duties as shepherds of the flock” (Bryant 11).

There is no greater office of responsibility and service than that belonging to elders. They have the most important responsibility on earth! **One of the identifying characteristics of the church for which Jesus died and over which He is the Head is that fully organized congregations have biblically qualified elders.**

Christians have a right to expect that **each** man serving as an elder meets **each** of the divine qualifications for elders (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). We have a right to expect elders to rule and feed the flock over which they have been selected (Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). Only when fully qualified elders serve in each congregation will the churches of Christ function in harmony with God’s will. God knew what He was doing when He determined that each congregation would be ruled by a plurality of elders who meet divinely given qualifications.

Rule

No one likes to be *ordered around* or *told* what to do. Not even elders are supposed to act like that toward members of the church (1 Peter 5:3). Yet, though the eldership is supposed to provide godly examples (1 Peter 5:3), being examples does not diminish their responsibility to “rule” the congregation over which they have been appointed on the behalf of Jesus Christ. “Remember those who **rule over you**, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7). **Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive**, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17).

The church is not a democracy in which all the members have an equal voice in directing the affairs. The church of Lord is ruled, when the will of God is carried out, by the Head of the church, which is Christ. He rules through the eldership. Elders are not to be tyrants. They are not to be cruel and heartless, lording it over God’s people, but they are to be as fathers, with wise heads and loving hearts ruling the Lord’s people. Somebody must take the lead; some one must direct the work; some one must carry out the discipline of the congregation. ...When the Holy Spirit teaches elders to rule over the congregation, it at the same time teaches the congregation to submit to the government of the elders. (Boles, *Churches of Christ* 28)

In the course of governing the local congregation and attending to the spiritual welfare of that church, elders fulfill their God-given responsibilities as elders. It is the responsibility of the elders of the local congregation to teach God’s Word, and in so doing, they often opt for Bible classes, multiple occasions on which to worship God, vacation Bible schools, lectureships, seminars, Gospel meetings, ladies’ inspiration days, etc. It is the responsibility of church members to cooperate with the elders who are trying to save their souls and guide them to an eternity in heaven.

It is not true that elders rule by example and that they lack authorization from Jesus Christ to govern. Christ rule through them, and if we resist godly elders, essentially we resist Jesus Christ Himself.

Local

The loftiest sector of church government about which one can read regarding the church in the New Testament is the congregational eldership. The New Testament knows of no organization of church governance larger than the eldership in a local congregation. Elderships were appointed in each congregation, and their sphere of influence and labors were confined to the autonomous congregations over which they were respectively appointed. “So when they had **appointed elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23; cf. Titus 1:5).

“Their field of labor extends to no further than the limits of their own congregation” (Milligan 337). Elders serve and rule over the congregation that appointed them from among its members. New Testament

references to elders pertain to the congregations with which they are identified (Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14). The pattern for the selection and appointment of persons within the church to certain roles is congregational (Acts 6:3).

Universal

Jesus Christ is the universal Ruler and Head of His church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 2:10). Our Lord possesses “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). He has ruled in every generation from the commencement of the church (Acts 2:47) through the present, and Jesus will continue to rule as long as earth and time remain (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). Jesus Christ rules today, and biblically qualified and congregationally appointed elders serve under Him.

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Works Cited

- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.
- Boles, H. Leo. “The Eldership, The Qualifications.” *Seek the Old Paths*. 17.4 (2006): 30.
- . *The Eldership of the Churches of Christ*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, n.d.
- Bryant, Jim. “Elders and the Importance of Communication.” *First Century Christian*. 14.9 (1992): 11-12.
- Campbell, Roger D. “If a Man Desire the Office of a Bishop.” *Seek the Old Paths*. 22.5 (2011): 20-21.
- Clarke, Adam. *Adam Clarke's Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. New Modern Edition. CD-ROM. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991.
- Gough, Gilbert. “Restrictive Qualifications for Elders.” *First Century Christian*. 14.9 (1992): 9.
- Hearn, Roy J. “Duties of Shepherds.” *First Century Christian*. 14.9 (1992): 13-15.
- . “Positive Qualifications of Shepherds.” *First Century Christian*. 14.9 (1992): 6-8.
- . “Selection of Elders.” *First Century Christian*. 14.9 (1992): 5.
- Hodge, Charles. *My Elders*. Fort Worth: Star Bible & Tract, 1976.
- Jackson, Bill. “Elders, Men of Spiritual Character.” *Seek the Old Paths*. 17.4 (2006): 29.
- McGarvey, J.W. *A Treatise on the Eldership*. Murfreesboro: DeHoff Publications, 1982.
- Milligan, R. *Scheme of Redemption*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1972.
- Phillips, H.E. “No Elder Theories.” *Paul's Letters to Timothy and Titus*. CD-ROM. Joplin: College P., 1975. 264-275.
- Olbricht, Owen D. “One Woman Man.” *Gospel Gazette Online*. 1 Jul 2005. 20 May 2012.
<<http://www.gospelgazette.com/gazette/2005/jul/page20.htm>>.
- Poole, Matthew. *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 1997.
- Stevens, David P. “The Present Tense in Titus 1:6.” *Therefore Stand*. 21 (2005): 13-14.
- Taylor, Robert R. *The Elder and His Work*. Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1978.
- Woods, Guy N. “How May Elders Lord It Over the Flock?” *Seek the Old Paths*. 17.4 (2006): 30-31.
- Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody, 1962.

Chapter 4: Worship

The New Testament contains a divine pattern for worshipping God, but many acts of worship practiced by modern religions and churches are vastly different from the worship of the first century church. The churches of Christ, though, try to duplicate the simple New Testament worship today. Therefore, someone visiting the worship services of the Lord's church may notice that our worship differs from popular denominational worship (especially since we sing without instruments of music). However, our worship is not intended to be *different*, but *identical* to what God through the New Testament requires. We invite you to also practice the simple New Testament worship which God authorized for his church.

Assembly

The word "church" from the Greek "*ekklesia*" means "a calling out" and refers to an assembly or to a group of people who have congregated for some purpose relative to the calling out. In a secular sense, the word can refer to an assembly for any purpose consistent with the summoning to assemble (e.g., politics, club meeting, etc.); see Acts 19:32, 39, 41. Religiously and its use in the New Testament, "*ekklesia*" most of the time refers to the "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16). However, the word "church" is used in three senses: *the universal church* over which Christ is Head, which spans the globe and all time (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23), *a congregation* of the Lord's church that meets in a particular place (1 Corinthians 1:2) and *the assembly* of the local congregation, especially for the purpose of worship (1 Corinthians 14). Regarding this area of inspection about the church and its worship, here we are primarily interested in noting the assembly of a local congregation for the purpose of worship.

The assembly of the local church is very important and the subject of a warning not to abandon – "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another..." (Hebrews 10:25). The assembly is an opportunity to exhort and encourage each other in the Christian faith as each of us face daily challenges in an ungodly world. Preaching and teaching as well as the lyrics of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs edify Christians in the assembly (Colossians 3:16).

The apostle Paul provided us with a definition of what it means to assemble as the church. Several times in 1 Corinthians 11, the apostle refers to the assembly of Christians for the observance of the Lord's Supper as "when you **come together as a church**" (verse 18; see also verses 17, 33 and 14:26). Further, the assembly is described by Paul as "**the whole church comes together in one place**" (1 Corinthians 14:23; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20).

God intends for Christians to assemble together for congregational worship at least on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). In addition, Christians need to conform to the directions of their elders as they watch for the souls of their congregational members (Hebrews 13:7, 17). This usually means that Christians need to take advantage of additional opportunities for worship, Bible study and edification. It is "for your own good" – spiritually.

Acts of Worship

From 1 Corinthians 10 through Chapter 16 of that epistle, the apostle Paul addressed, among other subjects, the five acts of Christian worship and the assembly of the church during which it is to worship God. Chapters 10 and 11 teach about the **Lord's Supper**. Chapter 14 teaches about **the assembly** as well as about **prayer, singing** and teaching or **preaching**. Chapter 16 teaches about the contribution or **the collection**. So, the congregational assembly for worship and the five acts of Christian worship appear in the space of seven chapters in 1 Corinthians, essentially together in one breath or one stroke of the inspired apostolic pen. Of course, references to the activities of Christian worship appear in other places in the New Testament, too.

Incidentally, the order in which these acts of worship occur is not stipulated in Scripture. Therefore, the order in which Christians participate in the five activities of worship does not matter. Although once performed in one sequence at a local congregation, they could be observed in a different sequence at the same location at another time.

In addition, the Holy Scriptures do not place a greater emphasis upon any act of worship over another. Each activity of worship is essential and descriptive especially of congregational worship every Lord's Day. Individual Christians or religious cultures, though, may deem one or more activities of worship as more meaningful to them. Hence, some Christian assemblies devote more time to preaching, whereas others spend more time in the observance of the Lord's Supper. All five acts of worship, however, comprise Christian worship.

Lord's Supper

Many religious people observe the Lord's Supper infrequently. Various denominations do the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week monthly, semiannually, once a year on Easter Sunday or at some other interval on which they arbitrarily decide. Sometimes the reason for the infrequent observance of the Lord's Supper is explained that so weekly observance of the Lord's Supper won't make its observance mundane or commonplace. Such an explanation and practice presumes that either God has not given instruction respecting the frequency of its observance, or that irrespective of His instruction that God does not care if that instruction is ignored.

However, the church of the Bible participated in the Lord's Supper **every first day of the week**. Therefore, Lord's church today also observes the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, too. Since the churches of Christ belong to Jesus Christ, they are obligated to conduct themselves according to what Jesus **authorizes** (Romans 16:16; Colossians 3:17).

Sometimes contemporary people remove the observance of the Lord's Supper from a worship assembly and observe it at other occasions, such as a wedding. Try as one might, one cannot find in the New Testament where the Lord's Supper was observed on any other occasion by the primitive church than in its worship on the first day of the week. If the New Testament is to be taken seriously as revelation from God, people living in the Christian Age must discern and practice what it **authorizes**.

Even denominational churches that might observe the Lord's Supper weekly, sometimes it is a corrupted form of the Lord's Supper that they practice. For instance, Catholics observe a corrupted form of the Lord's Supper or Communion every day. Among deviations from the way the primitive church observed Communion, the Catholic Church reserves the fruit of the vine for its priesthood and uses alcoholic wine. Catholics resort to the purported authority of the Catholic Church, rather than by appealing to biblical authority, for everything that they do. One must turn **exclusively** to the New Testament to learn what God has authorized respecting Christian worship.

The New Testament authorizes weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week in Lord's Day worship of the local church. The Bible **authorizes** practices in one or more of only three ways. The Bible authorizes through **direct statements**, such as commands or statement of information, "**Go** ye into all the **world**, and **preach** the **Gospel** to **every creature**," Mark 16:16. The Bible authorizes through **implication**, from which mankind is obligated to correctly **infer** (Mark 16:16, i.e. mode of travel and manner of communication). The Bible authorizes by **approved example**, or what our legal system calls "precedent," Acts 20:7. "**2 a** : something done or said that may serve as an example or rule to authorize or justify a subsequent act of the same or an analogous kind" (Merriam-Webster). Direct statements, implication and approved example are the tools of successful communication irrespective of the setting (e.g. between children, adults and God).

A single verse of Scripture settles the frequency and the occasion God intended for observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Acts 20:7 records an **apostolically approved example** of observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week by a local church. Since no other passage addresses the frequency of or occasion for observing the Lord's Supper, Acts 20:7 decisively settles those questions: first day of the week in the assembly of the local church for worship. "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread [a reference to the Lord's Supper or Communion], Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

The observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week in the assembly of the local church for worship corresponds to the other four acts of worship characteristic of Lord's Day worship. Preaching

also occurs on the occasion of observing the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). The collection occurs on the first day of the week, too (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Singing and prayer also occur during assemblies of a local church, including the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 14:15).

The reason for observing the Lord's Supper does not correspond to other occasions, reasons or days for its observance. It is observed to remember Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24-25). The Lord's Supper was never intended to be observed apart from other acts of worship and outside of the assembly of the local church on the first day of the week. Further, it was never intended to make a wedding more special than it should already be.

Everyone who respects biblical authority and wants to please God will render to the Almighty worship that He has authorized. In the case of the Lord's Supper, that means that it will be observed weekly on the first day of the week, along with other biblically authorized acts of worship, by the local church.

The Lord's Supper has special meaning to me. The **purpose** of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20), breaking bread (Acts 2:42; 20:7) or Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16) is to commemorate (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) and to proclaim the Lord's death until He returns (1 Corinthians 11:26). After all, the vicarious, sacrificial death of the Son of God on Calvary's cross is a cardinal facet of Christianity. With the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5) are the children of God redeemed (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:8) or purchased (Acts 20:28) from sin. This aspect of Christianity is so crucial that God saw fit that the church of Lord would observe the Lord's Supper weekly on the first day of each week (Acts 20:7). Furthermore, it is so important that Christians are cautioned on how to or how not to observe it (1 Corinthians 11:27-32).

In addition, partaking of the Lord's Supper has special meaning to me. Observing the Communion is a habitual, weekly affirmation that I believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), descended from heaven and died for me so that I could entertain the hope of spending forever in heaven (John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:1; Hebrews 11:10, 14-16; 13:14). Our Lord died so that the world could be saved (John 3:16; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:17).

Furthermore, every time I partake of the Lord's Supper, I sense a renewal of a pledge of allegiance to Jesus Christ. In essence, we who observe the Communion acknowledge afresh that our Messiah, the Son of God, died in our stead for our sins. We, then, ought to be willing to die if necessary for Him. That should engender and reinvigorate in us each first day of the week our heartfelt, whole being commitment to serve Jesus Christ foremost and first before all others (Matthew 10:37) and before anything else (Matthew 6:33). We are Christians **before** we are spouses, **before** we are parents, **before** we are children, **before** we are employees or employers, **before** we are citizens, etc. What a difference such a widespread attitude would make in the church! What an impact Christians with such a mental disposition followed by corresponding physical activity could have on the world!

Each time I observe the Lord's Supper I am left with the overriding sense of obligation to **live** for Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter in particular was willing to **die for Christ** (Matthew 26:35; John 18:10), but he found it immensely more difficult to **live for Christ** (Matthew 26:69-75). As hard as it would be for us to **die for Jesus**, like it was for the apostle Peter, it is vastly more difficult for us to **live for Jesus**. Yet, that is precisely what each child of God must do. Every time I partake of the Lord's Supper, I am reminded that I am obligated to live for my Lord.

Each occasion I eat that bread representing Jesus' body (Matthew 26:26) and drink the fruit of the vine representing His shed blood (Matthew 26:27), I am acknowledging my debt to Him – and my obligation to serve our Lord faithfully and actively. Taking of the Lord's Supper is not some lightly observed mere routine, but it is a declaration that echoes in heaven itself and should resound around the world that God has an army on earth peopled with valiant and courageous soldiers who are wholly dedicated to carrying out their marching orders.

Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper following His observance of the last authorized Jewish Passover (Matthew 26:17-30). He used food items available to Him in the same place He observed the Passover with which to institute the Lord's Supper. This means that He used unleavened bread since nothing with leavening in it was permitted in the Jewish home during the Passover (Exodus 12:15). Our Lord said that the bread represented His body (Matthew 26:26). Jesus also used "the fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29) to represent His blood (Matthew 26:27-28). "The fruit of the vine" referred to grape juice, and its color

resembles blood. The Lord's Supper is a memorial (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) of the vicarious sacrifice for sin that the Father and Jesus Christ made of Him for the sins of humanity – redeeming or buying us back from sin (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18).

It is a supreme privilege for every Christian to participate in the Lord's Supper each first day of the week. The Communion is so important that the way in Christians partake of it can be acceptable or unacceptable to God (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).

Works Cited

Merriam-Webster, I. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 10th ed. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993. CD-ROM. Bellingham: Logos, 1996.

Preaching

Verbal communication is God's choice for the communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ or the New Testament message to the world. He has done this in two ways – through the use of audible words by using Gospel preachers (Romans 10:13-15; 2 Peter 2:21) and through the written word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16). The same verse of Scripture that reveals to us the day on which and the frequency with which the Lord's Supper must be observed also includes preaching of God's Word (Acts 20:7). In addition, the New Testament itself stands as testimony to God's use of verbal communication to deliver His divine message to humanity.

Especially in the assembly on the Lord's Day, preaching serves to edify and enrich listeners with God's message for mankind. There are three basic kinds of sermons: *Topical*, *Contextual* and *Expository*. **Topical sermons** revolve around biblical *subject* matter. Research and arrangement of biblical information that presumably substantiates the theme or subject matter selected by a preacher may be assembled from numerous Old Testament and New Testament books. For instance, one could select passages from both testaments of the Bible that pertain to the subject of "murder" or "worship." Most sermons are topical in design, which means that the sum of God's Word (Psalm 139:17) on a subject may be assembled to demonstrate what God's divine instruction is about any given matter. Although this is an effective procedure for learning God's will on a biblical topic, the preacher must be careful to distinguish between former laws of God that do not strictly apply today (but may apply often in principle, Romans 15:4) and the law of God that all people living today must obey. The weakness of topical sermons is that they lend themselves to accidental or purposeful abuse by preachers to force Scripture out of context to appear to prove preachers' preconceived ideas or personal biases; if the Bible teaches a certain doctrine, especially Christians ought to appeal to the verses that teach the doctrine, rather than taking verses out of context in an attempt to validate doctrine (1 Peter 4:11).

Contextual sermons pertain to a passage of Scripture that may comprise a few verses within a chapter of a Bible book, a Bible book chapter or perhaps an entire book of the Bible. The emphasis is on a particular *context* under consideration. Contextual sermons are lesson topical in the sense that they do not rely heavily on Scripture outside of the context being examined. Yet, at the same time, contextual sermons do not explore extensively the meaning of individual words within the selected context. This kind of sermon shares some of the characteristics of both topical and expository sermons.

Expository sermons rely nearly exclusively on a selected passage, with a focus on the meaning of words used in the context of the passage. This kind of sermon is less susceptible to abuse that can occur especially with topical sermons and to a lesser degree with contextual sermons. Expository sermons are the truest form of preaching since they deal wholly with Scripture in the context of a passage, and they have as their goal the rich, full explanation of a portion of God's revealed will. Expository sermons attempt to convey the message of God first given to an ancient audience to a contemporary audience. This type of sermons requires greater diligence and study upon the part of the preacher, but a larger share of sermons preached ought to be this type of sermon.

The best communicators lead their hearers not merely to acquire information, but **challenge the auditors** of their speeches to act consciously upon the facts presented (e.g., repent, apply to themselves,

commit themselves, etc.). Likewise, every Christian needs to assume the role of feasting on the Word of God (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2), rather than, for instance, evaluating the presenter or allowing himself or herself to be distracted by other people or even irrelevant thoughts to Christian worship. Edification is the goal of preaching and teaching (1 Corinthians 14:12, 17, 26), and that requires cooperation between the speaker and the hearer (Matthew 13:15; Hebrews 5:11).

Preaching is not intended by God to be entertaining. Irrespective of whether the preacher exhibits oratory skills, one must keep in mind that the message from God's Word is more important than the messenger. Eat God's soul food and grow thereby!

The **purpose of preaching** is capsulated in Nehemiah 8:1-8, which is essentially Bible reading plus explanation. "So they **read distinctly from** the book, in **the Law of God**; and they **gave the sense**, and **helped them to understand the reading**" (Nehemiah 8:8). The purpose of preaching is **not** to fill an auditorium (numbers); to dazzle an audience with mastery of language (oratory, eloquence, fair speeches, good words); to zap the audience with an emotional charge that will make people roll in the isle, faint, shout, dance or jump; to fill the church treasury or even to pay the preacher. Chiefly in the Gospel Age, preachers are charged (2 Timothy 4:1-5) to preach Jesus (Acts 8:35). The worship assembly provides the natural and usual opportunity for the child of God to be edified by the preaching of the Gospel, and Christians ought to opt for every occasion afforded them for spiritual enrichment (e.g., every worship period, Bible class, Gospel meetings, seminars, etc.).

Giving

One must turn **exclusively** to the New Testament to learn what God has authorized respecting Christianity, and this includes knowing what God expects of Christians regarding their giving, church contribution or collection during congregational worship. The contemporary religious world funds itself in a variety of ways, but God has designated specifically in Scripture how New Testament Christians are to finance the Lord's church. Many denominations, for instance, resort to bingo, raffles, suppers, dinners, bake sales, carwashes, carnivals or even commercial enterprises. In addition, almost every religious group that claims an affinity with Christianity promotes tithing or contributions of 10% among its members. Tithing, though, was a part of the Old Testament from which contemporary mankind has been "delivered" (Romans 7:6-7) since the Old Testament was "abolished" (Ephesians 2:15) and "nailed... to the cross" (Colossians 2:14).

Instead of any of these ways of funding the church of the Bible, the churches of Christ are obligated to follow the divine will for funding religious activity in the Christian Age. Freewill giving is the only means authorized in the New Testament for funding religious activity. In addition, only the religious activity authorized in the New Testament for the church to perform can avail itself of the money collected by the Lord's church. In other words, any activity that does not relate to the mission of the Lord's church (i.e., evangelism) or a work of ministry (i.e., benevolence, edification) is not an appropriate expenditure for church funds. Generally, the Lord's church needs funds for evangelism, edification and benevolence (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Corinthians 11:8; 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26; Galatians 6:10; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Matthew 5:43-48).

The churches of Christ must follow the divine will for funding religious activity, and there are a number of religious activities indicated in the New Testament that may require the church to spend money. The New Testament authorizes the Lord's church to financially support preachers of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:4-14), to financially support elders (1 Timothy 5:17-18), to financially support widows who have no other recourse for their livelihood (1 Timothy 5:3-16), to financially support evangelism in its own community or other communities (2 Corinthians 11:8; Philippians 4:14-16), to financially provide for its own edification (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26) and to financially assist Christians and non-Christians who need benevolent relief (Galatians 6:10; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Matthew 5:43-48). Anything not specifically stated in the New Testament, not a part of evangelism, edification or benevolence and not otherwise authorized by direct statements, approved examples or divine implication is not something on which the Lord's money may be spent.

Christians are **authorized** to practice *freewill giving*. The **primary** New Testament prescription for funding the Lord's church is weekly freewill giving on the Lord's Day as a part of worship (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), and that instruction was in the form of a **command**. Freewill offering is characterized by *purposeful giving according to one's prosperity* or commensurate with one's resources (2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). An **additional** New Testament prescription for funding the Lord's church is through *spontaneous freewill giving*, for which we have an example in Acts 4:34-37. The freewill giving of Acts 4-5 does not appear to have been a during Lord's Day worship, in view of the coming and going of Christians as well as presenting the money to the apostles in Acts 5:1-10.

Since the churches of Christ belong to Jesus Christ, they are obligated to finance themselves only in the way the New Testament authorizes. Further, the Lord's church may only spend money on things that are authorized in the New Testament. No church is authorized to fund religious activities through any means other than freewill giving. Furthermore, no church is authorized to spend money on things not indicated in Scripture.

The inspired apostle Paul wrote in the context of our giving, "...He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6). May every Christian give as he or she purposes and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7), as well as according to one's prosperity (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Singing

Nowhere is it more important to distinguish between Old Testament and New Testament instruction than it is regarding the subject of worship music in the church of the Bible. This is the case because what the New Testament or Gospel teaches regarding the music with which we ought to worship God differs from what nearly every contemporary church does today. Especially this biblical topic pertains to what is **authorized** by God in the New Testament. It is important to reinforce fundamentals of the Christian faith, especially when they differ from popular religion.

The churches of Christ (Romans 16:16) belong to Jesus Christ, and consequently, they are obligated to conduct themselves according to what Jesus authorized (Colossians 3:16-17). People living in the Gospel Age must heed the words of Jesus Christ rather than the words of Moses or the words of Old Testament prophets. God the Father emphasized this at the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ when He uttered, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:1-5 NKJV). Remember that Moses (the lawgiver of the Old Testament) and Elijah (representing all the Old Testament prophets) were present at the Transfiguration. The significance of their appearance then is that the Father essentially said, "Listen to my Son, Jesus Christ, rather than to Moses or to the prophets." Jesus Himself stressed that during His earthly ministry when He said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Further, Jesus Christ is the Lawgiver (James 4:12) and Mediator of the New Testament (Hebrews 9:15), to which people living today must turn for religious instruction. Little surprise, then, that Jesus Christ condemned alteration of divine revelation (Judaism then, Christianity now) with "the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9), and that the inspired apostle Paul likewise condemned false Gospels (Galatians 1:6-9) and the human will instead of God's will discernible in the New Testament, specifically regarding worship (Colossians 2:23). One must turn **exclusively** to the New Testament to learn what God has authorized, including the topic of worshipful music under Christianity.

The Old Testament and heaven are incorrect places to look for what God has authorized for worshipful music today. The Old Testament has been replaced with the New Testament for people now living. It has been "done away" (2 Corinthians 3:6-11), "abolished" (Ephesians 2:15) and taken out of the way by nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14). People living today have been "delivered" from all of the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments (Romans 7:6-7). Further, the New Testament is a "better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6-7). Therefore, the Old Testament is an incorrect place to look for what God has authorized in worship today (including worshipful music).

What may or may not occur in heaven is irrelevant regarding the Christian Age, and often passages about heaven are misrepresented in a vain attempt to justify what God has not authorized for Christian worship. Every soul will be judged at Final Judgment respecting the law of God under which he or she lived – no more and no less (Revelation 20:12-15). Appeals to what may or may not occur in eternity are irrelevant regarding Christian worship today.

Singing is the only type of music that God has authorized for use in worship today. Instrumental music existed in the first century when the church was begun by Christ, and could have been authorized by our Lord for Christian worship, though He did not authorize instrumental music for Christian worship. Near the dawn of man’s habitation of planet earth, Jubal invented “the harp and flute” (Genesis 4:21). King David introduced instruments of music into Jewish worship (1 Chronicles 23:5; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 29:26; Amos 6:5). Obviously, then, instrumental music was available, though not selected by God, the Holy Spirit or Jesus Christ for use in Christian worship. The apostles and other inspired writers of the first century neither advised Christians to worship with instrumental music nor observed that Christians were using instrumental music in worship.

All worshipful music associated with the Lord’s church in the New Testament is **singing without accompaniment by instrumental music** (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13). A sample of a first century Christian worship assembly identifies singing as the type of worshipful music that had apostolic sanction or authority (1 Corinthians 14:15). “Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” in first century worshipful music were spoken through singing, and the instrument used to make melody was the “heart” (Ephesians 5:19). “Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” through singing taught one another spiritual truths (Colossians 3:16), which instruments of music are incapable of doing. The type of music in a first century congregational assembly was singing (Hebrews 2:12). Irrespective of the place or occasion, first century worshipful music involved singing “psalms” (James 5:13).

Famous religious leaders throughout history realized that instrumental music is **not authorized** by the New Testament for Christian worship. The first century church did not use instrumental music in worship because there is no biblical authorization for it, and at first, not even the Catholic Church used instrumental music in worship. According to historical records, instrumental music was added by some religionists occasionally not earlier than 400 years after the establishment of the Lord’s church, and the organ was not introduced until about 1,200 years after the church began in Acts 2. Yet, no one has ever been authorized to add instrumental music to Christian worship!

Singing is so specific of a type of music that it differs from instrumental music as well as other types of vocal expression, too (e.g., humming, whistling, making other noises). Through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul **commanded** singing as the type of music to be used in Christian worship (Ephesians 5:19). “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). The very next verse emphasizes the authority of Jesus Christ. “And **whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” While we must heed the authority of Jesus Christ in every matter, this reminder regarding the authority of our Lord is tied particularly to the God-designated type of music – singing – with which God expects Christians to worship Him. It is sinful to alter the Gospel in anyway (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19), and so, no one ought to expect God to be pleased with him or her who uses instrumental music in Christian worship.

Prayer

The Bible is God’s communication with mankind, and prayer is man’s opportunity to communicate with God. Besides private prayers, there are public prayers as well, such as are found in the congregational worship assembly (1 Corinthians 14:14-16). Our Lord provided a model for prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. These prayers may petition God for both temporal and spiritual blessings, or they may praise God, or they may thank God. Jesus taught the disciples to offer their prayers to God the Father (Matthew 6:9), and He further directed them to approach the Father through Him (John 14:6, 13). Our prayers need to be according to the

will of Christ (1 John 5:14) and God (1 John 3:22). In order to become familiar with the will of God, one must become familiar with the Bible, especially the New Testament for people living today (2 Timothy 2:15).

The posture of one's heart (Luke 18:10-14) is more important than one's physical posture. We have references in Scripture of people praying while standing (Hebrews 10:19), kneeling (Luke 22:41; Acts 20:36), lying face down (Matthew 26:39) and lifting up one's hands (1 Timothy 2:8).

Although some religious people make repetitious prayers (e.g., published religious prayers), Jesus warned His disciples against doing that (Matthew 6:7). Christians need to have confidence that God hears prayers in order for God to respond providentially to them (Matthew 21:22). Pretentious, long prayers should be avoided (Matthew 23:14). Christians ought to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; James 5:16), as well as to withstand temptations (Matthew 26:41). The children of God should pray for their enemies (Luke 6:28) and their government, too (1 Peter 2:1-2). Christians should pray persistently (Luke 18:1-8) and possess a willingness to pray regularly (Acts 12:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Pray should accompany important decisions (Acts 6:6). The child of God can find solace in times of hardship as well as an avenue of joyful expression through prayer (Acts 16:25; James 5:13). We should pray for lost souls (Romans 10:1). Our prayers may be for our providential healing (James 5:15).

In order for one's prayers to be acknowledged by God, he or she must endeavor to live a godly, obedient life. "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:12).

One leading a public prayer needs to remember that he is leading a prayer on behalf of all those who are present. It is not his prayer alone, but becomes the prayer of the entire assembly of Christians present (1 Corinthians 14:16). Therefore, the one praying needs to take into consideration through the public prayer the needs and concerns of the assembled congregation. The prayer needs to be uttered loudly enough that all can hear it; modern microphones typically make it possible for any man to be heard.

Incidentally, male Christians are charged in the New Testament with the responsibility of leading public prayers in the presence of both men and women (1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Corinthians 14:34). Female Christians, of course, may lead prayers among children or groups of other women – just as they may also teach women publicly (Acts 21:8-9).

Four acts of worship appear immediately after the establishment of the Lord's church, and prayer is one of those worshipful activities. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine [teaching or preaching] and fellowship [contribution or collection], in the breaking of bread [Lord's Supper], and in prayers" (Acts 2:42); absent from this list is singing, which is found elsewhere in the New Testament in multiple passages. Christians today need to participate in the public prayer led by a Christian brother, as well fully engage each other act of Christian worship, too.

Role of Members

What is the role of members of the church who are not serving publicly (e.g., preaching, public prayers, song-leading, serving communion, taking up the collection) in congregational worship on the Lord's Day? Christian worshippers are **not merely observers, but they are active participants**. For instance, the public prayer that a Christian brother leads is not his prayer only, but that prayer is led on behalf of the entire assembly of Christians. Therefore, the prayer is the prayer of each Christian present. Likewise, the sermon is not just the preacher's sermon, but it is the message from God by which every saint in the assembly ought to be edified. The joint participation is more easily recognized in the singing, the partaking of the communion and the giving because especially these aspects of Christian worship observably involve the entire assembly. Worship is not a mere formality whereupon Christians are simply called upon to be present at the appointed times. Rather, **worship is something that we do!**

Christians need to recognize that **worship is not a performance** by selected men, but instead, it is a joint participation of adoration for God, notably from which the worshippers also derive encouragement, fellowship and edification. When Christians understand that principle, then, they will be less likely to *grade the performance* of the preacher, song leader, etc. and be more likely to feel spiritually refreshed from the occasion of worship. Only when worshippers invest themselves in worship will they be less likely to pine

that they *didn't get anything out of the worship service*. Worship is more than a duty; it is a blessed opportunity to magnify the name of our Great God. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Psalms 122:1). "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

Purpose

The purpose of Christian worship is multifaceted. We must never lose sight of the fact that foremost, worship must glorify God in the way in which He has instructed us and desires to be worshipped; our worship must be 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). Worship in both testaments of the Bible includes the idea of prostrating oneself or bowing (in body, spirit or both) before Almighty God (Psalm 96:9; 99:5; Revelation 14:7); the English word "worship" represented by the Greek word "*proskuneo*" and meaning to bow, etc. appears 60 times in the New Testament. Christians ought to glorify and magnify the name of God in Christian worship. "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalms 29:2).

"Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! Sing out the honor of His name; Make His praise glorious. Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power Your enemies shall submit themselves to You. All the earth shall worship You And sing praises to You; They shall sing praises to Your name" (Psalms 66:1-4). "They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3-4).

Secondly, Christians are the beneficiaries of Christian worship, too. Unfortunately, much of the time humans and even true Christians put themselves in the first place and subjugate God to second place, or worse forget that we are supposed to be worshipping God in His own appointed way. Although Christians are not allowed to worship with the aim of pleasing themselves (Colossians 2:23), nevertheless, Christians receive blessings from worshipping God. This is especially discernible in when it comes to preaching and singing, because both of these activities of worship result in edification of the assembly. The obvious object of preaching is the edification of the congregation, and the lyrics of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs is "teaching and admonishing one another" (Colossians 3:16).

There is also fellowship or partnership, which edifies, in the Holy Communion or Lord's Supper and the contribution. The Greek word "*koinonia*" sometimes is translated "communion" when referring to the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16), "contribution" when referring to the weekly collection (Romans 15:26) and "fellowship" (1 John 1:3, 7) when referring to our three-way spiritual relationship – Christian to Christian and the Godhead. Christians uplift each other by their mutual participation or partnership in each aspect of Christian worship, including our public prayers for the brotherhood.

There are two primary purposes of Christian worship – in a specific order. First, glorify God, and secondly, see to the edification of one another. Christian worship, then, is purposed first **vertical** (to God) and secondly **horizontal** (to Christians).

Chapter 5: Work

In this area, we will show both the singular mission of the church of the Bible as well as works of ministry with which the Lord's church is charged by Scripture to perform. There may be a subtle difference in the two, but unless the distinction is observed, it is certain that the mission of the church will be overlooked in favor of works of ministry. The local congregation and individual Christians have responsibilities toward both the mission of the church and works of ministry.

Mission

What is the mission of the Lord's church? First, exactly what does the word, "mission" mean? From the dictionary, we learn that "mission" means an "assignment" or "a specific task with which a person or a group is charged" to do. The word "mission" may have additional meanings, too, but this is what we mean when discussing the mission of the church. Incidentally, the word "mission" does not appear in the Bible. Therefore, when talking about the mission of the church, we defer to the dictionary definition. Then, we must look to the New Testament, because that is the law of God binding upon humanity today, for references that correspond to the dictionary definition.

Hence, by asking, "What is the mission of the church?" we mean, "What is the **assignment** or **specific task** that the Lord's church is expected to perform?" In addition, since naturally we are looking to the New Testament for the answer to this question, we understand Who has made this assignment of a specific task to perform. No assignment or task merely assigned by mortals to themselves is satisfactory to be the mission of the church. So, the expanded question is, "**What is the mission of the church that our Lord Jesus Christ assigned to it?**"

To answer this question adequately, one must first ascertain what the mission of our Lord was while He was on the earth. That's easy! Summarized, Jesus Christ said of His purpose on earth, "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10; cf. 1 Timothy 1:15). In addition, the apostle John wrote by inspiration about the mission of Christ on earth, "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son as Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). Everything written prophetically about the Messiah or recorded regarding His earthly habitation and ministry fits nicely with the realization that our Lord was on a mission to save mankind from sin and its horrible consequences. Hence, the culmination of the ministry of the Son of God was His vicarious sacrifice on Calvary's cross, thereupon shedding His innocent blood, that the sins of the world could be forgiven. "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus Christ became our sacrificial Lamb so that our sins could be removed.

It would be reasonable to conclude, then, that the mission of His church would conform to the mission of our Lord Himself. The mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of His church are one in the same. We know this is true because Jesus Christ so informed us through the accounts of divinely inspired historians. Immediately preceding His Ascension, our dear Lord and Savior gave His followers **only one mission** to do; we commonly refer to that charge as the *Great Commission* (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47).

This was not an occasion on which Jesus Christ spoke about correct worship, Christian living or Christian service. Jesus did not pause prior to His Ascension to direct the apostles' attention to sound doctrine. The New Testament is full of various topics, many of them obligatory upon the child of God, that the Christ did not take time to address immediately preceding His Ascension. That does not minimize Christian worship, Christian living, Christian service or Christian doctrine, but it does emphasize the singular mission that Jesus Christ assigned to His followers.

This means that though Christians and congregations may correctly perform Christian worship, but not evangelize the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then they have **not** performed the mission of the Lord's church. Likewise, Christian living may be exemplary and Christian service may be laudable, but failing to evangelize the world, then Christians and churches fail to perform the mission of the church. Christians and

congregations may be correct biblically about Christian doctrine, but if they do not evangelize the world with the Gospel, they do not accomplish the mission of the church.

Beyond that, nice, comfortable buildings in which to worship, surrounded by manicured lawns and shrubs, ringed by asphalt parking lots do not equate to seeing to the mission of the Lord's church. These niceties allowed to feed from our treasuries through biblical implication and human inference are not necessarily wrong, but they are not a part of the mission of the church that Jesus Christ assigned His followers. Christians and the congregations that they comprise out to be more concerned about the mission of the church – to evangelize the world with the Gospel – than making their facilities comfy.

This mission of the church was first seen in the ministry of Jesus Christ. The mission of the church was announced by Jesus Christ prior to His Ascension. The mission of the church was demonstrated and recorded in the Book of Acts for us to emulate in our own lives. How, then, could good students of the Bible overlook the singular task that our Lord assigned to His followers in His final words before returning to heaven? How could contemporary Christians overlook the singular mission of the church in favor of creature comforts within our meetinghouses and otherwise become an introverted people, rather than becoming an extroverted through carrying the Gospel to every nook of our habitation? How can Christians feel a sense of accomplishment in anything, irrespective of how innocent a thing it may be or how noble an undertaking, even to practicing well Christian worship, living, service and doctrine, without heartily embracing the singular mission of the Lord's church?

What is the divinely assigned mission or task that Jesus expects the church to perform? Evangelism, of course! Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved..." (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus said that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:47). That is the mission of the Lord's church.

Who Is Responsible for Performing the Mission of the Church?

Okay, now we know that there is a singular mission for the church of the Bible. That mission is but an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ Himself. However, **upon whom specifically does the responsibility for performing the mission of the church fall?** Have we appointed the mission of the church to be done by the elders that congregations select to lead them? Have we hired the mission of the church to be done by the preachers and evangelists that we financially support? Just who needs to concern himself or herself with doing the mission of the church of the Bible? Can we pragmatically expect denominational persons to do the mission of the church? Does every child of God bear some responsibility for performing the mission of the church? Is the mission of the church being accomplished satisfactorily today? Why not?

Jesus Christ personally and directly first gave the responsibility for evangelizing the world to eleven surviving apostles. Later, a replacement apostle was added (Acts 1:15-26) to the band of disciples to whom Jesus made the charge before His Ascension. Still later, the apostle Paul was given special responsibilities respecting evangelism among non-Jewish people (Acts 26:16-18). So, **the apostles of Jesus Christ certainly were responsible for performing the mission of the church to evangelize the world, but does that responsibility extend to others as well, maybe even to us today?**

From 2 Timothy 2:2 we discern that the mission of the church first given to the apostles directly passed on to their coworkers who were not apostles. Even more than that, the mission of the church passed to others as well who were able to teach others (who, then, were able to teach others and so forth). "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). "These things" would include the mission of the church besides Christian worship, living, service and doctrine. In the same chapter, Paul called upon Timothy to be "apt to teach," and by extension, all Christians need to strive to be "apt to teach" (2 Timothy 2:24). Teach what? Yes, Christian worship, living, service and doctrine, but evangelism, too.

The early church lagged in preparation of teachers (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-14), and the church today likewise lags in qualified teachers. What do these teachers need to be teaching? Yes, Christian

worship, living, service and doctrine, but evangelism, too. Who should these teachers be teaching? Yes, fellow Christians, but non-Christians, too.

Now that we know that the church needs qualified teachers and that part of what they should teach includes the Gospel of Jesus Christ (evangelism), who should these teachers be? Well, teachers should be Christians, but which Christians? That's like asking, based on Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, on which first day of the week ought we to worship God? Every week has a first day! Which Christians ought to teach, namely teach the Gospel of Christ or do evangelism? **Every Christian**, of course!

It is true that there are different levels of teachers (Ephesians 4:11), and that as members of the body of Christ, we have different responsibilities (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). While it is a grave responsibility to be a teacher (James 3:1), every Christian ought to aspire to teach (2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 5:12-14). Surely, every child of God knows at least how one becomes a Christian, and he or she can relate that to others. Surely, every child of God can at least do passive evangelism by leaving Gospel literature in public places (e.g., restrooms, waiting rooms, motels, with gratuities) or arrange for more qualified teachers to teach the Gospel to family members, coworkers, fellow students and neighbors. Surely, every child of God can make evangelism an ever-present part of his or her daily prayers.

Evangelism is the lifeblood of the Lord's church. Evangelism ought to be the predominate thought in our minds throughout our waking moments. Nothing is truly more precious than a single soul, according to Jesus (Matthew 16:26), and we ought to order our lives in keeping with that truism. When we do, then and only then will we truly know what the mission of the church is and whose responsibility it is to evangelize the world with the Gospel of Christ. **The singular mission of the Lord's church is evangelism, and your primary responsibility and mine is to tell someone about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Some Things Are Not the Church's Mission

Some things are not the mission of the church because they are part of the mission of another divine institution, the home. For instance, entertainment is strictly a function of the home, as are secular education, marriages and attendant bridal showers, funerals, baby showers and such like. However, this fact does not necessarily preclude the use of the meetinghouse. Properly, though, the home should sponsor and finance these affairs.

Some things are not the mission of the church because they are possible missions of individuals, governments or other organizations, but are not assigned in Scripture to the Lord's church. Since the New Testament church is directed by the Gospel to finance itself through freewill offerings (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7), business enterprises as such have no place in the church. Neither may the church champion wholly political propositions or parties (except some political issues that pertain to morality or other Bible subjects, which, of course, the church should address as widely as feasible).

Churches of Men Have No Divine Mission

Jesus decried the efforts of Jewish religious leaders of His day to remake Judaism into something more palatable to merely human whims. Speaking of these efforts of reorganization of God-given religion, Jesus said, "...Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). A few verses before this, our Lord condemned the human teaching that fostered this departure from Judaism as God gave it. "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9).

Biblically speaking, there is **only one church!** Several passages illustrate truths about the church by comparing it to a body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18); these verses directly or indirectly affirm that the church is called the body and is single, only one. Ephesians 4:4 plainly declares this fact: "There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling."

Further, **Jesus promised to build one church**, His church (Matthew 16:18). Denominations, world religions and all other sects are the product of human ingenuity, not God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:10-11). **The**

church of divine origin alone has a divine mission! Churches of men exist in opposition to the New Testament and the divine church of which it speaks; these **non-divine churches**, therefore, **are incapable of assuming the divine church mission**. They cannot violate the Gospel by their existence in opposition to the divine church and at the same time faithfully proclaim the Gospel.

Summary

The New Testament church and the Christians of which it is comprised have a divine mission. No one else has the right to try nor indeed can succeed in fulfilling the mission of the Lord's church. If God's people today do not take upon themselves this responsibility, no one will. No one else can!

The time to perform the mission of the church is **now!** The New Testament does not charge Christians to do one thing *tomorrow*, nor *yesterday*, but *now*. The mission of the church is of extremely *urgent*. The church must act now, because its mission is divinely appointed and the sin-sick and dying world desperately needs to be saved. In addition to the upper call of God and the outer call of the world, each Christian should be pervaded with an inner call or desire to save lost souls.

We need to adopt the conviction of the apostle Paul regarding lost souls. "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:15-16).

Purpose

The overriding tenor of the church's divine mission is to **evangelize the lost**; the lost are constituted of both non-Christians and erring Christians (Mark 16:15-16; Jam. 5:19-20). Though perhaps not usually recognized as such, *evangelism* is an indispensable and identifying characteristic of the church of the Bible. No congregation today can successfully claim identity with the New Testament church while down-playing or ignoring evangelism.

Jesus Christ prophesied that the known world would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel within one generation of his earthly ministry (Matthew 24:14); twice in the first chapter of Colossians, the apostle Paul affirmed the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy (Colossians 1:6, 23). ***Evangelism* was *mission possible*** in the first century despite comparatively primitive mediums with which to proclaim the Gospel. Today, in spite of the earth's population of billion, especially in view of the sophisticated means of communication available to us, the church has the ability to evangelize the world in each generation. Evangelism is still the church's *mission possible*; not only so, but **evangelism is obligatory on the church and each Christian**.

Works of Ministry

There is a subtle distinction between the mission of the church and works of ministry in which the Lord's church engages. The mission of the church is the last thing about which Jesus Christ spoke to His apostles immediately preceding His Ascension back to heaven. Our Lord gave what often is called the **Great Commission** – to evangelize the world with the Gospel of Christ (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:47-51; Acts 1:8-11). The balance of the New Testament addresses evangelism as well as works of ministry. Especially *edification* has to do with various aspects of New Testament doctrine or teaching.

Benevolence

Although ***evangelism and edification* are exclusively the responsibility of the Lord's church and the Christians** who comprise it, the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16) are not the only source of ***benevolence*** in this world. The Lord's church is incapable of attending to the benevolent needs of every person on earth, and Jesus Christ acknowledged that there will always be poor people. "For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always" (Mark 14:7). Yet, that governments and other organizations may participate in benevolence does not excuse the church and individual Christians from embracing its responsibility respecting benevolence.

The first century church, with which we identify today, exercised benevolence toward sinners and saints (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27; Acts 6:1-7) “Therefore, **as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith**” (Galatians 6:10). Christians and the Lord’s church exhibit a preference for brethren (Romans 12:10), but also help needy non-Christians, too, as it can (2 Corinthians 9:12-13).

Benevolence (or Christian love set in motion) toward those within and outside the church was gladly shouldered by the first-century church. The immediate needs of new converts closely following the establishment of the church were met by generous Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The church in Antioch of Syria also responded with Christian charity toward the less fortunate in Judaea during a time of famine (Acts 11:27-30). Churches in Macedonia and Achaia likewise practiced benevolence toward needy saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-26).

The church is comprised, of course, by Christians, and responsibility for acting out benevolence falls upon the local assembly of Christians as well as the individual Christians that make up the local church. The obligation to perform benevolence, for instance, in Galatians 6:10 is a mere four verses – a few pen strokes in the epistle – from the responsibility to financially support those who devote themselves to preaching or teaching them (Galatians 6:6). *Young’s Literal Translation* renders that verse, “And let him who is instructed in the word share with him who is instructing — in all good things.” If someone feels compelled to argue that Galatians 6:10 (i.e., benevolence, especially toward non-Christians) is an individual responsibility and not a congregational duty, then he should affirm also that financial support of Gospel preachers (1 Corinthians 9:1-14) is solely an individual duty and not a congregational matter. Likewise, if the responsibility in verse 6 for materially compensating a preacher can be borne correctly by individual Christians and congregations, then benevolence toward Christians and non-Christians in verse 10 can be borne by Christians and congregations, too.

Edification

Edification of the church (1 Corinthians 14:12) is another tremendously important work of ministry. Edification or spiritual maturity is essential to the well-being of the church, each member and the overall success of the church. Unfortunately, as in the first century, today too, many Christians fail to properly mature in the Gospel (Hebrews 5:11-6:2). The means by which every soul can mature or be edified is readily available. “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the **word** of His grace, which is **able to build you up...**” (Acts 20:32). “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the **word**, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). The Christian graces in particular and the Scriptures in general can edify us (2 Peter 1:5-10). “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Once well on the road to edification, one can contribute to the spiritual growth of fellow Christians and answer the questions of non-Christians (1 Peter 3:15).

God designed Christian worship to provide valuable edification of the assembly. One primary object of Christian worship according to the apostle Paul in one of his letters to the Corinthian church was edification of those present – Christians and non-Christians (1 Corinthians 14:23). “...that **the church may receive edification**” (verse 5). “...seek that ye may excel to the **edifying of the church**” (verse 12 KJV). The chief purpose of public preaching or teaching is the edification of those present in the assembly by God’s Word.

A second act of worship that partly involves edification of the assembly for Christian worship is singing – not instrumental music, humming, whistling or oohs and ahs. Worshipful music in Christian worship goes upward and outward – vertically to God in heaven and horizontally to everyone present in an assembly. The words of the ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ not only praise and glorify God, but they also instruct or edify everyone present. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, **teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing** with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16 NKJV). “**Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

Words associated with the observance of the communion and the contribution as well as prayer itself also may provide edification of all in attendance. Therefore, there are a number of reasons for which Christians ought not forsake the assemblies (Hebrews 10:25). In the assembly one not only worships God, but in the assembly the child of God and non-Christians present too receive precious edification.

Individual Christians can and should be proactive in their own edification with the Word of God. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV). “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11 NKJV).

Parents, too, need to count as a major part of their parental responsibility the edification of their children (and grandchildren, etc.) with the Word of God (2 Timothy 1:5). “...From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). An invaluable principle of parental instruction of children in the Word of God appears in Deuteronomy. The subject matter today differs – the New Testament versus the Old Testament, but the mechanics of instilling God’s Word in our youth is something all parents ought to perfect in their homes.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:6-9)

Parents need to seize every moment they have with their children to either instruct them in God’s Word or demonstrate before them that spiritual things matter most in this life. It is one thing to make a living and a whole different matter as to how to live, preparing to meet God someday (Amos 4:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Church leaders often provide opportunities in addition to worship times for the edification of especially Christians, but for non-Christians, too. Elders, for instance, watch for the souls of the flock and must give an account to God for those that they shepherd (Hebrews 13:7, 17). We are obligated to follow them in their example and in instructions on our behalf. Yes, they rule on behalf of Christ over us. Therefore, when they provide Bible classes, Gospel meetings, seminars, vacation Bible school, etc., it behooves us to take advantage of every such opportunity that we can.

Edification is a personal responsibility, but it is also the responsibility of others who look out for our spiritual welfare. Preaches, teachers, elders, parents and grandparents are just some who earnestly desire that you and I receive edification in the Word of God.

Summary

Everything the church has a right or responsibility to perform or spend money on relates to evangelism, benevolence or edification. Benevolence and edification can indirectly contribute to evangelism and its effectiveness. Since the church is composed of individual Christians, each child of God must weigh how he or she can, and therefore, ought to participate in works of ministry.

Works Cited

Young, Robert. *Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2006.

Chapter 6: Spiritual Blessings in Christ

All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)! There are blessings in which both the sinner and the saint bask, courtesy of the grace of Almighty God (Matthew 5:45). These blessings are physical in nature and come upon all men alike. However, the Christian enjoys additional blessings over the sinner. These latter blessings are spiritual instead of physical and superior to the physical blessings in which all men participate. Furthermore, the extra blessings bestowed upon Christians are given to Christians exclusively. No one outside of Christ can acquire these special blessings from above!

Souls outside of Christ may legitimately attribute their *physical blessings* to God, and all men should realize that the natural blessings in which we all share owe their origin not to chaotic accident but to the design of our Creator. Non-Christians, however, are wrong when they claim to possess *spiritual blessings* and attribute their possession of spiritual blessings to God! Even brethren saying that non-Christians or denominational people possess the spiritual blessings only attainable in Christ does not make it so.

Ephesians 1:3 identifies the location of all spiritual blessings. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places **in Christ.**” The “us” refers to the “saints” and “faithful in Christ Jesus” of verse one. Christians or disciples of Christ, therefore, are the exclusive recipients of “every spiritual blessing”; Christians alone enjoy all spiritual blessings! The beneficiaries of spiritual blessings are further said to be “in Christ.” Hence, no one who is neither a saint, faithful in Christ Jesus nor in Christ possesses spiritual blessings.

The context of the opening verses of the Book of Ephesians identifies God as the Benefactor responsible for the bestowal of spiritual blessings. Since these blessings originate with and are given by God, it is only reasonable that those spiritual blessings be received according to the precise conditions that He stipulated. The condition upon which souls receive spiritual blessings is being “in Christ.” Though mortals may try to devise other ways to get “into Christ,” only in two passages does the Bible announce the one way to do so, which is through baptism (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3). Consequently, the many, even sincere, religious people throughout the world who have not been baptized (immersed) in water for the remission of sins or to have their sins washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16) are not in Christ and are not the recipients of spiritual blessings.

There are more spiritual blessings than noticed below, which can be found in God’s Word by the diligent study of the Christian. Each child of God should determine to search them out and enjoy them as only Christians can. Furthermore, spiritual blessings should be more earnestly sought than the physical things of which we all have need and regularly receive of God (Matthew 6:33). Spiritual blessings, like pretty flowers, need to be nurtured carefully, for when either are neglected, their delicate beauty withers away.

God wants his children to have spiritual blessings; He has reserved them exclusively for His faithful disciples. Additionally, these blessings can enrich life now and greatly contribute to eternal happiness. Every Christian, therefore, should covet, secure and use the spiritual blessings that God has provided for him.

Providence

Divine providence is one of numerous spiritual blessings. Like God himself (Genesis 1:1), providence is not precisely defined in the Bible. Nevertheless, God’s providence is amply taught throughout the Bible.

There are two types of providence. There is **general providence**, under which all of humanity shares physical blessings irrespective of individual relationships with God. “...Your Father which is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45). There is also **special providence**, under which faithful children of God are the direct recipients of physical or spiritual blessings. Following is the most graphic revelation in the Bible of God’s providential care of the children of God.

And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” So they came near. Then he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to

preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:4-8)

The purpose of God’s providence is the ultimate redemption of humanity. Therefore, suffering (e.g., Joseph, Job; Acts 8:1-4) or even death (e.g., the death of martyrs, the death of Christ) rather than earthly happiness may better serve the purpose of the providence of God. “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

How does God’s providence affect humanity? (1) The created world is sustained by divine, providential power – the same power source, howbeit by miracle, by which it was created (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; John 1:1-3). (2) Prayers are effective through providence. “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:17-18). (3) Christians are to be worry-free because of providence (Matthew 6:24-34). (4) God, through His providence, appoints rulers (e.g., Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:17-34), raises up or pulls down nations (e.g., Jeremiah 18:7-10), arranges circumstantial events of people and Christians (i.e., brings parties together who will predictably or through foreknowledge react a certain way (e.g., Pharaoh’s hardened heart). God, though, does not interfere with free moral agency.

How does humanity affect the providence of God? (1) God works through people who voluntarily conform to the purpose or will of God (e.g., taking the Gospel to the world, Mark 16:15-16). (2) God will use other persons to achieve His will if one through his own free moral agency does not do the will of God (e.g., Esther 4:15).

Only faithful children of God directly benefit from the goal of God’s providence (Romans 8:28). However, non-Christians may benefit indirectly from God’s providential care of the children of God. For instance, Egyptians became the indirect beneficiaries of the unfolding of God’s providence to save Joseph’s family. Otherwise, though the ungodly may appear to prosper in this life, they will not persevere in eternity (Luke 16:19-31).

God uses imperfect humanity to further His providence. He uses imperfect people who are generally righteous (e.g., Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Peter, you and me). Additionally, God uses people to accomplish His providential goals who may be generally unrighteous (e.g., rulers, nations, etc.).

A key element of providence is that through it God **provides**. The truth-seeker will find the truth (John 7:17). Providence provides for the fulfillment of God’s ultimate goal for humanity. “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12).

God, through providence, is attentive to the needs of his people. God does not slumber (Psalm 121:3). God sees and knows. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:28-31).

God hears the prayers of his faithful children. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). God will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6). God is our defender. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31).

The first verse about God’s providence to which we usually turn is Romans 8:28, which reads, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” The “good” here corresponds to God’s ultimate purpose for humanity. Summarized, the phrase “all things work” equals the **law of operation**; “all things work together” equals the **law of**

cooperation. The phrase “all things work together for good” signifies the **law of compensation**; “all things work together for good to them that love the Lord” is the **law of limitation**.

The Bible clearly teaches the certainty of God’s providence. However, there is some uncertainty exactly how it works. We can assuredly say, though, that God’s providence works on behalf humanity and the redemption of souls. We can have confidence that the minimal benefit of providence is the ability to remain faithful (Revelation 2:10; 1 Corinthians 10:13). Through providence, nothing and no one can separate us from God unless we allow it to happen (Romans 8:35-39).

Providence vs. Miracles

The astute Bible student knows that Bible grade miracles ended centuries ago (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-14). What passes for miracles today differ greatly from those miracles recorded in the Bible (e.g., the so-called miracle of birth and Pentecostal supposed healing of unseen maladies versus raising the dead, walking on water, multiplication of bread and fish, striking people dead, striking people blind, etc.). The only genuine miracles available for inspection today are those about which we can read on the pages of inspiration.

However, God’s providence is still active today and is the fundamental mechanism through which He answers the Christian’s prayers. Additionally, there is no reason to doubt that God still affects His will among nations (Daniel 2:21; 4:17, 32) and in the unfolding of His redemptive plan for man (Ephesians 3:10-11).

What, though, are the distinctions between providence and miracles? Both providence and miracles involve supernatural activity (i.e., deeds that mortals without the help of God cannot bring to pass). Both providence and miracles involve divine intervention in the affairs of mankind. **The singular difference between providence and miracles is that the former is not open for human inspection, while the latter was always visible or obvious.** Therefore, miracles, not providence, bore new revelation from God, validated the new message and confirmed the messenger as from God (Mark 16:20; John 20:30-31).

Hence, when miracles completed the purpose for which they were given (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4), they ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25). Providence, however, will never cease as long as there are prayers to be prayed and time remains while nations continue to exist as well as souls who need to be reached with the saving Gospel.

It is inappropriate to pray for a miracle today in view of biblical evidence respecting miracles. At the same time, it is irresponsible not to pray (relying on God’s providence to answer that prayer) and not to pray for the unfolding of God’s providence (and how we can effectively participate in that providence as Christians and the church).

Providence and miracles were assigned different missions by God. Whereas miracles achieved their mission once the Bible replaced partial revelation, providence continues in its mission respecting prayers, nations and human redemption.

Prayer

Reserved for Christians

Remember that ***Spiritual blessings*** are only available to those who are in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Prayer is one of the spiritual blessing that is only afforded to those who are “in Christ.” Recall that two New Testament verses explain that the way “into Christ” is through baptism. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6:3). “For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). Only faithful children of God can exercise themselves truly in prayer. Claims to the contrary notwithstanding, non-Christians and unfaithful Christians do not have access to the spiritual blessing of prayer.

How Prayer Works

Whereas God communicates with mankind today through the Bible, Christians communicate with God through prayer. Further, prayer is an expression of one's heart to God and may include *praise, requests and thanksgiving*.

Not All prayers Are Acceptable to God

God requires that **prayers be sincerely offered for the right reasons**. "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5).

Jesus spoke a parable in which He taught that acceptable prayers must be **offered with true humility** (Luke 18:9-14). Prayers are not to be offered thoughtlessly, but they should be **uttered with great desire**; the apostle Paul felt strongly for the subject of his prayers. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved" (Romans 10:1).

Christians are urged in the New Testament to **pray frequently**; "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). However, **only righteous souls** who practice good Christian living **can offer acceptable prayers**. "The Lord is far from the wicked, But He hears the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29). "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

Jesus prayed "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10) and the children of God must also pray **according to the will of God**. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing according to His will, He hears us" (1 John 5:14). Further, acceptable prayers are offered through or **in the name of Jesus Christ**. "And whatever you ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13). "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

Additionally, prayers must be prayed with the **confidence that God hears and answers prayers**. "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Christians should not underestimate the usefulness of prayer. "...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

Summary

One cannot word an acceptable prayer to God while living in rebellion to God. Only baptized believers who are faithfully practicing Christianity are able to offer prayers that God will accept. Dear Friend, are your prayers acceptable to God?

Comfort & Care

Every tender heart doubtless feels helpless to console broken hearts satisfactorily when catastrophe or death lashes out at them or at their loved ones. Just what are the right words to say? When is it better to simply be at the side of distraught souls and say nothing? Not even preachers, elders, friends or family are likely to be proficient in lifting the downtrodden. However, there is divine comfort and consolation that can do more to uplift the child of God from his sadness than anything an army of well-meaning people could possibly say. This comfort and consolation afforded the children of God is superior to and more effective than all earth's kind intentions and good will.

Second Corinthians 1:3-4 names God as the source and origin of divine comfort. The disciples of Christ further learn from God how to comfort others more effectively. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." The context in which these verses appear deals primarily with comfort and consolation from

persecutions and afflictions that are peculiarly incurred by Christians as they earnestly strive to serve the Lord (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

There are, though, also other areas in life in which the children of God are afflicted for which they should turn to God for divine comfort. The Lord invites all men to find refuge in Christ, wherein are all spiritual blessings and divine comfort (Matthew 11:28-30). Paul affirmed again in the Roman epistle that our heavenly Father is the God of comfort or consolation (Romans 15:5), and in the preceding verse indicated that this consolation is available to Christians through the Scriptures or the Bible.

Forgiveness of Sins

The forgiveness of past sins must be the chief spiritual blessing. Baptism is not only the point at which one gets “into Christ” (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3), it is also the point at which one’s past sins are forgiven (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Additionally, baptism is the point at which one comes in contact with the saving blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 1 Peter 1:18-20). Christ’s blood was shed in his death upon the cross (John 19:34) and baptism places one into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3, 4; Colossians 2:12).

All blessings indicate a multiplicity of blessings are afforded the Christian. So complete is the divine package of blessings bestowed upon the children of God that it neither lacks anything nor can it be improved upon. No more blessings could possibly be added to what God has already given the Christian. It is then the noble task and lifelong prescription of the disciples of Christ to identify and cultivate these heavenly blessings that they might better appreciate and more appropriately apply them.

The parade of spiritual blessings available from God begins with receiving the forgiveness of sins and becoming a child of God. For instance, there can be neither valid peace with God nor a legitimate hope of spending eternity with God in heaven until one’s sins are forgiven by God. “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus Christ] is preached to you **the forgiveness of sins**” (Acts 13:38; cf., Acts 5:31; 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14).

Peace

Divine comfort abounds from the basis of peace with God that occurs in Christ (Romans 5:1). The peace that Christians know with God, their fellow men and themselves rests upon fellowship with God and the children of God. Hence, there exists unity and single-mindedness among brethren and between faithful brethren and God (Romans 15:5-7). Comfort and peace cause Christians to maintain a valid hope regarding eternity with God (Romans 5:2).

Divine peace is only possessed by those who are spiritually minded (Romans 8:6); to be carnally minded and yet in the world deprives one of this precious blessing. Our Heavenly Father, called the God of hope, is said to fill the child of God with joy and peace and to cause him to abound in hope (Romans 15:13). The fruits of the Spirit include love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22) and are portrayed as worthy acquisitions of Christians.

According to Colossians 1:20, the Christian peace is attained through “the blood of His cross.” Recall that the blood of Christ is reached only through being baptized into his death wherein the blood was shed (John 19:34; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12). This peace, which when sought leads one to accept the Gospel call, should also continue to rule the Christian’s heart (Colossians 3:15). “Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way...” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Hope

The unique hope that the child of God knows is inseparably linked with other heavenly qualities. Passages about peace (Romans 5:1-2; 15:13) also address hope. In discussing the Christian hope, the natural relationship between these qualities will become even more apparent.

First Peter 1:3, 13 and 21 show conclusively that Christian hope looks with anticipation and desire for the Second Coming of our Savior. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from

the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). The souls who can legitimately cherish within themselves this hope are described thus:

Who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Peter 1:21-23)

The Christian hope is effected by the resurrection of Christ and belief in God who raised Him. This hope rightfully belongs only to those who have been begotten of God (verse 3) through their faith in God (verse 21), have purified their souls in obeying the truth (verse 22), have a fervent love for brethren (verse 22; John 13:34-35) and have been born again by obeying the Word of God (verse 23; John 3:3-6). The heart of the Gospel message appeals to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, which believing, Christians have hope (expectation and desire) regarding eternity and long for the return of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 19-23; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). “Looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Hope is something in which Christians are to rejoice (Romans 12:12) and which can be found in the Scriptures (Romans 15:4). Hope is, further, the quality by which faithful disciples can endure unto the end in spite of present tribulations and temptations (Romans 5:2-5). Hope saves or helps to preserve the child of God until his death or the return of the Lord (Romans 8:24; Hebrews 3:6; 6:11). First Corinthians 13:13 teaches that faith, hope and charity (love) are the companions and wise counselors that God determined should accompany the Christian in his earthly pilgrimage to the Promised Land, instead of the temporary miracles of which the infant church often boasted. Hope, not miracles, is the anchor of the soul by which the children of God can safely moor themselves and avoid the rocky destruction and death into which Satan would otherwise steer them (Hebrews 6:19).

Christian hope pertains to eternal salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8) or eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7), which is attainable only in Christ (1 Timothy 1:1). Hope of spending eternity with God abides within the child of God and serves to purify or keep him holy so his heavenly anticipation may someday become reality (1 John 3:2-3; 1 Peter 3:15). Therefore, Christian hope is indispensable to every soul who possesses the aspirations of pleasing God in this life and enjoying the presence of God in heaven forever.

If it were not for the grace of God, Jesus would never have come to earth and would never have shed His blood for the sins of the world. Had it not been for the grace of God, there would have been no Gospel, which through obeying sinners can have divine comfort and hope of eternity. However, because of God’s love and grace, men may with confidence possess hope (Hebrews 10:19-24) when they obediently comply with the conditions of salvation found in the Gospel. “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

Spiritual Life versus Physical Life

Plants and animals have physical life, but unlike plants, animals and rocks, human beings have both physical life and spiritual life. People are dual beings – physical and spiritual at the same time. As with animals and plants, we mortals experience the brevity and uncertainty of life. At some point, we will die physically. Even the longest recorded lifespan for Methuselah at 969-years-old was finally punctuated with the words “and he died” (Genesis 5:27). Typically over the last 3,000 years or so, man’s optimum lifespan has been 70 to 80 years (Psalm 90:10), though many die prematurely owing to violence or disease and some continue to exceed that range. Every human being has an appointment with death looming in his or her future (Hebrews 9:27).

Death differs between that of plants and animals versus that of humans. Plants and animals are simply dead when they die, but the spiritual side of humans continue when they die. The Bible describes human

death as the separation of the spirit or soul from the body. “For as **the body without the spirit is dead**, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). After death, departed spirits reside in a special place, “Hades” (Luke 16:23), awaiting Judgment Day. The righteous dead are in the Hadean section of “paradise” (Luke 23:43) or “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22), and the unrighteous dead are in the separated area of “torments” (Luke 16:23) or “Tartarus” (2 Peter 2:4 YLT). All souls will be resurrected at the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) to face individual, personal accountability before the Judgment Seat of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 7:21-23).

While it is right to provide for one’s own physical welfare as well as for that of his family (1 Timothy 5:8), especially the children of God need to realize the responsibility of seeking spiritual things first.

Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. **For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.** (Matthew 6:25-33)

In recognition of the dual status of humans, we need to make deposits in our spiritual bank accounts since all of our physical possessions must be left behind when we die. “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but **lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**” (Matthew 6:19-21). “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:5).

When one’s physical life concludes, his or her spiritual life continues. Humans are not eternal, but they are immortal; we had a beginning, but spiritually, we will live forever – in one of two possible eternal habitations (Matthew 25:46). “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The child of God earnestly desires to seek an eternal habitation with God. “For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ...But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:10, 16). Jesus is coming back for His faithful followers. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:3).

How one lives his or her physical life affects one’s spiritual life now as well as one’s spiritual life after death (or upon the Second Coming of Jesus Christ). “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Much of the New Testament addresses how to live physical life in an acceptable way to God – promoting our spiritual lives. Unless we succeed in our entwined physical and spiritual lives during our earthly sojourn, our spiritual lives after Judgment will continue separated from God (2 Thessalonians 1:9) in a place “prepared for the devil and his angels” – hell (Matthew 25:41).

Victory in Christ over Sin, Death & Satan

Confidence Despite Conditional Salvation

The Bible teaches that salvation is conditional upon human obedience, not to be confused with human perfection. **Conditional Salvation:** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). **Obedience Saves:** “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal **salvation** to all **who obey Him**” (Hebrews 5:9). **Human Imperfection:** “There is none righteous, no, not one... for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:10, 23). Therefore, it is inappropriate for Christians to possess solely and strictly a *law mentality* under Christianity, especially since it is tempered with divine grace (Ephesians 2:8) and mercy (Titus 3:5).

However, it is natural for new Christians who have not matured to fret over the conditional nature of their salvation. Respecting their saved status, they may succumb to persistent anxiety over inadvertently or unintentionally violating (1) **secular laws** (behind which are God, Romans 13:1-7) or (2) **God’s law** under which we now live (i.e., Christianity, New Testament, Gospel, “perfect law of liberty,” James 1:25). A better understanding of the nature of human redemption, including keeping the saved in a saved relationship with God, will alleviate unfounded fears among Christians respecting their preparedness to meet God in Judgment (Amos 4:12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

This brings us to the consideration of acquiring and maintaining fellowship with the Godhead. Since fellowship between God and mankind was breached first in the Garden of Eden through Adam and Eve, we mortals have been estranged from God because of our sins. Yet, God has always presented humans with opportunities to reestablish fellowship with Him.

Unencumbered fellowship with Almighty God under Patriarchy and the Old Law of Judaism required absolute human perfection. However, no human upon maturing to a state of mental responsibility has ever achieved sinless perfection. Therefore, under both Patriarchy and Judaism, conditional fellowship between God and His faithful followers was attainable through animal sacrifices, which were themselves typical of and dependent upon the ransoming from sin sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through those sacrifices and obedience to God under those respective law systems, in anticipation of Christ’s sacrifice, human perfection was pronounced upon man by God, permitting fellowship between God and His faithful followers.

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

No less under Christianity, true fellowship with Almighty God is only possible on man’s side through human perfection. Yet, no human upon maturing to a state of mental responsibility has ever achieved sinless perfection. Not animal sacrifices, but the ransoming from sin sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes it possible for a sinless God to pronounce perfection upon His obedient followers, which perfection is essential for unencumbered fellowship to exist between God and man. “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Hebrews 7:19).

Furthermore, the circumstances by which fellowship is possible between God and a child of God are the very exact same circumstances that permit spiritual fellowship between God and every Christian as well as between Christians. The basis of Christian fellowship is that each Christian maintains fellowship with God. Conversely, Christians cannot have a spiritual fellowship with persons who are not in fellowship with God. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

The apostle John in the first chapter of 1 John wrote about how erring Christians can have perfection pronounced upon them whereby they can sustain fellowship with God and fellowship with other men and

women who also have fellowship with God. **Unknown Sins:** “But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). **Known Sins:** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

First John was written to correct erroneous doctrinal beliefs held by some Christians in the first century. No less today, we need to dispel misconceptions about the nature of redemption that may impair Christians’ confidence in the status of their salvation. Notice especially 1 John 1:7 and 9 more carefully. Before we do that, though, it is important for us to realize to whom 1 John was written, and it is equally important to comprehension of the passage to understand to whom 1 John was not written.

It must be noted that these words concerning sin, found in verses 8-10, are not addressed to Gentile sinners, but a generation which had grown up in the church. Indeed, of all the epistles, this is the only one which can truly be said to have been addressed to a Christian generation. Hence, it would naturally emphasize, not the unconverted sinner’s need of pardon, but of the Christian’s constant need of a pardoning Savior. It is the Christian who cannot say that he has no sin, and who must find pardon by confessing his sins to Christ. Acts 2:38 shows how the alien sinner may obtain remission; 1 John 1:9 shows how the Christian, when he sins, may obtain remission. (Johnson)

The **object** of 1 John 1:7 is sustained fellowship between the Christian and his God, which also affords sustained fellowship between Christians, too. The **means** by which this fellowship is sustained pertains to walking in the light of God’s righteousness. “Light represents truth, knowledge and holiness. Darkness represents ignorance, error, falsehood and sin” (Johnson). The verbs and their tenses in 1 John 1:7 and 9, however, convey the essential particulars of **how** Christians can maintain fellowship with God and other Christians, despite the occurrence of sin in their lives from time to time.

The verbs “walk,” “have” and “cleanses” in 1 John 1:7 are present tense, and they represent continuing action. As long as the child of God continues to walk in the light of God’s righteousness, he continues to have fellowship with God (and other Christians), because the blood of Christ continues to cleanse him from his sins. Delightfully, this fellowship is reciprocal between man and God, and between Christians (Wuest). **Christians who conscientiously practice the Christian faith receive constant cleansing from the sins that may creep into their lives unexpectedly.**

For those who walk in the light, the continual, ceaseless and effective cleansing through the blood of Christ is the means of their continuing in a state of absolute perfection. This cleansing, however, is not necessarily automatic. It is based upon confession, penitence, renewal (1 John 1:9), and keeping his commandments (1 John 2:3). Even beyond this, however, the cleansing effect of Jesus’ blood is operative unconditionally in instances of the believer’s unawareness of sins that lie hidden from himself. ...This great verse [1 John 1:7] is the source of incredible joy, assurance and consolation to the child of God. He never needs to fear that some impulsive, unintentional, or atypical conduct might overtake him with the result of eternal condemnation. (Coffman)

“‘Walk’ in this passage, as frequently in the New Testament, is an idiom for the totality of human conduct” (Coffman). “Walk” means “literally, *walk about*; indicating the habitual course of the life, outward and inward” (Vincent). “‘If we keep on walking in the light...’ It must be a continuing walk. ...‘Cleanseth’ ...a constant process, conditioned on our walking in the light. As we thus walk the blood operates to keep us constantly cleansed from the defilement of sin... We keep on having an ever-present remedy for the isolated acts of sin which, through weakness, ignorance, and inadvertence, we commit” (Woods).

Whereas 1 John 1:7 pertains to sins of which the child of God is unaware, 1 John 1:9 concerns sins in the life of a Christian of which he becomes aware. Verse 9 is about forgiveness of singular, non-habitual sin, whereas verse 7 notes continual forgiveness of unknown sins as one habitually practices Christianity (Wuest). Verse 7 activates the forgiveness of sins based on the continual walking in the light of God’s righteousness,

but in verse 9, the forgiveness of sins is as continual as is the confessing of the sins of which one becomes aware. “Confess” in 1 John 1:9 is present tense and indicative of continuing action, too.

In the overall context, we have these jewels as well. Verse 6 informs us with whom we do not have fellowship due to walking in the darkness of sin, but verse 7 tells us with whom we do have fellowship because we walk in the light of God’s righteousness (Robertson). Verse 8 notes the **false affirmation** by some Christians that it is not possible for them to commit sin, whereas verse 10 observes the equally **false claim** by some Christians that they are not guilty of specific acts of sin (Robertson). Wiersbe summarizes the two verses thus: “Lying about nature of sin (1 John 1:8) and lying about the deeds of sin (1 John 1:10).”

Happily, **mankind’s redemption is conditional upon human obedience rather than upon human perfection.** Yet, this is only possible through the benevolence of the Godhead and specifically through the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross. As long as Christians conscientiously practice Christianity and repent of sins whenever they become aware of them, the children of God continuously receive the cleansing of the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ – power washing our very souls from sin! **There are no gaps in our salvation as long as we continue to walk in the light of God’s righteousness and repent of the occasional sins of which we become aware.**

Works Cited

- Coffman, James Burton. *James Burton Coffman Bible Study Library*. CD-ROM. Abilene: ACU Press, 1989.
- Johnson, Barton Warren. *People’s New Testament*. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2008.
- Vincent, Marvin R. *Vincent’s Word Studies*, Vol. 2. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2004.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1992.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Peter, John, and Jude*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest’s Word Studies*. 3 Vols. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Part Four: The Walk

Introduction

“Walk’ in this passage [1 John 1:7], as frequently in the New Testament, is an idiom for the totality of human conduct” (Coffman). “Walk” means “literally, *walk about*; indicating the habitual course of the life, outward and inward” (Vincent). “If we keep on walking in the light...’ It must be a continuing walk. ...‘Cleanseth’ ...a constant process, conditioned on our walking in the light. As we thus walk the blood operates to keep us constantly cleansed from the defilement of sin... We keep on having an ever-present remedy for the isolated acts of sin which, through weakness, ignorance, and inadvertence, we commit” (Woods). Christians who conscientiously practice the Christian faith receive constant cleansing from the sins that may creep into their lives unexpectedly.

The **object** of 1 John 1:7 is sustained fellowship between the Christian and his God, which also affords sustained fellowship between Christians, too. The **means** by which this fellowship is sustained pertains to walking in the light of God’s righteousness. “Light represents truth, knowledge and holiness. Darkness represents ignorance, error, falsehood and sin” (Johnson). The verbs and their tenses in 1 John 1:7 and 9, however, convey the essential particulars of **how** Christians can maintain fellowship with God and other Christians, despite the occurrence of sin in their lives from time to time.

Since fellowship between God and mankind was breached first in the Garden of Eden through Adam and Eve, we mortals have been estranged from God because of our sins. Yet, God has always presented humans with opportunities to reestablish fellowship with Him.

Both testaments of the Bible speak to “the walk” that God requires of His children, and uniformly this figure of speech represents the type of godly deportment that God deems acceptable to Him. Consider from the Old Testament Jeremiah 6:16, which reads, “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And **walk** in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.’ But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’” Despite the Israelites’ refusal of God’s instruction, God restated His command: “But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And **walk in all the ways that I have commanded you**, that it may be well with you” (Jeremiah 7:23); likewise, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah, directing the people to walk in the way of God (Isaiah 30:21). The pathway in which one walks, physically and especially spiritually, is very important (Matthew 7:13-14).

The precept of walking in the pathway of God is prominent also in the New Testament. As Christians, we must “**walk in the newness of life**” (Romans 6:4), and we must “**walk properly**” (Romans 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:12). As the children of God, we must “**walk by faith**” (2 Corinthians 5:7), “**walk worthy of the calling**” (Ephesians 4:1), “**walk in love**” (Ephesians 5:2), “**walk as children of light**” (Ephesians 5:8), “**walk worthy of the Lord**” (Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12), “**walk in Him**” [Christ] (1 John 2:6) and “**walk in truth**” (3 John 4). Especially as faithful followers of our Lord, we are to “**walk in the light of the LORD**” (Isaiah 2:5). The New Testament counterpart to that Old Testament verse is 1 John 1:7, which says, “**But if we walk in the light** as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Non-Christians and erring Christians need to get on the straight and narrow pathway that leads to eternal life (Matthew 7:13-14). To do this, one must become a child of God by following the instructions of Jesus Christ in Mark 16:16, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” When sin creeps into a Christian’s life, he or she must repent and pray to receive forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Dear Friend, let’s take this Christian walk together – hand in hand!

Works Cited

- Coffman, James Burton. *James Burton Coffman Bible Study Library*. CD-ROM. Abilene: ACU Press, 1989.
- Johnson, Barton Warren. *People’s New Testament*. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2008.

Vincent, Marvin R. *Vincent's Word Studies*, Vol. 2. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2004.
Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Peter, John, and Jude*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.

Chapter 1: First Steps

“First steps” represent the “beginning” of something, whether of an unsteady, wobbling infant discovering the art of walking or the commencement of anything, such as the onset of some type of a program in which one expects to progress with experience. Aptly, new Christians are babes in Christ, irrespective of how far advanced in age they might be chronologically when “born again” (John 3:3, 7; 1 Peter 1:23). “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1; Hebrews 5:13). Just as babies need to learn to walk, and they will falter initially until they master walking, spiritual babies in Christ need to learn to walk spiritually, and they also will waver from time to time especially in the beginning of their Christian walk. Just as the little child must learn to walk before he or she can run, new Christians need to learn to walk before they can run; babes in Christ must mature (Hebrews 5:14; 1 Peter 2:2).

Scripturally Saved

How Obedience Saves

The Bible shows conclusively that obedience is essential to salvation. Many religious people despise the thought of associating *obedience* with *salvation*. Many would defend with their lives some *manmade doctrine*, but they refuse to obey God’s Word, and they would not die for it (Revelation 2:10). It is no secret that we live in a *disobedient society* where disobedience manifests itself variously: failure to obey speed limits, disobedience to parents and teachers, cheating on taxes, widespread immorality, stealing, robbery, assault, murder, etc. At the risk of being viewed as unpatriotic, I remind you that the United States of America was conceived in disobedience to the government of England. Mankind in general has a long history of disobedience toward God. However, man can obey God, and he must obey God to receive God’s grace and mercy, resulting in salvation. **Obedience has always been essential to be saved.**

Obedience to God was essential under Patriarchy. Cain was disobedient whereas Abel was obedient to God (Genesis 4:3-5; Hebrews 11:4). Faith results from the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Therefore, Scripture implies that Cain was disobedient to God’s instructions pertaining to worship, but Abel was obedient to the same instructions from God.

The wicked world was disobedient whereas Noah and his family were obedient to God (Genesis 6-9). God chose a righteous man named Noah to build the ark to save his family and him from the universal flood. Noah obeyed God regarding the construction of the ark and was saved from the impending disaster that enveloped the rest of the world and all of humanity not on the ark with Noah. It is evident that if Noah had disobeyed God respecting the building of the ark that he, too, would have perished with the wicked world. Other noteworthy Bible characters as admirably served God. Enoch, Abraham and Moses also demonstrated an obedient faith in God under Patriarchy (Hebrews 11).

Obedience to God was essential under Judaism. The Old Testament is replete with instances of human disobedience to God, which God severely punished. Fortunately for fallible man, God provided for the forgiveness of ignorant sin, but God severely condemned willful disobedience (Numbers 15:27-31). A man violated the Sabbath Day by gathering sticks, for which God commanded that he be stoned to death (Exodus 20:8-11; Numbers 15:32-36). Korah and 250 leaders among the Israelites challenged God’s choice of Aaron’s family to be the priestly family, for which God burnt the disobedient with fire and caused the earth to swallow their families and personal property (Numbers 16). Moses and Aaron were accused by God of disbelief or disobedience for striking a rock to provide water for Israel, which prevented those two otherwise notable Bible characters from entering Canaan (Numbers 20:7-12; 22-29; Deuteronomy 34:1-6; Romans 11:30-31,

cf. KJV & ASV). King Saul disobeyed God and was rejected by God from continuing as king (1 Samuel 15:3-4, 7-28).

God also rewarded obedience under Judaism. Joshua and Caleb obeyed God and alone among the adults who left Egypt were permitted by God to enter Canaan (Numbers 14:22-24, 29-38; 32:11-13; Joshua 14:6-14). David obeyed God for which God raised up our Savior through David's descendant, Jesus of Nazareth (1 Kings 15:5; Acts 13:22-23). King Hezekiah obeyed God for which God added 15 years to his life and spared Jerusalem from the Assyrians (Isaiah 38:3-6).

Obedience to God is essential under Christianity, too. It is abundantly clear from the New Testament that disobedience to God results in condemnation. Every accountable soul who refuses or neglects to obey the Gospel will be lost (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). The disobedient will be barred from heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). Jesus will reject everyone who does not obey His words (John 12:48).

Obedience is a requisite to receive salvation. The faith that saves is an obedient faith (Romans 5:1; 1:5; 16:26; Acts 6:7). Not only our actions, but also every thought must be brought to "the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Jesus Christ saves those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). **Obedience is not perfection**, but it is the attempt to do what Jesus says (Luke 6:46). Only when we obey Christ by obeying the Gospel does God's mercy and grace make up what lacks between our obedience and our sinlessly holy God (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5).

One correctly concludes that each period of religious history (i.e., Patriarchy, Judaism and Christianity) demonstrates the role of obedience in human salvation and that disobedience toward God results in severe condemnation (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Especially Judaism proved that mankind is incapable of achieving sinless perfection, even by those who otherwise are considered obedient to God (Hebrews 10:1-4). Yet, human obedience to the laws of God prompts Him to extend His grace and mercy toward us (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5). The human ideas of "If it feels good, do it" or "situation ethics" or "the ends justifies the means" or "a new morality" or "relative truth" or human creeds, etc. are mottos of disobedience and will not prompt God to save us with His grace and mercy.

Obedience on our parts whereby God will save us with His grace and mercy includes our response to His redemptive plan. Unbaptized believers must be immersed in water for the remission of their sins (Romans 10:17; Luke 13:3; Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38). Erring Christians must repent and pray (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Finally, we must obey the faith **even if it kills us**, literally (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 2:10).

Divine Redemption

By *divine redemption*, we mean the *redemptive plan that is divine in origin*. In other words, "How did God in the New Testament state that He is willing to save people from their sins?" It is unreasonable to believe that God will accept one or more manmade redemptive plans **instead of His plan** for the salvation of lost souls.

God the Father through His **mercy** (Titus 3:5) and **grace** (Ephesians 2:8) designed a redemptive plan. Essentially, by God's mercy He withholds punishment that we deserve from us. By God's grace, we receive good things from Him that we do not deserve.

Through mercy and grace, God sent Jesus Christ to be our Savior (John 3:16). Jesus brought the divine redemptive plan with Him (John 1:17), and He died on the cross for our salvation (Hebrews 9:28). Also through mercy and grace, God caused the Holy Spirit to reveal the redemptive plan in the New Testament (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit, along with the Father and the Son, participates in the redemption of souls: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free – and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In addition, God's redemptive plan requires the participation by those who would be saved. Jesus is said to be the author of salvation to them who **obey** Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). "Though he was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them who obey Him."

This obedience includes **hearing** the Word of God only (Romans 10:17); “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The Word of God leads to Bible **faith** (John 8:24); “Therefore I said to you, that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Faith leads to **repentance** (Luke 13:5); “I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Repentance is followed by **professing Christ** (Romans 10:9-10); “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10).

Then comes **immersion** (Romans 6:3-5); “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were **buried** with Him **through baptism** into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united [“**planted**” KJV] together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5). Afterward, Christians must practice **faithfulness** (Revelation 2:10); “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done their parts for the redemption of lost souls. Have you, dear Friend, participated in your own redemption according to God’s redemptive plan, or have you subscribed to a mere manmade redemptive plan – that is unable to save your soul? Eternity is too long and souls are too precious to accept a counterfeit plan of salvation. Divine redemption is within reach of every soul and is all that will matter in judgment.

Attitude of the New Christian

A Way of Life

Christianity hasn’t become important enough to any Christian who has not made the practice of Christianity a **way of life**. Christianity is not some social club with which a person can innocently amuse himself from time to time, when he feels like it. For instance, if one’s Christianity is only vibrant on those occasions he congregates for worship and assembles for Bible classes with other Christians, then his Christianity has no *practical application* in his life, and it will not transport him from this habitation to an eternal heaven with God. For one’s Christianity to be of much use in this life and respecting preparation for eternity, it must be the *driving force*, the *overriding principle* and the *single-mindedness* that governs one’s every waking moment. Truly, one fully converted is no longer the person he or she once was, but the Christian is one whose life has been *transformed* into something that it was not formerly (Romans 12:2). To be “conformed” is to be fashioned **like something else**, but to be “transformed” is **to become something else**. The Greek word for “transformed” in Romans 12:2 is “*metamorphoo*,” from which we have the English word metamorphose, which describes the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.

When Christianity becomes a way of life with a person, he or she...

- ...will not argue with the Lord who bought him with His life’s blood (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 6:20), but will do what Jesus says without quibbling (Luke 6:46).
- ...gladly will attend every assembly of the saints that he or she possibly can (Psalm 122:1; Hebrews 10:25).
- ...will praise God unreservedly in public and private worship (Hebrews 2:12; 13:15), knowing that all those who enter the throne room of God do so without end (Revelation 5:11-14; 19:5-6).
- ...will evaluate his or her actions regularly by the Holy Word of God and make any course corrections accordingly required to keep oneself trained wholly on the eternal destination (2 Corinthians 13:5; Hebrews 11:10, 15-16).
- ...will concern himself or herself foremost with the work of the Lord’s church, including the adoption of a sense of urgency with which through all lawful means the Gospel must evangelize the world (Acts 8:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8).

- ...will prepare to teach others the fundamentals of the Christian faith (Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Peter 2:2).
- ...will evaluate the use of his or her time (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5) and that on which he or she spends money as a steward for God (Psalms 24:1; 50:10, 12; Luke 16:1-2; 19:12-26).

When Christianity becomes a way of life with a person, truly he or she will follow Jesus Christ, the Captain of one's salvation (Hebrews 2:10). For the wholly converted, "Christian" is not a name to be worn, but it is every bit of everything he or she **is** – every waking moment of everyday all the days of one's life. When Christianity becomes a way of life with a person, he or she will be the best possible person one can be, as a mother or a father, a husband or a wife, an employee or a boss, a citizen, a debtor or a creditor, etc. **Has Christianity become a way of life with you?**

In It to Win It!

"**In it to win it**" is an expression used everywhere to punctuate our language from references to sports teams, sales forces, fast food crews and nearly every other group activity imaginable. "In it to win it" often refers not only to a group's determination to be the best it can be and the most successful possible, but this expression characterizes each individual group member's mindset and contribution to achieving the anticipated goal.

As Christians and component parts of the church belonging to Jesus Christ, are we "in it to win it" religiously? How much activity for the Lord and with the Gospel would characterize a local congregation were each member clearly "in it to win it"? **Above all others, Christians need to be "in it to win it"!**

Otherwise and using biblical wording, one might say he has "whole heart" religion. "Whole heart" religion leads one to not only praise God, but to unreservedly and actively to serve God, too. "I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works" (Psalm 9:1). The original language word for "whole heart" here includes one's emotions and intellect, plus suggests the deepest organ and center; from the deepest most internal part of our being we ought to fully worship and serve our God.

"Whole heart" religion leads one to enthusiastically and unconditionally worship God in His own appointed way. "Praise the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation" (Psalm 111:1; 119:145). The original language word for "whole heart" here means the whole or all; hence, "whole heart" religion is in no way partial but an all-encompassing passion. We must worship God with our whole being.

"Whole heart" religion leads one to not hedge but fully embrace the commandments of God. "Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!" (Psalm 119:2, 10, 34). "Whole heart" religion faithfully practiced permits mere mortals to appeal to the mercy of God. "I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; Be merciful to me according to Your word" (Psalm 119:58).

An outward pretension in place of "whole heart" religion is miserable folly. "Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 3:10). God planned through the church that Christians would practice "whole heart" religion better than had Judah of old did. "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart" (Jeremiah 24:7; cf. Hebrews 9:10-13).

"Let us draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). Unless as a child of God you are "in it to win it," you do not have "whole heart" religion.

Place of Refuge – God's Care

Numbers 35 introduces six cities of refuge that God decreed to be established in Palestine after the Israelites settled there. Three cities were in Canaan, west of the Jordan River, and three cities were in the Trans-Jordan, east of the Jordan River. They were cities of justice to which persons guilty of accidentally killing someone could flee for protection from the avenging kinsmen of the slain.

Otherwise, the Old Testament portrays Almighty God as being a refuge to which His people can resort for consolation, comfort and protection. “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, A refuge in times of trouble” (Psalms 9:9). “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1). “Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by” (Psalms 57:1). See also Psalm 59:16; 62:7-8; 91:2 and 94:22. “In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence, And His children will have a place of refuge” (Proverbs 14:26).

Likewise for the Christian, God is his or her refuge and hope (Hebrews 6:18). The Godhead is always a reliable resource for the child of God to Whom such a one can turn; God will not fail His children as sometimes even fellow Christians and one’s family do. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe” (Proverbs 18:10). “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6). “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:6-7). God knows you and me personally, and He cares for us as individuals.

Chapter 2: Growth

In Faith

Magnificent Faith

There is no justification for some of our religious neighbors camping on faith to the exclusion of other elements to which the Bible ascribes saving power. Yet, Bible faith is such an awesome spectacle in the spiritual world.

Far from being saved by *faith only*, Bible faith is the binding substance that interacts with every facet of Christianity. This faith permeates worship, service and Christian living. In other words, Bible faith (to distinguish it from counterfeits) is companion to the Christian's whole being.

The allies of faith include: *prayer* (Mark 11:24), *baptism* and *salvation* (Mark 16:16; 2 Timothy 3:15), *wise stewardship* (Luke 12:42), *worship* (John 9:38), *grace* (Acts 15:11; 18:27; Ephesians 2:8), *repentance* (Acts 20:21), *remission of sins* (Romans 3:25), *righteousness* (Romans 4:3; 10:4), *justification* and *peace with God* (Romans 5:1; 2 Timothy 2:22), *hope* (Romans 5:2; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Peter 1:21), *preaching* (1 Corinthians 1:21), *joy*, *peace*, *longsuffering*, *gentleness*, *goodness*, *meekness* and *temperance* (Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Peter 1:5-7), *boldness* (Ephesians 3:12), *love* (1 Thessalonians 3:6; 5:8; 1 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13), *patience* (2 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Timothy 3:10; Hebrews 6:12), *truth* (2 Thessalonians 2:13), *edification* (1 Timothy 1:4), *a pure conscience* (1 Timothy 3:9) and *good works* (Titus 3:8). All of these work through faith.

Not the least remarkable profile of faith, by far, Bible faith does pertain to our eternal redemption (John 3:16). However, **we are not saved by faith only** (James 2:24). True believers “will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43); believers are further “justified” (Acts 13:39; Romans 3:28), purified (Acts 15:9), saved (Acts 16:31), forgiven and “sanctified” (Acts 26:18), and “baptized” (Acts 18:8).

The point, of course, at which faith accomplishes these things is when faith culminates in baptism. It is in baptism one symbolically contacts the blood our Lord shed in His death (Romans 6:3), puts on Christ (Galatians 3:27), washes away sins (Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5) and is saved (1 Peter 3:21). Only after baptism does one possess a bright forecast for eternity (dependent upon faithfulness thereafter, 2 Peter 2:20-22; Revelation 2:10).

“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Since faith precedes salvation and works with other saving attributes, without faith there is only condemnation, and without baptism, faith is unfulfilled and fruitless.

Additional to its relationship to our salvation, the quality of Bible faith is no less outstanding. Through faith Christians shall not be ashamed (Romans 9:33; 10:11). Using our “shield of faith,” we are “able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:16). Bible faith does not doubt (Matthew 21:21), is categorized in Scripture as one of the “weightier matters” (Matthew 23:23), is watchful (Matthew 24:42-46), contributes to Biblical unity (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Ephesians 4:13), is “obedient” (Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26), is “pattern” quality (1 Timothy 1:16) and is associated with “boldness” (1 Timothy 3:13).

The expression of this magnificent faith in the children of God is multi-directional. Christians “believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15; Romans 1:16), and “have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). So significant is faith, that without it we can neither please God (Hebrews 11:6), nor any more enter into the eternal rest awaiting us than the unbelieving Jews could enter Canaan (Hebrews 3:19).

Therefore, Jesus came that men might have this faith (John 1:7) and performed miracles to confirm Himself whereby men would believe (John 2:11, 23). Consequently, men believed the words of Christ (John 8:30), even as we must also, for we will be judged by them (John 12:48). Following Christ, the apostles and other inspired men spoke words whereby men could believe (John 17:20), which words of Christ and His apostles were also written, through which writings men should believe (John 20:31). As in the first century, still today, God's Word is committed to “earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7) for its proclamation to the end that men might have faith (1 Corinthians 3:5; Romans 10:14-15).

Today, the resource to which we must turn to learn of true faith is the Bible. Only Bible faith is worth any consideration. Really, faith is merely the product of the transferal of the Gospel (that system of faith, “the faith,” 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 13:5) into the lives of Christians. Hence, there is only “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5); it is both the faith to which we turn and what activates the child of God in worship, service and Christian living. We must ever determine to “walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7), even the very “word of faith” (Romans 10:8; 1 Timothy 4:6).

Not Unbelieving, But Believing

Even the disciples of our Lord sometimes experience difficulty believing as they should. Thomas was such a disciple: “Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing’” (John 20:27). While we today do not have the crucified, but resurrected body of Jesus to personally inspect, we are not lacking in the least for ample evidence whereby we may believe.

Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:29-31).

Yet, there are people in this world who refuse to believe the obvious. Jesus was rejected by some in spite of His miracles (John 12:37). Many Athenians also rejected the forceful, Holy Spirit-inspired preaching of the apostle Paul; this is often equally true of contemporary people when the Gospel is proclaimed. “And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved” (Acts 28:24). The world is largely comprised of the “uninformed” and “unbelievers” (1 Corinthians 14:23).

The children of God, though, “not being weak in faith,” but “strengthened in faith,” should serve God without reservation, not holding back at all, after the example of faithful Abraham (Romans 4:19-20). Faith results from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). It is demonstrated by obedience (Romans 1:5; 16:26; Hebrews 11; James 2:14-26). Further, faith is the foretaste of things as of yet unseen, and thereby is indeed a familiar friend to the children of God as they make their pilgrimage toward the eternal city. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Brethren, may we ever be “not unbelieving, but believing.”

Council against Faith

After Jesus resurrected Lazarus, the Jewish religious leaders were thrown into a quandary. “Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, ‘What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’” (John 11:47-48). *Off the record*, even the enemies of Jesus Christ acknowledged the miracles that Jesus performed (John 3:2; 12:42), and, these miracles were intended to cause belief in the Lord and His Word (John 2:11, 23; 20:30-31) everywhere and for all time.

How wonderful to think, unobstructed in anyway, every honest heart would believe on Jesus Christ. Yet, this proposition horrified the religious leaders of the day, for they would lose their position at the helm of contemporary religion and the worldly esteem that accompanied it. Their solution was to erase the miracle under consideration; they plotted to murder Lazarus. “But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus” (John 12:10-11).

Unfortunately, there is still a council against faith today. The chief-executive-officer (CEO) is the devil himself. “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). The devil and his board of devious directors disguise themselves as servants of God, thereby deceiving countless souls. “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform

themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Consequently, this unholy company represents itself with false Messiah’s (Matthew 24:5), false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) and false gospels (Galatians 1:6-9). These are the ploys that obstruct the faith of millions. Even the children of God must be careful lest they succumb to such devilishness (Matthew 24:24). Each Christian must discern between true and false prophets (1 John 4:1); and, the tool for this discernment is God’s Word alone (Acts 17:11). Potential danger may lurk without or within the Lord’s church (Acts 20:29-30); whereas denominationalism is an obvious departure from Bible truth to the clear thinking student of the God’s Word, more subtle deviations are brandished by some among us.

How wonderful that, unobstructed, the world would gladly believe on Jesus. Yet, how sad, because of numerous obstructions and the relentlessness of the evil army of darkness, headed by Satan himself, most of the souls who have ever lived, have already or will cross the threshold of eternity ravaged by sin and lost. How horrible! Then, how momentous the mission of the army of light, with Jesus the Captain of our salvation leading, to counter these obstructions and inoculate the lost instead with saving truth.

Every Christian is a soldier (on active duty); each congregation is a fighting unit (surrounded by hostile forces); and, the brotherhood is the nation of God (engaged in spiritually lethal combat). The future of the entire free spiritual world depends, in part, on **each** child of God. Are you well trained, able and willing to faithfully serve the Captain of your salvation, unto death if necessary? If not, why not? If not now, when?

Types of Faith

“Faith” is multifaceted. Not all kinds of faith are worthy of acquisition, because some types of faith are deficient. Other types of faith are sufficient and worthy pursuits by the child of God.

Little Faith: “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:30; cf., Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). **No Faith:** “And he said to them, ‘Why are ye so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?’” (Mark 4:40; cf., Mark 6:6). **Taunting Faith:** “He saved others; Himself he cannot save. If he is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matthew 27:42). **Stolen Faith:** “Those by the way side are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12). **Lost Faith:** “And He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ And they were afraid, and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Who can this be? For He commands even the winds and water, and they obey him’” (Luke 8:25). **Failing Faith:** “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail: and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). **Hindered Faith:** “Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4; cf., John 5:44; Acts 13:8). **Useless Faith:** “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue” (John 12:42). **Erring Faith:** “By professing it some have erred from the faith...” (1 Timothy 6:21). **Weak Faith:** “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1). **Futile Faith:** “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17; cf., 15:2). **Lacking Faith:** “Night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). **First Faith:** “Having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith” (1 Timothy 5:12). **Overthrown Faith:** “Who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some” (2 Timothy 2:18). **Dead Faith:** James 2:14-26. **Not Faith Only:** “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). **Lying Faith:** “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10). **Trembling Faith:** “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble” (James 2:19).

Contrast the types of faith in the previous paragraph with the types of faith in the following paragraph. Do you see a significant difference?

Great Faith: “When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!’” (Matthew 8:10; cf., Matthew 15:28). **Saving Faith:** “When He saw their faith, He said to him, ‘Man, your sins are forgiven you” (Luke 5:20). “Then He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (Luke 7:50). **Healing Faith:** “And He said to her, ‘Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace” (Luke 8:48; cf., Acts 14:9). **Precious Faith:** “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). **Increasing Faith:** “And the apostles said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith”” (Luke 17:5; cf., 2 Corinthians 10:15). **Faith Filled:** “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8; cf., Acts 6:5; 11:24). **The Faith:** “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13; cf., 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 3). **Open-Door Faith:** “Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). **Stepping Faith:** “And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:12). **Walking Faith:** “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). **Living Faith:** “Now the just shall live by faith; but if any man draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). **Word of Faith:** “But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)” (Romans 10:8; cf., 1 Timothy 4:6). **Household Faith:** “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). **Joyous Faith:** “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith” (Philippians 1:25). **Grounded Faith:** “If you continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister” (Colossians 1:23). **Stedfast Faith:** “For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing to see your order and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ” (Colossians 2:5; cf., 1 Peter 5:9). **Rooted Faith:** “Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:7). **Working Faith:** “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of our God and Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). **Patient Faith:** “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:3). **Spreading Faith:** “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything” (1 Thessalonians 1:8). **Comforting Faith:** “Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:7). **Growing Faith:** “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (2 Thessalonians 1:3). **Unfeigned Faith:** “When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5; cf., 1 Timothy 1:5). **Holding Faith:** “Having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck” (1 Timothy 1:19). **Fighting Faith:** “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good profession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12). **Kept Faith:** “I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). **Common Faith:** “To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1:4). **Sound Faith:** “This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:13; cf., Titus 2:2). **Sharing Faith:** “That the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (Philemon 6). **Assuring Faith:** “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). **Professed Faith:** “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23). **Unwavering Faith:** “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (James 1:6). **Understanding Faith:** “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). **Active**

Faith: Hebrews 11:4-40. **Following Faith:** “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7). **Praying Faith:** “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:15). **Tested Faith:** “That the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). **Examining Faith:** “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). **Victorious Faith:** “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith” (1 John 5:4). **Overcoming Faith:** “Who is he that overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5). **Holy Faith:** “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

Certainly, anyone can ascertain the types of faith that should be avoided, as well as the types of faith that every Christian ought to strive to adopt for himself or herself. Faith is not nearly as simplistic as one might imagine, but depending upon the kind of faith one has, it can either complement one’s Christianity or severely impair it.

The Impact of Faith

What is the impact of your faith on you personally as a Christian? In order for a professed faith in Jesus Christ to actually mean something, it has to have a direct impact on the way we conduct ourselves.

In what ways is it evident that one’s faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on him? Faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on us when we obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ and become Christians. Faith that does not lead one to become a child of God on His terms is a faith that is no more valuable than the faith of “devils” (KJV) or “demons” (ASV, NKJV) (James 2:19). If faith in Jesus Christ has the proper impact on us, we will couple that faith with baptism and be saved. **Jesus said**, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16); I like to say with some force, “Jesus said,” because mere mortals surely can be moved by the words of the Son of God Himself, if they can be moved at all to do the bidding of God. Baptized believers are added to the church by Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Members of the church were first called Christians in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26).

Faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on us when we are aware of our allegiance to our Lord every waking moment. There is no time during our waking moments that we as Christians should not think pure thoughts (Philippians 4:8), speak like Christians (Ephesians 4:25; 5:12) and act like Christians (Ephesians 5:8).

Faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on us when we manage our interpersonal relationships in accordance with that system of faith, the Gospel. The faith in Jesus Christ that led us to become Christians should also lead us to be good spouses and parents (Ephesians 5:24-25; 6:4; Titus 2:4-5), to become Christians should also lead us to be good employees and employers (Ephesians 6:5-9) and to become Christians should also lead us to be good citizens (1 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-14, 17).

Faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on us when we scrutinize every activity in which we involve ourselves by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The faith we have in Jesus Christ ought to keep us from developing a close friendship with ungodly people (1 Corinthians 15:33 ASV; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). For instance, we will not eventually marry an ungodly person if we make it a practice not to date or have close social interactions with ungodly people. The faith we have in Jesus Christ ought to cause us to evaluate potential recreation and entertainment choices properly in light of the Word of God (Hebrews 11:25; 1 John 2:15-17). Activities that may be biblically permissible may be inappropriate for Christians depending upon when and where they occur, such as fishing or golfing instead of assembling with fellow Christians to worship God in His own appointed way (Hebrews 10:25-31). The faith we have in Jesus Christ ought to lead us to select as carefully as possible the jobs at which we work to avoid promoting ungodliness or preventing us from worshipping God in the public assembly. Circumstances such as available work opportunities may be less than ideal, but we must find some time to worship (as well as serve) our God to be Christians indeed.

In what ways is it evident that one's faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on him?

Faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on us when that faith does not leave the church house. Our faith in Jesus Christ is useless if it is not evident in our daily lives – at home, at work, at school, in our business dealings, in our citizenship, etc. Those with whom we come in contact throughout the days, weeks, months and years we spend on earth ought to be able to ascertain that we look “for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on us when that faith does not help make this world a better place in which to live. We can help this world to be a better place in which to live as we conduct ourselves like Christians and provide an example for others to imitate us (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:1). As Christians and the Lord's church, we should not rub elbows with sin, but rather oppose sin (Romans 1:32; Ephesians 5:11). Christians ought not to opt for activities or places where gambling, pornography, drinking, dancing, lewd activities, vulgarities, etc. are commonplace.

Faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on us when we do not glorify God. Obviously, we can glorify God verbally through statements we make, prayer and song (Acts 4:24; Hebrews 13:15; Psalm 69:30). We can also glorify God by the way in which we live our lives, or we can spite God and bring reproach upon Him by the way we live (especially if we profess to be Christians) (1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12).

Faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on us when we do not save souls, including our own. Faith in Jesus Christ is inconsequential to us when we are so little concerned about sin that mars our souls and that will prevent us from going to heaven (Acts 26:28). We need to ask ourselves if we really care about where we spend eternity – enough to do something about it. Faith in Jesus Christ is inconsequential to us when we are so little concerned about sin that we make little or no attempt to rescue the souls of others from a devil's hell (James 5:20). We need to ask ourselves if we really care if our family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, etc. spend forever in hell.

Faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on us when we are not true to the Book – the Bible, the only book learning that is important enough to take us to heaven. When we pick and choose portions of Scripture to apply in our lives, we are fooling ourselves if we think that is a winning strategy that will take us to heaven (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46). When we substitute doctrines of men in place of the doctrines of God (even if we abide by many of God's doctrines), we make it apparent that we neither have sufficient regard for the Bible nor have the right kind of faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 15:9; Titus 1:14; Hebrews 13:9).

In conclusion, we pose these questions: In what ways is it evident that your faith in Jesus Christ has a direct impact on your life? Are there ways in which it is obvious that faith in Jesus Christ does not have a direct impact on your life? What is the impact of faith on you personally? Has your faith led you to become a Christian (Mark 16:16)? Has your faith led you to be a **faithful** Christian (1 John 1:7, 9)?

In Works

Our Lord's Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) illustrates that every Christian has some responsibility proportionate to his or her opportunities and abilities. Jesus Christ expects His followers to be fruitful. ““Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit... I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears **much fruit**... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear **much fruit**; so you will be My disciples.”” (John 15:2, 5, 8). Consequently, the manifestation of Christian faith is in the fruits or works that are outgrowths of that faith. Faith without works is dead (James 2:14-26). The Bible's heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 all did something as a consequence of their faith. Christianity is supposed to be a doing religion.

As such, the more knowledge a child of God acquires, coupled with increasing experience as a Christian leads to greater abilities and more opportunities. Greater abilities and more opportunities equate to greater responsibility to work effectively in the service of Jesus Christ. Christians ought to exhibit growth in works.

The children of God become unacceptable to God for their failure to do what they know is right and needs to be done. “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Each year as Christians grow in the Christian faith and apply it to themselves, they should also increase in Christian works.

In Service

The Cause of Christ!

Two dictionary definitions in particular pertain to the way the noun, “cause,” is used within this article. They are: “a reason for an action or condition” and “a principle or movement militantly defended or supported.” Assembled in the phrase “cause of Christ,” herein, the emphasis and focus is a reason for subsequent activity manifesting itself as *militant Christianity*. In other words, “the cause of Christ” in these paragraphs refers to the church for which Jesus Christ died to establish, purchasing it with His blood (Acts 20:28), over which He is the Head (Colossians 1:18) and for which He will return to take back with Him to heaven (John 14:1-3). However, the usage of the phrase “the cause of Christ” is not a ho hum reference merely to a collection of Christians in some community, but as reference to the Lord’s church should be, it is an allusion to a *vibrant, active living organism*.

It is not unusual for the New Testament to use various words to represent the concept of the New Testament church, emphasizing different characteristics of it. Jesus used the words “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably (Matthew 16:18-19), and the apostle Paul used the words “church” and “body” to refer to the same thing (Ephesians 1:22-23). Likewise, he used the words “house” (1 Timothy 3:15), “temple” (1 Corinthians 3:15) and ‘wife’ or “bride” (Ephesians 5:22-32; cf. Revelation 22:17) to emphasize traits of the Lord’s church.

Very much in the sense of “the cause of Christ,” Luke records the words of the apostle Paul referring to the church as “the way.” “But this I confess to you, that according to **the Way** which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). The word, “way,” means, “a road” or “a route,” literally or figuratively. Consequently, when referring to the Lord’s church, “the way” represents the high, spiritual road or route to a home in heaven forever with God.

Sometimes, the Greek word for “way” is also translated as “highway” or “journey”; if we are Christians, we are on the highway to heaven, and we are on a journey. Consider these uses of the “the way” in keeping with the emphasis intended herein: “the way of salvation (Acts 16:17), “the way of God” (Acts 18:26), “the way of truth” (2 Peter 2:2) and “the way of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:21). Who can forget the resounding words of Jesus Christ Himself along these lines: “...I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6)?

All of the foregoing was noted to herald loudly in your ears that “the cause of Christ,” otherwise observed in Scripture as “the church” (Acts 2:47) or “the way,” is more important than any other institution, material or immaterial. The cause of Christ is more important than any earthly pursuit and any mortal idea or opinion. The “cause of Christ” ought to be the catalyst for the consistent and perpetual animation of every child of God. Everything a Christian thinks, does or says ought to conform to his or her high regard for “the cause of Christ.”

Therefore, New Testament Scripture teaches that Christians ought to suffer personal grievances if necessary rather than risking injury to the Lord’s church (“the cause of Christ”). “Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?” (1 Corinthians 6:7; see also 1 Peter 3:19-23).

There are a number of additional ways by which “the cause of Christ” can be harmed, sometimes irreparably. Internal, congregational conflict results in division between brethren, resulting in a reproach against “the cause of Christ” in the non-Christian community (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 11:18; 12:25). We must be careful that we are not the ones “because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Peter 2:2).

“The cause of Christ” is not a social club or other earthly organization over which its members ought to compete for control. Jesus Christ is the Head of His church, of which Christians are members, and the New Testament comprises the bylaws for it. No subject over which Christians must come to a decision respecting

inconsequential details ought to disrupt the harmony, focus and direction of “the cause of Christ.” The color of carpet, the location of a structure in which to assemble for worship and certainly the dimwitted mentality of *rule or ruin* are not sufficient matters for which anyone should risk injuring “the cause of Christ.”

If every Christian had as his or her motivation the single-minded thrust in life to further “the cause of Christ” before himself or herself and any earthbound interest, we would enthusiastically embrace Christianity more fully and faithfully than we ever have before, *using ourselves up in and for* “the cause of Christ.” We would **do our Christianity** in the spirit of James 2:14-26 and the **doers of faith** recorded in Hebrews 11. Further, we would quickly marginalize impenitent, sinful Christians who would tear the fabric of fellowship with divisiveness (Titus 3:10-11) or persistent sin (John 8:34; 1 John 3:8).

The “cause of Christ” or the Lord’s church is paramount in importance because it was devised first in the mind of God from eternity (Ephesians 3:10-11), and because Jesus purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). It is the body of the saved (Acts 2:47), and our Lord is coming back for it and none other (John 14:1-3). How important is “the cause of Christ” to you?

In Knowledge

Biblical ignorance, not knowing God’s Word sufficiently, is the enemy of every soul so afflicted. On the other hand, knowledge from above is the friend of everyone. Biblical knowledge leads to salvation and preserves souls from loss. God said through an Old Testament prophet, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge...” (Hosea 4:6). God has always provided ample divine instruction for humanity, but mankind often simply refused it. During His earthly ministry, Jesus stated, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). This corresponds with the reason for which Christ came from heaven to earth, which was “to give knowledge of salvation to His people By the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:77).

Obtaining knowledge is essential, but there is a difference between earthly knowledge and knowledge that is divine in origin; we mortals need to seek divine knowledge about spiritual matters first. “Receive my instruction, and not silver, And knowledge rather than choice gold” (Proverbs 8:10). The apostle Paul put behind him all things earthly in his pursuit of divine knowledge. “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). This knowledge from above must be sought with the utmost reverence or godly fear. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:7).

In the first century during a time when true miracles were operative, divine knowledge was one of the spiritual gifts. “For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:8). It was over those early decades after the establishment of the Lord’s church or kingdom that God through the Holy Spirit was in the process of providing new revelation – the New Testament. However, now that the miraculous age has come to a close (1 Corinthians 13:8-12), we must appeal to the completed New Testament revelation to obtain knowledge. In order to do that, we must study and meditate upon the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). Mortals need to start with the milk of God’s Word whereby they can grow (1 Peter 2:2). Exercising themselves in the Word of God, then, they can become mature in the faith (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The goal of spiritual growth is to know God’s Word more fully this year than the year before, as well as to know it better next year than this year. We need to examine ourselves to determine whether we are growing in the knowledge of God’s Word – the Bible (2 Corinthians 13:5). Increasing one’s knowledge of the Bible will neither happen overnight nor accidentally. Rather, in a figure, a person must purposely eat the Word of God. “Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16).

In Value

The more a child of God knows of the Word of God the more easily he or she can fend for himself or herself against the Wicked One. In addition, the knowledgeable Christian can assist babes in Christ and less knowledgeable children of God in their spiritual growth. With an increase in knowledge and experience, a Christian can be a more valuable servant of Jesus Christ. As the years come and go, the child of God ought to strive continually to improve himself or herself – all the time becoming more valuable to the cause of Christ. Are you growing in Jesus Christ and becoming a more useful and fruitful servant each year?

Chapter 3: The Role of Every Christian

Patriarchy was a family-type religion where the fathers of the families received instruction that they passed to their family members. Not every family head received direct revelation or communication from God, but those who did were responsible for disseminating the information to extended family members, too. Judaism was a national-type religion specifically given to the Jews; some proselyted Gentiles also brought themselves under the scope of Judaism. Christianity is a universal religion, affecting all mankind, irrespective of whether one has a Jewish or a non-Jewish (Gentile) ancestry. Moreover, Christianity is an individual, personal religion wherein each Christian must participate for himself or herself. There is a role for each child of God in the Christian system.

Work of Ministry

Yes, there are special areas of ministry within the church of our Lord that are performed by especially men who are assigned those roles in keeping with divinely stated and inspired qualifications (e.g., elders, deacons, preachers). Yet, every Christian shares a responsibility to serve or minister in the cause of Christ, respecting his or her abilities and opportunities; **ability plus opportunity equals responsibility**.

First Corinthians 12 illustrates the shared duties within a congregation by referring to the diversity of miraculous or spiritual gifts that various church members were able to demonstrate. Irrespective of what the ability was, it was needed in conjunction with whatever other abilities other members were able to use in the church. The apostle used the physical body as an illustration of how numerous body parts must work together in harmony in order for the body to be coordinated and functional. “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Corinthians 12:27).

Even without the miraculous or spiritual gifts of the first century (1 Corinthians 13:8-12), Christians still have varying abilities and opportunities, and hence responsibilities in the area of church work or ministry. A local congregation will never be all that it could otherwise be as long as any of its members does not do his or her part. Without every local member of the church doing his or her part, to that extent, the local church will be uncoordinated and dysfunctional. Are you doing all that you can in service to our Lord Jesus on the local level as a member of a congregation?

Edify Brethren & Non-Christians

One of the biblical qualifications for the selection of elders is that a prospective elder be “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2). Yet, that does not excuse other Christians from also developing the ability to teach. The apostle Paul instructed Timothy that others, too, must be “able to teach” (2 Timothy 2:4). Therefore, at least preachers, ministers or evangelists in addition to elders need to be “able to teach.” However, to some extent, all Christians need to prepare themselves to be teachers of God’s Word. There was a widespread deficiency among first century Christians that adversely affected the Lord’s church. Christians were not growing spiritually whereby they were prepared to teach the Gospel of Christ to others. Instead, they were constantly in need of someone teaching the fundamentals of the faith to them. “For though by this time **you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). Notice that all Christians “ought to be teachers.” Further, only after digesting not only the milk of the Word but meatier matters, too, a child of God can better know the difference between “both good and evil.” In addition, the church at Corinth was troubled with perennial babies in Christ, which harmed the local congregation (1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The route to edifying others, including brethren, is to learn God’s Word. After that, then, a child of God can make a valuable contribution to the edification of others. There are several ways by which one can

participate in edifying others (e.g., conversation, Christian conduct, Bible classes, home Bible studies, writing articles, distributing tracts, etc.). Opportunities abound for formal and informal sharing portions of the Gospel, especially with brethren (e.g., Bible classes, VBS). At the very least, each child of God knows how his or her sins were remitted and can convey that information to non-Christian family members, friends, coworkers, etc. A primary assignment by Jesus Christ to His followers is to edify Christians and non-Christians (2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Matthew 28:19-20).

Support the Body

Whereas under the Old Testament, followers of Patriarchy and Judaism were required to contribute 10% of the increase of their possessions or wealth, the New Testament does not prescribe a specific amount that a Christian is obligated to give. Yet, each child of God is required by divine instruction in the New Testament to give something, according to some guidelines. The New Testament giver must give *generously* (2 Corinthians 9:6), *without compulsion*, on purpose or *with premeditation* and *cheerfully* (2 Corinthians 9:7). In addition, one's giving is to be *regularly* (i.e., weekly) and *proportionate to one's prosperity* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The local congregation incurs expenses (e.g., benevolence, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; support evangelists, 1 Corinthians 9:4-5; support missionaries, Philippians 4:16; etc.), and this is the way that God has determined to provide funds to pay for them. Members of a local congregation need to finance the work of the local church, and each Christian needs to give what he or she is able to give.

Assist Brethren & Non-Christians

Christians have always been charitable people, especially toward fellow Christians but also toward non-Christians, too. At the inception of the church, a need arose among new Christians who had been visiting Jerusalem at the time of their conversion. They had gone to Jerusalem as practicing Jews, but obeyed the Gospel and lingered to learn more of the new faith – Christianity. Consequently, they developed a need to which Christians residing in Jerusalem responded. “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (Acts 2:44-45).

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ...Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37)

Individually as Christians (James 1:27) as well as collectively as Christians or a congregation (2 Corinthians 9:13), the church is to practice benevolence toward Christians first, and afterwards toward non-Christians as opportunity allows. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Attitude toward the Lost

Immediately preceding our Lord's Ascension, He gave the church the mission of evangelizing the world with the Gospel of Christ. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16). “‘But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.’ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:8-9). The church, which is the sum of its members, has the responsibility of heralding the Gospel of Christ

throughout the world. Every child of God shares in that responsibility in accordance with his or her ability and opportunity. Evangelizing this world with the Gospel is supposed to be a part of what a Christian is and does.

Attitude toward Government

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 13:1-7 that everyone must obey governments. Likewise, the apostle Peter, also by divine inspiration, penned that men are to obey various levels of government (1 Peter 2:13-17). “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey...” (Titus 3:1).

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

However, whenever there is a conflict between the law of God and the law of man, the Christian must obey the higher law of God. This was the reaction of the apostles when they were forbidden to teach or to preach any longer in the name of Jesus. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19). Christians are obligated to obey the law of the land, except when doing so would require disobeying God.

The Bible does not authorize a particular form of government (e.g., democracy, monarchy, etc.), but it does require compliance with the law of the land. The only exception pertains to those portions of the law of man that contradict the law of God and require a Christian to commit sin.

Chapter 4: Family

Family cannot be overemphasized because it is the basic component of society, the foundational block of any nation and the underlying component of the Lord's church. Healthy families bolster society and the nation as well as the church of our Lord. Contrariwise, unhealthy, dysfunctional families speak to the ruin of society, the nation and the church. God made the family back in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:21-25), and the Bible is a sufficient marriage manual by which the family can become all God wants it to be.

Roles of Each Family Member

A family is comprised of at least a husband and a wife. When children enter the home, the husband becomes a father, and his wife becomes a mother – in addition to the respective roles of husband and wife. The couple, then, has biblical roles as spouses and parents, plus children will grow into biblical roles, too. Ideally, each family member will embrace his or her respective role or roles and help the family to be coordinated and functional. This is most likely to occur if family members resort to the Bible as the family handbook. In every area of life, the Bible needs to be used for practical application for living in this physical world as well as living as God desires for us in the spiritual world.

Rearing Children

Following are some biblical and practical aspects of rearing children. Some of the obstacles that parents face in rearing their children are due to undisciplined society, church and home. There are, though, sufficient rewards to raising children to offset the obstacles along the way. Successful childrearing begins with parental realization that parents have a God-ordained **obligation** to exercise discipline (control) in the home over their children. “Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23:13-14).

Childrearing Is a Mission

Sometimes rearing children may seem as though it is an impossible mission, but it is a grave undertaking from which no parent dare turn back. The mission of childrearing is not unlike the overall mission of the church; benevolence, evangelism and edification must begin at home. Children must be impressed foremost with spiritual values (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Matthew 6:33). Along the way as parents bring up their children, our offspring must be taught not only how to make a living, but more importantly how to live. In addition, they must be taught how to seek spiritual maturity in adulthood (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2) and to be spiritually productive or fruitful (John 15:1-8).

Parents need to ground their children for spiritual service. Children should be instructed and shown how to be good mothers and fathers (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:3-5), while being shown how to be good Christians (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:5). Our children should be groomed to be future teachers, elders, deacons and preachers as well as wives of elders, deacons and preachers.

The mission of childrearing is too important to take lightly or even to allow the word “failure” to be a part of our vocabulary. Our children must be taught to be true to the Book – the Bible, including salvation, worship, service and Christian living. In whatever other areas of rearing our children we may succeed, if we fail to instill in them spiritual values, we fail our childrearing mission.

Responsibilities of Childrearing

The responsibilities of childrearing are many and varied. There are parental responsibilities involved in rearing children, which include both their *physical care* (1 Timothy 5:8) and their *spiritual care* (Ephesians 6:4). However, parental responsibility diminishes or ceases where the child's responsibility begins (Ezekiel 18:20).

Children must cooperate in their own rearing in order for it to be biblically successful. Youngsters must learn and practice obedience to parents (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; 2 Timothy 3:2). Under Judaism, God emphasized how seriously He views children obeying their parents by requiring the stoning to death of accountable children who were disobedient and rebellious (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) or who had struck their parents (Exodus 21:15). While the New Testament does not call for parents to have disobedient children stoned, it does require that children show respect toward their parents (Ephesians 6:2), just as the Old Testament did (Exodus 20:12); this respect of children towards their parents pays dividends later in life as children care for their aged parents (1 Timothy 5:4). Very importantly, children must obey the Gospel for themselves!

The disposition of children themselves plays a significant role in childrearing. Every child is different, even in the same family. Young children are biblically innocent – without sin – not responsible for themselves (Ezekiel 28:15; Matthew 18:3). Children have pliable minds, and parents need to begin molding them at a very young age. Proverbs 22:6 is an axiom or general truth that concurs with early training of children to provide them the necessary guidance to see them through their adulthood. Since accountable children have freewill (Ezekiel 18:20), parents need to realize that despite what parents did correctly or perhaps incorrectly in childrearing, children will sometimes make wrong choices for themselves. Hence, the responsibility for biblically successful childrearing is a shared responsibility between parents and the children themselves.

Obstacles to Childrearing

The obstacles to successful childrearing are many. Again, each child is different, and reacts differently from his or her siblings. Just when parents think they have parenting figured out, another child enters the family, and mom and dad have to start over with their schemes for parenting. Of course, there is the problem of parental imperfection with which to contend. Parental imperfection is bound to lead to mistakes in childrearing; probably most of us wish we could undo something in our lives that has potentially affected our children adversely. Parental lack of experience, which largely only disappears after a substantial amount of OJT (on the job training), is a certain obstacle, too.

Outside the family, other obstacles present themselves. The *ungodly world* is earnestly trying to pull our children into the depths of sin (1 John 2:15-17). The *pleasures of sin* also call our children while we are at the same time trying to teach them about righteousness (Hebrews 11:25). Some sins that are characterized as “*youthful lusts*” threaten to undo everything for which godly parents work and pray (2 Timothy 2:22). *Erring Christians* and their children can greatly detract from successful childrearing: “Everybody’s doing it,” “Brother so-and-so’s children are allowed to do it.” *Secular advice books* can often render more harm than good in rearing; any advice that conflicts with the Bible must be avoided. Sometimes, deficiencies in parental childrearing can be traced back to abuses or deficiencies in their rearing by their parents; it can be harder to be a good parent if one’s parents were not good models of parenting.

Additional contemporary threats to childrearing as well as to Christian living come from *hedonism* (e.g., entertainment, 2 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Timothy 5:6; 2 Timothy 3:4; Titus 3:3), *peer pressure* (1 Corinthians 15:33; Exodus 23:2), *humanism* (self-centered, anti-God religion, which has infiltrated government, education and religion), *materialism* (Proverbs 30:8-9), *apathy* or indifference (Revelation 3:15-16) and *false teachers* (Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1). *Despair* particularly among adolescents can lead to teenage suicide; all Christians, including youth, need to focus on the primary purpose of life – seeking spiritual things first. Purpose in life can carry one through many crises over which he or she has little control; keep focused on the heavenly horizon.

Our young people may also be threatened by *sex and dating* unless both parents and their children exercise caution in this area; while sexual feelings are natural, they must be properly restrained within the bounds of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 7:2). Another threat engulfing our nation and posing a hazard for our children is *drug and alcohol abuse* (Galatians 5:19-21).

Danger signs along the way in childrearing tell of developing problems that need to be addressed speedily. *Persistently unruly children* indicate problems with parental guidance or children themselves or outside influences or a combination of these; special attention must be given to the problem areas. Persistently

unruly children amount to a **little red flag** waving above their heads, declaring something is wrong, perhaps at home. Another danger sign is when a *child doesn't like attending worship or classes*; this is equivalent to spiritual anorexia that may prove spiritually fatal (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 10:25). Parents must be careful that their children do not learn a dislike for attending worship and classes from them.

There are other areas in which parents may experience difficulties in rearing children. For instance, sometimes parents have difficulty adjusting the treatment of their children according to their maturity and age. Or, some of the conflicts between one or both parents and children may resemble rivalry between siblings instead of between grownups and children. A child may be babied to the point of debilitation.

Positive Side to Childrearing

Successful childrearing helps to qualify parents for greater service in the kingdom; especially elders must rear their children successfully (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). Deacons also must demonstrate skills in rearing children (1 Timothy 3:12). Additionally, preachers and teachers will be greatly hindered in their effectiveness in teaching the Gospel unless their children are credits rather than liabilities to their parents.

Happily, there are rewards in rearing children. Family love — natural affection is a precious commodity, similar to the love God has for His children. Someday, one's dear children also will care for their aged parents.

Several positive signs may bolster the confidence of parents endeavoring their best to rear their children. How wonderful it is when people you don't know feel compelled to compliment you on the good public behavior of your children (e.g., restaurants); the successful childrearing in such cases occurred at home and is only on public display otherwise. It is as though a **green flag** waves above their heads, indicating that some sound parenting is ongoing back at the house. Further, it must be encouraging to parents when they feel especially thankful for their own children when they see other people's unruly children. It is also a positive sign of good childrearing when children make it easier for parents to be good Christians. Certainly parents can rejoice when their children obey and continue to obey the Gospel. Both children and parents have grown and succeeded when parents value the judgment of their children. It is also a positive sign of successful childrearing when parents trust their children (not blindly, but based on evidence — the children have demonstrated trustworthiness).

Tools for Good Childrearing

Childrearing tools include *parental patience* (James 1:2-4); *time* — duration — has a way of giving parents the experience they once lacked and convincing children that their parents actually know something after all (Hebrews 5:12). Perhaps distasteful for both parent and child, *corporal punishment* is biblical and sometimes absolutely necessary (Proverbs 23:13-14). “Beat” means to strike, and to us pertains to spanking. Sometimes *chastisements* are sufficient correction of children (Hebrews 12:5-11). Additionally, *rewards* for compliance with parental instruction reinforces successful childrearing. *Praise*, too, underscores successes in rearing children. All children need *special attention* from their parents for their self-esteem and proper development.

Some helpful **rules of thumb** for childrearing include the following considerations. By and large, from infancy dress children modestly; this will avoid conflict later when parents otherwise try to have the child *start* practicing modesty (1 Timothy 2:9); it is easier not to start something that you do not want your children doing later in life than to begin and later try to stop it. Parents must endeavor to practice even-handedness with a child; children need to know what to expect from their parents, even as we know what God expects of us and how God reacts to different situations (James 1:8). Parents must be careful not to show partiality between their children (Romans 2:11). Furthermore, parents need to remember that they are responsible for controlling their dependent children; children should not be allowed to run roughshod over their parents. (The tail must never wag the dog.) Finally, all things go better with the Gospel.”

Summary

Admittedly, parenting is somewhat of an imperfect science. However, it is a mission that godly parents cannot afford to neglect. Yes, there are difficulties associated with rearing children. However, the rewards, both on earth and in heaven, for both parents and children, far outweigh all the pains of parenting.

Marriage

Definition

Unfortunately, the state of affairs in contemporary times is such that we must examine the definition of marriage. What is it? Where did it originate? Who are the parties to a marriage?

First, God instituted marriage around 6,000 years ago on the sixth and final day of creation when He created a man and a woman for each other.

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:18-25).

There were three parties to the original marriage: Adam, Eve and God. Likewise today, there are three parties to a marriage that God recognizes in our time; again, it is man, woman and God.

Clearly, God intended and provided only for marriage to be comprised of **one man for one woman**. In addition, God specifically condemned as sinful every other conceivable coupling. Sexual relations between males and females outside of marriage is condemned as "sexual immorality" or "fornication." "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality ["fornication" KJV], let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2). Sex by a married person with someone other than his or her spouse is condemned as "adultery" (Romans 13:9). Likewise, both homosexuality and bestiality have always been condemned by God. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination. Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion" (Leviticus 18:22-23). God determined that anyone committing these sins ought to be put to death (Exodus 20:10; Leviticus 20:13; Exodus 22:19). These divine condemnations against fornication, adultery, homosexuality, etc. appear also in the New Testament. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Irrespective of what the laws of mankind may legally define as marriage, it remains that God Who originated marriage in the first place only defines marriage as one man for one woman for life. The lone exceptions where God permits remarriage are remarriage of the innocent spouse of a divorcee due to adultery to a biblically eligible candidate (Matthew 19:9), and secondly, the remarriage of a surviving spouse to a marriage terminated by the death of a spouse (Romans 7:2-3).

Different but Complementary Roles

The respective roles for men and women in the church and in the home are not culturally based, but they go back to near creation. By divine inspiration, Moses wrote regarding the aftermath of sin in the Garden of Eden, “To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you’” (Genesis 3:16). Therefore, the subordinate role of women to men does not pertain to custom or culture, but predates both. Also, the Gospel has not altered or removed the subordinate role of women any more than it has affected (1) painful childbirth, (2) sweat and labor, and (3) physical death (Genesis 3:16-19), all of which will remain until the end of time.

The God-given roles for men and women were implemented before there was any culture (1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9). For about 6,000 years women have been submissive to men in the home and in religion because God legislated that doctrine in Scripture, and for nearly the past 2,000 years, God has included in the New Testament the submission of women to men in the home and in the church. He has not retracted His decree in this matter.

Despite *political correctness* in modern society, perhaps nothing better illustrates the unchanging roles for men and women as God designed them than the immutable fact that the female of our species still must give birth to our offspring. The apostle Paul alluded to this role in 1 Timothy 2:15, when he penned, “Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” A woman does not attain salvation by giving birth, but the point of the passage is that she cannot expect to be approved of God while abandoning the role that He has assigned to women. The *role of women in the church or in the home* is only controversial to those who do not properly respect the authority of God and His Word. Since God Himself specified the respective roles of men and of women, faithful Christians must not deviate from divine teaching.

The inspired Word of God gives several reasons for the subordination of women: (1) “For Adam was first formed, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13); (2) woman, not man, was deceived by Satan (1 Timothy 2:14); (3) woman was created **from** man (1 Corinthians 11:8) and (4) woman was created **for** man (1 Corinthians 11:9). Yet, a woman’s salvation and worth are not tied to a man (Galatians 3:28). However, the Gospel does not dissolve physical distinctions between races, political or economic status, or the sexes. The standard for Christians, including women, is not the practices of society around them (Romans 12:2). Final authority for the conduct of Christian men and Christian women in the home or in the church rests with God. Our Heavenly Father has the **absolute right** to distinguish between roles for women and for men.

The apostle Paul wrote by divine inspiration, “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God... Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11:3, 9). It is no more appropriate for a woman to take for herself a role that God designated for men than it would be appropriate for a man to take for himself the role of Jesus Christ. As far as God and faithful children of God are concerned, the respective but distinctive God-given roles for men and for women are unaffected by contemporary culture and society.

Husband

God holds husbands responsible for being the head of the home. “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24). “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives” (1 Peter 3:1). The subjection of women to men is a divinely given principle that predates both Christianity and Judaism, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Among other things, at that time, God said to the wife, “...**Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you**” (Genesis 3:16).

From the inception of marriage in the Garden of Eden, throughout the balance of Patriarchy and under Judaism, male leadership in the home continued as God instituted it. Consequently, Numbers 1:4 speaks of

the “head of the house of his fathers.” Zacharias confirmed Elizabeth’s naming of their son as John, which indicated that as husband and father, Elizabeth was obliged to be submissive to him (Luke 1:59-63). The background of the Old Testament where it lends insight into the workings of the Jewish home shows that male leadership in the home continued through Judaism.

The biblically submissive role of women to men in the home and the church does not grant men the right to abuse their wives. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). “So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28). The differing roles of men and women remain constant, despite *political correctness* in modern society.

There is biblical equality between men and women pertaining to redemption as indicated by the following passage. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28). However, the roles between men and women are different.

The assumption from 1 Timothy 5:8 is that primarily the head of the house has the responsibility of providing for his family – including his extended family in which may be widows according to that context. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Not only was Sarah submissive and obedient to Abraham under Patriarchy, the apostle Peter used that fact as an example for women to be submissive to their husbands under Christianity (1 Peter 3:5-6). It is not enough that wives are willingly submissive to their husbands, but husbands need to embrace their God-given responsibilities in the home. If husbands and fathers do not accept their duties at home, the void will not persist, but wives and children will assert themselves. Somebody has to take charge of the home and make decisions. If the husband does not take charge, his wife will take charge – if for no other reason because someone has to do it.

Teaching in Scripture that a wife must submit to her own husband places the responsibility for the home on the husband. However, in recent years, largely due to societal changes, contemporary roles for men and women have been modified from what God ordained. Scripture, though, has not changed nor has there been any new revelation for nearly 2,000 years. As far as God and the children of God are concerned, the respective but distinctive God-given roles for men and women are unaffected by contemporary practice. Efforts to apply *political correctness* to biblical roles are misguided.

As a wife, woman is more than a mate. She is a partner with her husband in their mutual quest for earthly and heavenly goals, through separate roles. A subordinate and dutiful wife deserves love and kind treatment from her husband (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 33; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). Aquila and Priscilla are a noble Bible example of a husband-wife team worthy of contemporary emulation. First Peter 3:7 reads, “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” The role of the husband complements the submissive role of his wife as he provides for and praises her. They are the team, and he is supposed to be the team leader.

The American Standard Version of the Bible reads: “workers at home” where the King James Version has “keepers at home” in Titus 2:5. Truly, God has given to women **work** to do: (1) which they must accept to please Him, (2) which mission should be joyfully received, and (3) for which women deserve ample appreciation for their godly labors. Male leadership in the home regarding one’s wife includes exhibiting love toward her and appreciating her for all she does to make the home. Leadership involves providing for her and empowering her in the home. Male leadership honors the mother of his children with the backing to manage the home, including their children. Husband and father is half of the team, with his wife and the mother of their children being the other half of the family management team. A Christian wife will submit to the leadership of her Christian husband, but it is easier for her to submit to a godly spouse who takes upon himself the responsibility of leading the home.

It is a man’s fault when a woman assumes a role that God never gave her in the home. It is his fault because he allows her to abandon her role and seize his role. Often, he is also at fault for leaving undone

what he should have done, intentionally or unintentionally leaving it for his wife to do. The home will be better coordinated when each fulfills his or her role.

Father

“And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Mothers (and grandmothers, too) play an indispensable role in childrearing (2 Timothy 1:5). In the home, a wife and mother has chiefly domestic duties (1 Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:1-5). This area of godly service especially includes for a mother the care for and guidance of young children. A mother has no more important duty before God than the proper care of her family. Nevertheless, God holds the father ultimately responsible for rearing his children. “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21).

If the father does not exercise himself with the authority invested in him by God through the Scriptures, children will assert themselves. If they have to, children will raise themselves, and it is not a pretty sight. Neither did God intend for mothers to raise their children without the children’s father. Some fathers are physically present, and yet, they are absent spiritually and socially from positive interaction and guidance of their own offspring.

Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 just noted is the New Testament abbreviation of the parental responsibility, especially belonging to fathers, to indoctrinate their children with the Word of God. Notice Deuteronomy 6:1-2, 4-8.

Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, **you and your son and your grandson**, all the days of your life... Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them **when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up**. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Fathers today need to emulate father Abraham respecting the confidence that God had in him when it came to instructing his children with God’s divine message. “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” (Genesis 18:19).

Not under Judaism and not under Christianity either dare a father neglect acquainting his children with God’s Word at all times. Christian fathers should not leave the religious education of their children solely to their wives. It is also shirking a father’s duties to expect the church to take the full responsibility of informing one’s children about Christian doctrine and Christian living. At best, children only experience Bible class and worship a few hours weekly, but parents have their children hours daily. Given the adverse effect of the world on our offspring, parents need to seize every opportunity for positive reinforcement with the Bible.

Summary

The roles in religion and in the home that God established from the dawn of man’s earthly pilgrimage are still in force. The inspired apostle Paul clearly taught that these roles God assigned men and women from creation onward are yet effective under Christianity. No passage elsewhere in the New Testament nullifies these God-ordained roles for men and women. No one has the authority to countermand God in this (or any other) matter on which He has legislated in the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19).

The fact that many males may not rise to the occasion to be the husbands and fathers in the home that they should be is a sad commentary on men, but that human failure does not, for instance, make a wife into a husband or make a mother into a father. The home needs both male and female roles to be the coordinated home that God designed it to be.

Men and women differ physiologically, but they are of equal worth respecting salvation (Galatians 3:27-29). Nevertheless, God gave differing but complementary roles to men and women. Mindful of those differing roles, while the woman is to submit to the man, the man has added responsibilities toward the woman. The God-authored physiological differences between the sexes also correspond to the respective roles that God assigned each sex. The man generally enjoys greater strength while the woman in her supportive role is usually not quite as strong physically.

Women demonstrate equal academic capabilities with men. Emotionally, women typically differ from men. Between the two sexes, their combined emotional characteristics furnish the home. Both sexes have the same capacity to excel morally, though often women outshine many of their male counterparts. There are many women who are spiritual giants and who make the home and the church more of what God wants them to be. However, neither men nor women are spiritual giants when they disdain God's respective roles for men and women.

Excepting God the Father, everyone is subordinate to someone else (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Hebrews 2:8). "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

It cannot be denied that the Bible also **plainly teaches** that women are subject to men (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:3). Further, Scripture abundantly denotes that wives are required to be subordinate to their own husbands (Ephesians 5:22-25; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:5-6), even if their husbands are not Christians (1 Peter 3:1).

The role of women in the church or in the home is only controversial to those who exhibit diminished respect for the authority of God and His Holy Word! Christians who reject the subordinate role of women despise "**sound doctrine**" (Titus 2:1, 4-5) and **blaspheme the Word of God** (Titus 2:5)! Men who fail to or neglect to take upon themselves the role God has bestowed upon them also despise "sound doctrine" and blaspheme the Word of God.

Please consider the futility of arguing with God and accept the divine teaching on the respective roles of men and women, especially in the home, which is under consideration here. Almighty God established the respective and differing roles between men and women way back in the Garden of Eden.

Wife

In an effort to not be overly repetitious, please note the foregoing information that was provided in greater detail respecting the submission of wives to their own husbands (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9; Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:13-15; 1 Peter 3:1). Remember also that God assigned varying roles to husbands and wives, and that wives' special area of participation in the home makes them queens of their respective domestic dominions (Titus 2:5; Genesis 18:6; Proverbs 31:13-27).

As a wife, a woman has a special relationship and partnership with her husband. She completes him. "And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him **a helper comparable to him**'" (Genesis 2:18). Furthermore, God designed the marital relationship for the husband and his wife to enjoy a physical as well as a sexual intimacy (Genesis 2:24-25; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5). In addition, wives ought to love (Titus 2:4), respect (Ephesians 5:33), obey (1 Corinthians 7:10) and remain with their own husbands for life (Romans 7:2-3).

Husband and wife together comprise a team, of which God decreed that the husband is the team captain, and therefore answerable and accountable as head of the home to God. A husband has in his wife a friend, a confident, a helper and a fellow life's traveler on whom he can rely and depend. Of course, he should be all of that to his wife, too.

Mother

When children enter the home, the wife's responsibilities and sphere of influence increase greatly. God has placed on the mother the task of bringing offspring to the marriage into this world (1 Timothy 2:15; 5:14) and being the primary nurturer of those children (Titus 2:4). The mother is faithful to her charge of parenting her children (2 Timothy 1:5). Along with the father of the children, the wife ought to instruct the children in the ways of God (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 32:46; 2 Timothy 3:15). Mother will participate in and administer to her children the physical necessities of life (2 Corinthians 12:14; 1 Timothy 5:8). The home's mother is to "manage the house" (1 Timothy 5:14). That means that she is to rule the household, be the master of the house or "to manage family affairs" (*Wuest's*).

Yet, there is a tenderness not usually as typical of fathers with which mothers tend to their children. The apostle Paul recognized that trait and borrowed it to portray the tenderness with which he worked with the Gospel among the Thessalonians. "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7). Motherhood also is charged with setting the holiness of the home (Titus 2:3). The place of mothers in the home and in society is so important that "the hand that rocks the world rules the world." She begins molding a little baby, and eventually she presents to the world a man or a woman, but she begins early and persists daily (Proverbs 22:6). Mothers are mothers for life, reaching beyond their children to their grandchildren, too (2 Timothy 1:5). Truly, a mother's works is never done!

Works Cited

Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1940-55. Copyrights renewed 1968-73 by Jeannette I. Wuest.

Priority

The family or the home is too crucial to the wellbeing of society, of a nation and of the Lord's church to think too lightly of it. Hence, the home must be a priority in our lives. Yet, compared with our allegiance to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, faithful Christians must cherish loyalty to the Godhead, things spiritual and the church over and before our loyalty to our homes. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39). "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Part 5: Background

Chapter 1: God

Two primary factors are true about the Godhead. (1) The Bible distinctly teaches that the Godhead is made up of three divine persons. (2) The Bible teaches with equal certainty that the Godhead possesses precise (therefore predictable) divine characteristics. The very nature of God is revealed by the Bible.

The word Godhead is translated from words derived from the Greek, “*Theos*,” which simply means “divinity.” Romans 1:20 uses the word Godhead and refers to evidences apparent in the physical universe that testify of the divine nature of the Creator. The power responsible for creation is of incomprehensible magnitude and contrary to natural law, so much so it can only be the product of Divinity.

Acts 17:29 records the word “Godhead” in the speech of the apostle Paul before Greeks at Athens. There, the word conveys the idea of the Deity, the one true God. Paul also wrote to the Colossians of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9). In that epistle, the apostle referred to the divine essence, the personality of Deity, the state of being God or Divine. None of the citations disclose the number of persons in the Godhead nor the precise nature of Divinity; this information elsewhere found throughout the Bible.

Attributes

The heavenly Father is attributed with characteristics of a person. He sends physical and spiritual blessings (Matthew 5:45; Ephesians 1:3). The Father possesses the quality of morality (Matthew 5:48). He is capable of rewarding (Matthew 6:1, 4). Our Father can see (observe, discern, know) (Matthew 6:6, 8, 18; Luke 12:30). He forgives (Matthew 6:15) and can hide things (Matthew 11:25). The Father can be known as a person is known (Matthew 11:26-27); He has a will or volition (Matthew 12:50; Luke 11:2; John 5:30). God the Father also possesses a kingdom (Matthew 13:43), has glory (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; John 1:14), receives prayers (Matthew 26:39, 42, 53; Luke 11:2; 23:34, 46; John 11:41; 12:28), is merciful (Luke 6:36), delivers things (Luke 10:22), makes appointments (Luke 22:29), receives spirits (Luke 23:46) and makes promises (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

He is referred to as possessing a bosom (John 1:18), loves (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:23; 16:27), is to be worshipped (John 4:23), works or does things (John 5:17, 19, 20, 37), has life (John 5:26), gives (John 6:32, 37; 12:49; 18:11), teaches (John 8:28) and is pictured as possessing a hand (John 10:29). The Father has a Son and adopted sons as well (Matthew 8:29; Luke 1:32; Luke 4:41; Luke 22:70; John 3:16; 10:36; Acts 3:13; Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 6:18; 11:31; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:3; 3:14; Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 1:5; 1 Peter 1:3; 2 John 1:3; Revelation 1:6; 3:5). He gave Jesus the words he spoke (John 12:50; 15:15), possesses things (John 16:15) and puts things (Acts 1:7). All this confirms the personality of the Father.

Relationship to Man

The God of the Bible is not the god of denominationalism! Christians must recognize the distinctiveness of the Godhead; nothing should be allowed to cloud one’s knowledge of the one true God (Ephesians 4:4-6). Denominationalism is strikingly similar to the idolatry with which the heathen and the children of God have been beset throughout human history. God views *idolatry* as *spiritual adultery* (Jeremiah 3:2, 6; Judges 2:17; Ezekiel 6:9), and doubtless views denominationalism no differently. Mankind was never intended to be the consumer of a religious shopping center; the church, god, beliefs, salvation, worship, etc. of one’s choice were never optional facets of God-given religion. There is only one God by whom “we live and move and have our being” and who “will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:28, 31).

The fourth word in the Bible is “God” (Genesis 1:1). From that point forward throughout the Bible one learns specifics about God. The Bible reveals how God views disobedience and obedience. God promises blessings for His faithful followers and punishment for those who disobey Him. God has not left mankind without evidence of Himself both as Creator/Master Designer through the created universe (Romans 1:20)

as well as through His instruction book – the Bible. God is the ultimate Benefactor of humanity in general and especially for those who are His faithful spiritual children.

The New Testament church is divine in Godhead. In other words, the Lord's church will believe what the Bible teaches concerning God, His Word and eternity. The Bible consistently teaches the same truths about God. Hence, the Godhead possesses precise (therefore predictable) divine characteristics.

The character of the Godhead is changeless (Hebrews 13:8). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Summarized, the nature of God includes these divine traits. The Godhead is infinitely righteous or just (Psalm 145:17), but is tempered with boundless love and mercy (Ephesians 2:4-5; Romans 5:8), which results in matchless grace (Titus 2:11). Though loving, God is yet impartial (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11), wrathful and prepared to punish disobedient souls (Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6). There is a heaven into which all the faithful will one day be ushered (Matthew 25:34, 46), as well as a hell to which the unrighteous will be condemned (Matthew 24:41, 46). The Godhead has given man His Will (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3), in which He expects us to abide (Matthew 7:21-23) and by which all humanity will be judged (Revelation 20:12-15).

Godhead – Three Beings

In view of the multitude of passages addressing a plurality of persons in the Godhead, it is truly remarkable that anyone could doubt it. For instance, several passages place the Father in heaven while Jesus Christ was on earth (Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9, 14, 26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 23:9; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 11:2); Jesus, during his earthly ministry, said, "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before **My Father who is in heaven**. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before **My Father who is in heaven**" (Matthew 10:32-33).

Scripture also notes that more than one person of the Godhead participated in creation (Eph. 3:9). "And *God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...*" (Genesis 1:26). Still other Scriptures mention all three persons of the Godhead in a single breath or stroke of the pen (Luke 1:35; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:33; 10:38; Romans 15:16, 30; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 5:7). "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Here, not only the plurality of persons in the Godhead is proved by Scripture, but the number also (three persons).

Additionally, several other passages mention the Father or the son and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13; Romans 15:30; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Ephesians 2:22). Couple with these more passages in which the Father and the Son are mentioned together (Mark 5:7; John 5:18, 22-23; 6:46; 10:32; 11:41; 12:26, 28; 13:1, 3; 14:21, 23, 28, 31; 15:1; 16:10, 28; 20:17; Romans 1:7; 15:6; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2-3; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 6:23; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2-3; 2:2; 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:11, 13; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2; 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; 1 Peter 1:2-3; 2 Peter 1:17; 1 John 1:3; 2:1, 3; Jude 1:1; Revelation 3:5). Such verses attest the plurality of persons in the Godhead.

The Father raises the dead, including Jesus Christ (John 5:21; Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:33; Romans 6:4; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:15; Colossians.. 2:12). This, too, affirms the plurality of persons in the Godhead. A plural Godhead is further evident by passages that declare the Father sent Christ (John 5:36-37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 29, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 13:3; 17:3, 25; 20:21; Romans.. 8:3; Galatians. 4:4; 1 John 4:9).

Passages which teach Jesus is not the lone person of the Godhead are numerous (Matt. 27:46; John 8:16, 18, 28, 29, 38, 54; 14:1, 28; 16:23, 27, 32; 17:3; 20:17; Acts 2:33; 7:55; 10:38, 40; Romans 8:17, 34; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 15:24, 28; Ephesians 4:4-6; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 3:22; 2 John 9-11). The Bible, matter-of-factly, overwhelmingly acknowledges three heavenly personalities in the Godhead.

The unity noted in Scripture among the persons of the Godhead does not do away with their plural number. This is obvious when one considers that Christians are one in God and God in Christians, yet our personality under these conditions is not questioned (John 14:20; 17:11, 21-24; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Revelation

3:21). Finally, the plural number of persons in the Godhead can be seen in that prayer is to be made to the Father through Christ (Matthew 27:46; John 15:16; Romans 1:8; 7:25; Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17).

The Lord's church teaches that the Godhead is made up of three divine persons who possess the same divine traits. Though the word "Trinity" does not appear in the English Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is taught throughout the Word of God.

The Father

The person of the Godhead referred to as the Father is acclaimed to be God (Deity) in Scripture; He is called "God the Father" (John 6:27, 45; Galatians 1:1, 3; Ephesians 1:17; 6:23; Philippians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:17; 2 John 1:3; Jude 1:1).

Chapter 2: Christ

The Pre-Incarnate Jesus Christ

Let's examine the pre-incarnate of the preexistence of Jesus Christ. The preexistence of Jesus Christ, as it is usually described, has to do with the one we know as Jesus Christ before His incarnation (i.e., when He took fleshly, bodily form through the Virgin Birth). Technically, though, the Second Person of the Godhead had not adopted the roles of Jesus Christ yet in His pre-incarnate state.

There was no Jesus, no Messiah, no Christ, no Son of God, no Only Begotten, before the reign of Augustus Caesar. The relation that was before the Christian era, was not that of a son and a father, terms which always imply disparity; but it was that expressed by John in the sentence under consideration [John 1:1]. The relation was that of God and the "word of God." This phraseology unfolds a relation quite different from that of a father and son – a relation perfectly intimate, equal, and glorious. (Alexander Campbell qtd. in Mosher 313)

The preexistence of Jesus Christ is axiomatic given His participation with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the creation of the universe and all that is in it (Genesis 1:26-27; Colossians 1:15-17). The preexistence or the pre-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ is also definitively taught in Scripture. "Any proper study of Jesus Christ must include not only His earthly span of some 33 years, but His eternal existence as well. The Bible plainly teaches that the Savior had an eternal existence prior to His earthly incarnation" (Jackson 1).

The Old Testament Teaches the Pre-Incarnation of Christ

Old Testament Scripture teaches the preexistence or pre-incarnate nature of the member of the Godhead best known to us as Jesus Christ. The very **creation** in which the second member of the Godhead participated along with the Father and the Holy Spirit shows our Lord's preexistence. The Godhead created the world (Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 1:20). Further, Jesus Christ had an instrumental part within the Godhead in the creation of the world (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:15-17; John 1:1-3).

Old Testament prophecy intimates the preexistence of Jesus Christ. One of the most obvious prophecies that implies the pre-incarnate state of Jesus Christ is **Micah 5:2** – the virgin birth of eternal God into fleshly form.

When Micah prophesied concerning the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, he was careful to stress that Christ's goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. (Mic. 5:2). It is evident from the context that the Lord's eternal goings forth are put in contrast to His coming forth as a child in Bethlehem of Judea. It would be difficult to imagine the prophet's intention in using such terminology if they mean anything less than the eternal pre-existence of Christ. (Vestal 129)

One learns by comparison of Old and New Testament passages that **Daniel 7:13-14** pertains to the Virgin Birth, the means by which God came to dwell on earth (cf. Isaiah 7:14; John 1:1-3, 14; Galatians 4:4); therefore, Daniel 7:13-14 implies the preexistence of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter cites the prophets respecting the preexistence or pre-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:10-11). "The Spirit of Christ having been in the prophets, it follows that Christ existed during the times of the prophets, and this verse thus becomes an important text in support of the deity and pre-existence of the Lord Jesus" (Woods).

The New Testament Teaches the Pre-Incarnation of Christ

New Testament Scripture teaches the preexistence or pre-incarnate nature of the member of the Godhead best known to us as Jesus Christ. **Jesus Christ Himself** affirmed His own preexistence or pre-incarnate nature. An article in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE)* quickly amasses

biblical evidence from several passages in which Jesus Christ claims to have had a preexistent or pre-incarnate state.

That He was of higher than earthly origin and nature, He repeatedly asserts. “Ye are from beneath,” he says to the Jews (8:23), “I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (compare 17:16). Therefore, He taught that He, the Son of Man, had “descended out of heaven” (3:13), where was His true abode. This carried with it, of course, an assertion of pre-existence; and this pre-existence is explicitly affirmed: “What then,” He asks, “if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before?” (6:62). **It is not merely pre-existence, however, but eternal pre-existence which He claims for Himself:** “And now, Father,” He prays (17:5), “glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (compare verse 24); and again, as the most impressive language possible, He declares (8:58 the King James Version): “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am,” where He claims for Himself the timeless present of eternity as His mode of existence. In the former of these two last cited passages, the character of His pre-existent life is intimated; in it He shared the Father’s glory from all eternity (“before the world was”); He stood by the Father’s side as a companion in His glory. (“Person of Christ” emphasis added)

Wayne Jackson emphasizes some occasions on which Jesus claimed for himself a preexistent (i.e. pre-fleshly) state. “The Master asserted His heavenly origin when in debate with the Jews He said, ‘Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world’ (John 8:23). And shortly before His death, He could pray, ‘Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was’ (John 17:5). (Jackson 2). Roy H. Lanier, Sr. in his book, *The Timeless Trinity for the Ceaseless Centuries*, comments on John 16:28; compare Galatians 4:4. “Just as surely as his leaving the world and going to the Father means that he was first in the world before going back to the Father, so his coming from the Father to come into the world means that he existed with the Father in heaven before he came to the world by birth of Mary in Bethlehem” (Lanier qtd. in Mosher 311).

The **apostle John** distinctly taught the preexistence or pre-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ. Most Bible students suppose that the Gospel According to John is the lone historian of the Gospel records that treats the preexistence of Jesus Christ: “John is the only one of the gospels that gives us insight into Jesus’ pre-existence” (Winkler 32); “John’s Gospel teaches the pre-existence of Christ” (“Christology”). John’s special use of the Greek word, “*Logos*,” teaches the pre-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ, John 1:1-3, 14.

In the description of the incarnation given by the evangelist John there appears the term “*Logos*” in a sense new to the Scriptures, and among New-Testament writers peculiar to him. Some have maintained that it supplies an indubitable [unquestionable] ascription of personal existence to the Word, in some sense distinct from the personal existence of the supreme Father; that this Word is the *Logos* of the New Testament; and, consequently, that the phrase is a proof of a belief among the ancient Jews in the pre-existence, the personal operations, and the deity of the Messiah, “the Word who became flesh, and fixed his tabernacle among us” (“Incarnation”)

...the repeated “with God” (verses 1, 2) compels us to distinguish the *Logos* from God; the words “became flesh” (verse 14) cannot be said of an attribute of God; and the Baptist’s testimony, verse 15, in direct connection with this introduction (compare also such sayings of Christ as in chapters 8:58; 17:5), show clearly that John attributes personal pre-existence to the *Logos*. Similarly, every attempt to explain away this profound sense of *Logos* is inadequate, and most are ungrammatical. (“*Logos*”)

Wayne Jackson forcefully makes the point respecting the relationship between John’s use of “*Logos*” and the preexistence of Jesus Christ.

There is an interesting contrast between the eternal existence of the LOGOS and the incarnate sojourn of the Son of God. "In the beginning was (a verb of continual timeless existence) the Word." Yet, "the Word became (a verb denoting the commencement of His human existence in time) flesh." In similar fashion, Christ Himself said, "Before Abraham was born (definite origin), I am (always existing)." (John 8:58). Thus, the LOGOS had a prehuman, timeless existence. (Jackson 1)

The apostle John recorded the words of John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus, which affirmation implies the preexistence of our Lord, John 1:15. "**After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me**" (McGarvey) As a man John was six months older than Jesus, but Jesus was the eternal Word. The Baptist therefore asserts here the preexistence of our Lord. In 1 John 1:2, the apostle avowed both the pre-incarnation and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. "This life had been with the Father prior to the incarnation and is thus eternal. Here is the first of four stages indicated in the sacred writings regarding the second person of the Godhead and points irresistibly to his deity: (1) his pre-existence in eternity as the Word prior to creation" (Woods).

Each passage where Jesus Christ is **called God** equates to Him the same eternity as the other two members of the Godhead, and since Jesus Christ took a bodily form, refer to His preexistence or pre-incarnate nature (John 20:28; Acts 20:28). The **apostle Paul** repeatedly taught the preexistence or pre-incarnate state of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul taught that Jesus Christ, prior to his incarnation, had an earthly role. "And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). "1 Cor 10:9 I have already supposed, in the note at 1 Cor 10:4, that Christ is intended by the spiritual rock that followed them: and that it was he, not the rock, that did follow or accompany the Israelites in the wilderness. This was the angel of God's presence who was with the church in the wilderness, to whom our fathers would not obey, as Stephen says, Acts 7:38 and 39" (Clarke). "1 Cor 10:4 The literal sense of that Rock was Christ is no more to be pressed than is the literal sense of "I am the true vine" (John 15:1). The was, rather than is, may, however, point to Christ's pre-existence (cf. 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 4:4)" (*Wycliffe*). "The rock to which Paul referred here was clearly stated: 'The rock was Christ.' The miracle of Moses' bringing forth water from the rock in the wilderness (Exo. 17:5ff) provided literal water for Israel; but much more than that is in evidence here. As Marsh said, 'The rock was Christ, not 'is' or 'is a type of'...and this is a clear statement of the pre-existence of Christ'" (Paul W. Marsh qtd. in Coffman on 1 Corinthians 10:4). "The view preferred here is that Paul meant 'Christ,' the same being another reference to his pre-existence, and indicating that our Lord's pre-incarnation activity included that of shepherding the chosen people in the wilderness" (Coffman on 1 Corinthians 10:9).

Consider **2 Corinthians 8:9**.

By the Spirit, Paul was led to write concerning Christ, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor..." (II Cor. 8:9). If Jesus did not preexist in grandeur and glory before His birth, when was He rich? Certainly not while on earth! He was born in a borrowed stable, rowed the Sea of Galilee in a borrowed boat, fed the multitudes with borrowed food, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed beast, ate His last meal in a borrowed room and finally was buried in a borrowed tomb. He once announced, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). (Jackson 2)

In addition, no passage more directly or more dramatically attests to the preexistence or pre-incarnate state of Jesus Christ than **Philippians 2:5-11**.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven,

and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11).

In this context, with one majestic sweep of his pen, Paul embraces Christ's 1. **Preexistence** (equality with God), 2. **Incarnation** (made in the likeness of men), 3. **Coronation** (God highly exalted Him). ... Similarly, the Hebrew writer notes: 1. He made the worlds – indicating His pre-existence. 2. He made purification of sins having been sent in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin (Rom 8:3) – this involves the incarnation. 3. He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:2,3). (Jackson 2 emphasis added)

How does the pre-incarnate role of Jesus Christ relate to other roles correctly ascribed to Jesus Christ? What was the pre-incarnate role of the member of the Godhead that we best know as Jesus Christ? Jesus Christ participated in the creation (Genesis 1:26-27; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:2-3). Jesus Christ interacted with the Israelites in the wilderness wandering (1 Corinthians 10:4, 9). “Christ is represented in the passages by Paul and John as pre-existent before coming to the earth, and presiding over the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness. ... Here he designates him as the one who accompanied Israel in the cloud through the wilderness, and gave them deliverances when they needed” (Lipscomb and Shepherd). “It is possible that Paul is saying that Christ was present with His people all along the wilderness journey and that He was sustaining them spiritually by every word that proceeded out of His mouth for their direction, protection, and encouragement” (Applebury 183).

Christ's Role after the Incarnation

What was the role of Jesus Christ after His incarnation? Jesus came “to seek and save” the “lost” (Luke 19:10). This was accomplished through His ministry, death on the cross, resurrection and Ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Mark 16:19). Jesus Christ became the world's Savior (1 John 4:14).

Christ's Role after the Ascension

What is the role of Jesus Christ since His Ascension back to heaven? Jesus Christ is Mediator and Intercessor (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25). Jesus Christ will come again to retrieve the saved (John 14:3). Jesus will come again to punish disobedient souls (Hebrews 10:29-30; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Jesus will judge all humanity of all time (John 5:28-29).

Summary

Flavil Nichols concisely summarizes the preexistence of Jesus Christ. “From all eternity in the direction of the past, Jesus Himself, in His pre-fleshly state, not only was ‘in the form of’ Deity (Phil 2:6), was ‘with’ Deity [the Father and the Holy Spirit], but He also (Himself) ‘was’ Deity (John 1:1-3). He had ‘glory’ with the Father ‘before the world was’ (John 17:5)-which He surrendered to be our Savior!” (25). More extensively stated, it is reasonable to deduce from Scripture the preexistence or pre-incarnate nature of Jesus Christ (though we do not subscribe to a human spirit of Christ *in addition to* his divine spirit per the context of the citation).

1. Christ is represented as his Father's messenger, or angel, being distinct from his Father, sent by his Father, long before his incarnation... The appearances of Christ to the patriarchs are described like the appearance of an angel, or man really distinct from God; yet one in whom God, or Jehovah, had a peculiar indwelling, or with whom the divine nature had a personal union. **2. Christ, when he came into the world, is said, in several passages of Scripture, to have divested himself of some glory which he had before his incarnation.** ... (John 17:4,5; 2 Cor 8:9). ... Nor can it be said of Christ, as man, that he was rich, if he were never in a richer state before than while he was on earth. 3. ... that the soul of Jesus Christ should pre-exist, that it might have an **opportunity to give its previous actual consent to the great and painful undertaking of making atonement for man's sins.** ... The covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son is therefore

represented as being made before the foundation of the world. (“Pre-Existence of Jesus Christ” emphasis added)

The Jewish people, who for centuries were the custodians of Sacred Scripture and before that the beneficiaries of Patriarchal oral instruction, were thoroughly convinced about the preexistence of the Christ: “...The Jews uniformly maintained the pre-existence of the Messiah” (“Pre-Existence of Jesus Christ”). Everything carefully evaluated, we can be assured from the Bible of the preexistence of Jesus Christ and His respective roles then and since: “Any view which fails to include the Divine preexistence of Mary’s Son is certainly erroneous” (Jackson 2).

The first time Jesus Christ came to this earth, “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). However, upon the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, our Lord will retrieve the saved or obedient and punish the disobedient (Hebrews 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). What will Jesus do with you upon his return (Mark 16:16; 1 John 1:9)?

Works Cited

- Applebury, T.R. *Studies in First Corinthians*. CD-ROM. Joplin: College P., 1963.
- “Christology.” *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2000.
- Clarke, Adam. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.
- Coffman, James Burton. *James Burton Coffman Bible Study Library*. CD-ROM. Abilene: ACU P., 1989.
- “Incarnation.” *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2000.
- Jackson, Wayne. “The Pre-Existence and Birth of Jesus.” *Spiritual Sword*. 1.3. (1970): 1-4.
- Lipscomb, David. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: First Corinthians*. J.W. Shepherd, ed. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1987. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- “Logos.” *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2000.
- McGarvey, J.W. and Philip Y. Pendleton. *Four-Fold Gospel*. Cincinnati: Standard, 1914. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2004.
- Mosher, Keith. “The Pre-Existence of Jesus.” *Jesus Christ: The Gift of God’s Grace and the Object of Man’s Faith*. Curtis A. Cates, ed. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1992. 310-317.
- Nichols, Flavil H. “For He Himself Knew What Was in Man.” CD-ROM. *Spiritual Sword*. 18.3 (1987): 25-26.
- “Person of Christ.” *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE)*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.
- “Pre-Existence of Jesus Christ.” *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2000.
- Vestal, Mike. “The Triune Nature of God.” *The Godhead: A Study of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. CD-ROM. Southaven: Southaven Church of Christ, 1998. 119-139.
- Winkler, Daniel. “The Life of Christ.” CD-ROM. *Spiritual Sword*. 30.4 (1999): 29–33.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Peter, John and Jude*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1991. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. CD-ROM Chicago: Moody P., 1962.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

The incarnation (or taking a fleshly body) of Jesus Christ is essential and foundational to Christianity; the incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot be overemphasized. Without the substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate God on Calvary’s cross, there could be no forgiveness of sins. Without the resurrection from the dead of incarnate God, death would not have been vanquished so we also may resurrect from the dead someday. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is so vital to Christianity that it is a chief test of fellowship!

Incarnation Defined

First, we must define what we mean by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The English word “incarnation” does not appear in our translations. “Neither the noun ‘incarnation’ nor the adjective ‘incarnate’ is biblical, but the Gk. equivalent of Lat. *in carne*, ‘in flesh’ is found in some important NT statements about the person and work of Jesus Christ” (*New Bible Dictionary*). “INCARNATION A theological term for the coming of God’s Son into the world as a human being. The term itself is not used in the Bible, but it is based on clear references in the New Testament to Jesus as a person ‘in the flesh’ (Rom 8:3; Eph 2:15; Col 1:22)” (*Nelson’s*).

The word “incarnation” summarizes or represents in short an indisputable Bible doctrine.

That very person who was in the beginning – who was with God – and who was God, John 1:1, in the fullness of time became flesh – became incarnated by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin. Allowing this apostle to have written by divine inspiration, is not this verse [John 1:14], taken in connection with John 1:1, an absolute and incontestable proof of the proper and eternal Godhead of Christ Jesus? (Clarke)

The Virgin Birth was the means by which the incarnation of Jesus Christ came about (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:31-35; 2:11; Galatians 4:4; cf. Genesis 3:15).

Jesus was born “according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3), in order that “through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death” (Heb. 2:14); and further, that he might be “made like unto his brethren” so as to be a merciful and faithful high priest (Heb. 2:17). The incarnation was necessary in order for Jesus Christ to accomplish these purposes. The virgin birth was necessary in order for him to become flesh. (Highers 22)

“Absolutely essential to the Christian system is the Incarnation of Christ – and, the virgin birth is the *how* and the *when* of the Incarnation” (Cates 301). John 1:1, 14 makes it clear that “the Word became flesh” “by being born in Bethlehem of the Virgin Mary” (McGarvey and Pendleton). Briefly, the incarnation pertains to God coming to earth in bodily form (i.e., with a literal body, Hebrews 10:5).

Cardinal Doctrine of Christianity

The taking of a fleshly body by the Second Person of the Godhead is essential and foundational to Christianity; the incarnation of Jesus Christ cannot be overstressed. “The doctrine of the incarnation is fundamental to Christianity, and is the basis upon which the entire fabric of revealed religion rests. It is presented to our faith from the plane of the miraculous, and is to be considered as the one all-comprehensive miracle of Christianity” (*McClintock and Strong*).

Incarnation Implies Preexistence

The subject of the incarnation of Jesus Christ necessitates the preexistence of Jesus Christ. “Incarnation of the Savior. God manifested in the flesh. **Jesus didn’t begin His life in Bethlehem. He was there when Bethlehem’s site was created** (John 1:1-14). He was eternally God and equally God. John describes his incarnation in four words where Luke used hundreds (Heb. 5:7-8). ‘Who in the days of his flesh’” (Clark, “Members” 262). “Christ was the Word in His pre-existent state, not the Son until the incarnation: Luke 1:35; John 1:1...” (Mosher 312).

Both God and Man

We hasten to acknowledge that Jesus Christ, though incarnate, retained His full Deity. Thomas acknowledged the humanity and Deity of the resurrected Lord (John 20:27-28). The apostle Paul affirmed the simultaneous humanity and Deity of Jesus Christ (Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 2:9).

Incarnation Taught in Both Testaments

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the subject of Scripture in both testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament predicted the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul affirmed that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was “promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures” as pertaining to “the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:2-4). Genesis 3:15 is the very first intimation of the then future incarnation of Jesus Christ. “The first announcement of the divine incarnation was given not while Adam and Eve remained in a state of innocency, but after they had rebelled against their Maker” (Pink). God’s promise to Abraham about the blessing upon all humanity through a descendant of Abraham was found to be further intimation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Genesis 12:3; Acts 3:22-26). The inspired prophecy of Moses respecting another Prophet/Lawgiver (of the New Testament) coming from among the Israelites was found to be further intimation of the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Acts 3:22-26). Prominent Old Testament passages about the Virgin Birth of the “Mighty God” foretell the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6). “When one deals with the virgin birth of our Lord, he deals with the incarnation of Jesus” (Clark, “Virgin Birth” 188). Old Testament prophecy that the Being “from everlasting” who would “be Ruler in Israel” and come from Bethlehem speaks to the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Micah 5:2).

In the OT prophecies, which represent Christ as a person both human and divine, He is set forth in “the seed” of the woman, a descendant of Abraham, of Judah, and of David, “a man of sorrows.” But He is also called “the Mighty God,” “the Eternal Father,” “the Son of God,” “the Lord [Jehovah] our righteousness.” Although these familiar Scriptures do not formally state the doctrine of the incarnation, they logically suggest or lead up to it. (*New Unger’s*)

The New Testament is filled with doctrinal statements about the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Although the doctrine does not rest for its authority upon isolated proof texts, but rather upon the Scripture revelation as a whole, still there are certain utterances of great weight in which the truth is distinctly, and we may say even formally, stated (see John 1:1-14, cf. 1 John 1:1-3; 4:2-3; Rom 1:2-5; Phil 2:6-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14). The only way in which the force of these teachings can be set aside or lessened is by proving lack of authority on the part of the Scriptures. (*New Unger’s*)

John 1:1 and 14 are unexcelled in reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. “Even the most casual of readers must be impressed with the logical and verbal connection between verse 1 and verse 14 of this remarkable chapter. The Word *was* (evermore existed) and *became* flesh (at a specific point in time) and dwelt among men” (Woods). Philippians 2:7-8 avows that Jesus Christ was “in the likeness of men” and “in appearance as a man.” The “Son of man” passages affirm the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Dan. 7:13; Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 40; 16:27-28; 17:9, 12; 19:28; 20:18; 24:27, 30; 25:31-46; 26:24, 64; Mark 10:45; 14:61-62; Luke 9:43-44; 19:10; John 1:51; 3:13-14; 6:27, 53; 12:23; Acts 7:56; Revelation 1:13; 14:14). Scripture is riddled with passages respecting the incarnation of Christ so that hardly any other doctrine has more biblical support (as evident from citations variously organized herein).

Incarnation Indisputable

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is an indisputable fact. The apostle Paul affirmed that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was “without controversy” (1 Timothy 3:16). “Paul emphasizes that there is no dispute about the truth which he is about to state. It is ‘without controversy.’ He continued by saying, ‘Great is the Mystery.’ The truth about to be stated **had been** a great mystery, but is not at this time a mystery at all” (Cook 116).

Even the divinely given names of Mary’s child indicate the incarnation of Jesus Christ. “The name Jesus was given to emphasize salvation (save His people from their sins), and the name Emmanuel was given to emphasize incarnation (God with us)” (Webster 478).

Heresy to Deny Incarnation

Denial of the incarnation of Jesus Christ is heresy! Ralph Gilmore correctly assessed Scripture when he wrote that "...the **doctrine** of the incarnation of Jesus is a matter that presents a test of fellowship" (207). "The apostolic writers clearly see that both the deity and the manhood of Jesus are fundamental to his saving work. ... We should, therefore, expect the NT to treat any denial that Jesus Christ was both truly divine and truly human as a damning heresy, destructive of the gospel; and so it does" (*New Bible Dictionary*). Anyone denying "that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh... is that spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7). Jesus Christ Himself plainly proclaimed that He came bodily (Luke 24:39). The apostle Paul affirmed that mankind knew Jesus Christ "according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 5:16). The apostle John affirmed that he and others had "looked upon" and "handled" the flesh of Jesus Christ, which also he preached (1 John 1:1-3).

Purposes of the Incarnation

The purposes of the incarnation of Jesus Christ are many. The incarnation of Jesus Christ permitted God to experience the temptations that humans face (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). "The mystery of the Incarnation would have been needless and fruitless, had His Humanity not been subject to all its right and ordinary conditions" (*Edersheim*).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ enabled mankind to have a perfect High Priest between humanity and God (Hebrews 2:17). The incarnation of Jesus Christ provided a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12). Jesus Christ was "put to death in the flesh" and "suffered in the flesh" (1 Peter 3:18; 4:1). Humanity is "reconciled in the body of his flesh through death" (Colossians 1:21-22; cf. Ephesians 2:15-16).

The incarnation of Jesus Christ was God's special means of seeking and saving the lost (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 9:26, 28; 1 John 3:5). The power of death over humanity was destroyed through the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His subsequent resurrection from the grave (2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14-15). The incarnation of Jesus Christ was God's means to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Mankind has the opportunity to enjoy an 'abundant life' through the incarnation of Jesus Christ (John 10:10). The incarnation of Jesus Christ was victorious over the flesh, whereas the rest of humanity faltered in the flesh (Romans 8:3).

With Edersheim one must wholeheartedly exclaim: "The Incarnation of Christ was the link which bound earth to heaven..." "The incarnation was the ultimate act of communication. It testifies to the extent of God's love as he reached out to his creation. He not only knew his audience, he became one with them" (Adcox 5). Imagine the awesomeness of the incarnation of Jesus Christ!

The incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest miracle of all human history. That God Almighty, who made this world and made man, would condescend to the level of man, that the Son of God would take upon himself the form of man and become a servant and live among men, that he would be born of woman, whom he created, that he would subject himself to his own law and then live accordingly, are truly remarkable things to consider. (Laws 2)

God purchased His church through the blood of Jesus Christ (Acts 20:28). Through the "washing of regeneration" (baptism) we can come in contact with the saving blood of Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; Revelation 1:5). That saving blood is also available to Christians (1 John 1:7-10).

Works Cited

- Adcox, Jimmy. "Teaching on Preaching." *Glory to God Through Christian Living and Through Christian Living*. Winford Claiborne, ed. CD-ROM. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman College, 1989. 1-9.
- Cates, Curtis A. "Was the Virgin Birth of Christ Necessary for Man's Salvation?" *The Bible None Like It*. Curtis A. Cates, ed. CD-ROM. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1989. 301-315.

- Clark, J. Winfred. "Members Must Be Prepared." *Expositions of the Expositor*. vol. 1. Michael R. McDaniel, ed. CD-ROM. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 2001. 259-263.
- Clark, Winfred. "The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ." *Major Lessons from the Major Prophets*. B.J. Clarke, ed. CD-ROM. Southaven: Southaven Church of Christ, 1995. 177-189.
- Clarke, Adam. *Adam Clarke's Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.
- Cook, Kenneth. "The Church and the Mystery of Godliness." *The Epistles of I and II Timothy and Titus*. Curtis A. Cates, ed. CD-ROM. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1986. 113-120.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Four Group, n.d.
- Gilmore, Ralph. "Is the Restoration Movement Complete?" *Family, Church and Society Restoration and Renewal*. David L. Lipe, ed. Henderson: Freed-Hardeman University, 1995. 201-210.
- Highers, Alan. "Why I Believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus." *Spiritual Sword* 23.1 (1991): 20-22.
- Laws, Jim. "The Role and Purpose of Miracles." *Spiritual Sword* 25.1 (1993): 2-4.
- McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2000.
- McGarvey, J.W. and Philip Y. Pendleton. *The Four-Fold Gospel*. Cincinnati: Standard, 1914. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2004.
- Mosher, Keith A., Sr. "The Pre-existence of Christ." *Jesus Christ, The Gift of God's Grace and the Object of Man's Faith*. Curtis A. Cates, ed. CD-ROM. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 1992. 310-317.
- Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.
- New Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1962.
- New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.
- Pink, Arthur W. *The Life of David*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four, n.d.
- Webster, Wade. "Isaac and Christ." *The Book of Genesis*. Curtis A. Cates, ed. CD-ROM. Memphis: Memphis School of Preaching, 2001. 475-490.
- Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.

The Deity of Christ

The Bible also teaches that Jesus Christ is God (Matthew 1:23; 1 Timothy 3:16). Not only is there a plural number of persons in the Godhead, namely three, but all are *divine persons*.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. (Colossians 2:8-10)

Closely associated with the pre-incarnation or preexistence of Jesus Christ is the deity of Christ. The following observations prove that Jesus Christ is divine or possesses the nature, character and attributes of God, and that He is, therefore, God or Deity.

The Bible is the final, absolute, complete, divinely inspired and inerrant Word of God. As such, the Bible is the standard for the Christian by which he can discern between mortal and immortal or humanity and deity. The Bible's testimony is sufficient to prove to every honest student of the Bible the deity of Jesus Christ. The following study will reinforce the confidence of those who already admit the deity of Jesus. In addition, anyone who may be unsure or have reservations, this section lesson will embolden one's confidence respecting the deity of Jesus Christ. We are aware that since some religions deny the deity of Jesus Christ (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses), it is possible for some present today to be confused about the matter.

A statement such as "Jesus is God" may be a difficult and a confusing declaration for some people. The phraseology or terms may be unfamiliar even to persons who readily acknowledge the deity of Jesus. However, the word "God" is equivalent to the word "deity." Jesus Christ is one of three members of the Godhead, hence, God-the-Son (cf. God-the-Father and God-the-Holy Spirit, Matthew 28:18-20; 3:16-17; Ephesians 4:4-6). Hence, a word not appearing in our English translations (though not an anti-biblical reference), "trinity," commonly refers three persons in one Godhead.

Fulfilled Prophecies Prove the Deity of Christ

Prophecies and fulfillment of prophecies concerning the Messiah prove that Jesus Christ is God or Deity. Prophecy foretold that God (“The Mighty God”) would appear as the Messiah through the lineage of King David (Isaiah 9:6-7). The Gospel records confirm the fulfillment of such prophecies and apply them to Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:31-33). The Isaiah 9:6-7 prophecy occurred about 700 years before its fulfillment in the first century A.D.

The Pre-incarnate Existence of Christ Proves His Deity

The pre-fleshly existence of Jesus Christ proves Jesus Christ is God or Deity. Jesus claimed to have existed before the time of Abraham (John 8:58). Furthermore, Jesus existed before creation, participated in creation and maintains the created universe (Colossians 1:14-17; John 1:1-3, 14; Genesis 1:26). At a time chosen by God, the second person of the Godhead came to earth in the form of mankind (Galatians 4:4).

Jesus Christ Claimed to be Deity

Jesus Christ claimed to be God or Deity on several occasions, and first century religious leaders understood that Jesus affirmed that He was God (John 5:17-18). Jesus avowed to the Samaritan woman at the well that He is God (John 4:24-26). Likewise, Jesus clearly stated to the Sanhedrin that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, hence, Deity (Mark 14:61-62).

Jesus could not have been a “good” prophet of God and not the Son of God (Deity), as some claim regarding Jesus of Nazareth. Since Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and ascribed Deity to Himself, He was either all that He said that He is, or He was not a good prophet sent by God. Instead, He would have been a liar or deluded person.

Other People Proclaimed the Deity of Christ

The testimony of others affirms that Jesus Christ is God or Deity. The enemies of Jesus Christ testified that He is Deity or God, which testimony because they were the enemies of Jesus is especially powerful testimony regarding the Deity of Jesus. Despite claiming to be the King of a non-earthly kingdom, Pilate ‘found no fault in him at all’ (John 18:33-38). Judas who betrayed Jesus acknowledged that Jesus was innocent (Matthew 27:3-5), which implies that Christ was innocent also regarding His claims of being deity. The centurion at the foot of the cross remarked that Jesus is the Son of God, Deity (Matthew 27:54). Further, the demons acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God (Luke 4:34).

Friends of Jesus Christ also avowed that He is God or Deity. John the Immerser affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, Deity (John 1:29, 34), and the apostle John wrote the words of Jesus claiming to be God or Deity (Revelation 1:8). The apostle Peter affirmed that Jesus is the Christ, hence Deity (Matthew 16:16), and the apostle Thomas plainly referred to Jesus as “God” (John 20:28). On the road to Damascus, the apostle Paul acknowledged the Deity of Jesus Christ (Acts 22:6-10, and subsequently as well, Phil 3:7-11). Angels declared that Jesus is Christ, hence, God or Deity (Luke 2:10-11). On two separate occasions, God-the-Father affirmed that Jesus is the Son of God, hence, Deity or God (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Simeon the prophet declared that Jesus is God (Luke 2:25-32), as well as did Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38).

Jesus Christ Possesses the Attributes of Jehovah

Jehovah (ASV) of the Old Testament is God, some of which references either apply to the second person of the Godhead or are also true about him. Jehovah is the Creator (Isaiah 40:28; John 1:3) and the Savior (Isaiah 43:11; John 4:42). Jehovah raises the dead (1 Samuel 2:6; John 5:21), is the great Judge (Joel 3:11-12; John 5:27; Matthew 25:31-33), is the everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19-20; John 8:12), is the Great I Am (Exodus 3:14-15; John 8:58) and is the great Shepherd (Psalm 23:1; John 10:11).

Jehovah is the glory of God (Isaiah 42:8; John 17:1, 5), the first and the last (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; Revelation 1:17; 2:8), is the Redeemer (Hosea 13:4, 14; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14), is the

Bridegroom (Isaiah 62:3-5; Hosea 2:16-19; Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 21:2) and is the Rock (Psalm 18:2; 1 Corinthians 10:4). Jehovah forgives sins (Jeremiah 31:34; Mark 2:7, 10), is worshipped by angels (Psalm 148:1-2; Hebrews 1:6), resides in heaven and is addressed by mortals there (Acts 7:59). Jehovah is the Creator of angels (Psalm 148:2, 5; Colossians 1:16), and Jehovah is confessed as Lord (Isaiah 45:21-23; Philippians 2:11).

The Resurrection of Christ Proves His Deity

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that He is God or Deity. Jesus Christ is not the first to be resurrected from the grave, but there is something uniquely different about His resurrection. The son of the widow of Zarephath was raised from the grave (1 Kings 17:22), as was the son of a Shunammite (2 Kings 4:35). A dead man who fell against Elisha's bones resurrected (2 Kings 13:21), and Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead (Matthew 9:18-25; Mark 5:22-43). The son of the widow of Nain was raised from the dead (Luke 7:11-15), and Jesus resurrected Lazarus (John 11:44). The apostle Peter raised Dorcas (Acts 9:36-41). All of these, however, died a second time and returned to the grave – unlike Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ was the first to be raised from the grave never to die again (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). Jesus prophesied of His own death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21; Mark 9:9). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was announced by angels (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:12), and hundreds of persons saw the resurrected Christ (Acts 3:14-15). Among those who viewed the resurrected Lord were Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18; Mark 16:9), another disciple named Mary (Matthew 28:9-10), two male disciples (Luke 24:13-31), the apostle Peter (Luke 24:34), the apostles except for Thomas and Judas (John 20:19-24), Thomas and the disciples (John 20:26-28), more than 500 brethren at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6) and the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11). Now, our resurrected Lord sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Ephesians 1:20).

The Virgin Birth Proves Jesus Is Deity

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ proves that he is God or Deity. The virgin birth was prophesied (Isaiah 7:14). The prophecy of the virgin birth was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 1:23). God brought about the virgin birth at a time suitable to him (Galatians 4:4).

Christ's Sinless Life Proves His Deity

The perfect, sinless life of Jesus Christ proves that He is God or Deity. Jesus committed no sin (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). Our Lord's enemies found Him guiltless (Luke 23:4), even though He claimed to be the Son of God.

Christ's Oneness with the Father Proves Jesus' Deity

Oneness with God-the-Father proves that Jesus Christ is God or Deity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons of the one Godhead (Matthew 28:18-20). The Father and the Son are one (John 10:30; 14:9; 17:21).

Christ's Supernatural Knowledge Proves His Deity

The supernatural knowledge of Jesus Christ proves that He is God or Deity. Jesus possessed supernatural knowledge (John 1:47-49; 2:24-25; 4:28-29). Some others had supernatural knowledge because that information was given to them by God (Acts 9:10-17; 21:10-11). Having supernatural knowledge and affirming oneself to be God or Deity proves Christ's deity.

Christ's Miracles Prove His Deity

The miracles of Jesus Christ prove that He is God or Deity. Jesus performed miracles (John 3:2; 5:36). Miraculous power was also given to various servants of God, (Acts 2:4; 3:4-8), but having miraculous power and affirming oneself to be God or Deity proves Christ's deity (John 20:30-31).

Summary

The Bible affirms repeatedly that Jesus Christ is God or Deity. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, walked on the earth, died for us, resurrected from the grave and is now back in heaven. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who died for us and rose again, will save all who will obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Erring Christians need to repent and pray for the forgiveness of their recent sins (Acts 8:22). Unbaptized believers need to repent and be immersed for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38), and He will add them to His church (Acts 2:47).

In the Beginning

There are said to be over 330 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the birth of Jesus Christ, and each of them was fulfilled in every detail regarding Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, information regarding Jesus Christ predates His incarnation – taking on a mortal body (1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:14). Moreover, the member of the Godhead best known to us as Jesus Christ is eternal and participated in the creation of everything (Genesis 1:26). “For by Him [Jesus Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist [continue to exist]” (Colossians 1:16-17). It has been the Heavenly Father's “eternal purpose” (Ephesians 3:9-11) to save humankind through Jesus Christ, and He has been waiting from before the creation of the universes to save souls (Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20). “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:9-10).

The Birth of Christ

Both the Bible and secular history provide information regarding the birth of Jesus. We can appeal to some degree to secular history for information because Jesus Christ was an historical person. He was a real human being (besides his divine side), and He lived in a real place. Jesus Christ lived in a real, definite and identifiable time period. Christ had and continues to have a real and a genuine influence on other people.

However, the Bible and secular history provide only a limited amount of information about the birth and life of Jesus Christ. To the Christian, the Bible information about Jesus Christ is unimpeachable. However, we must scrutinize carefully secular history to distinguish between fact and myth or unsubstantiated tradition; portraits of Jesus, reports of Jesus as a boy miraculously repairing toys, etc. are not factual.

The birth of Jesus Christ was out of the ordinary; He was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). Young women have been birthing babies for thousands of years, but virgins do not give birth to babies. Therefore, the birth of Jesus Christ involved a miracle.

The Gospel writers confirmed the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the virgin birth of the Christ. Matthew 1:18-25 records the announcement by an angel to Joseph that the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy concerning a virgin birth was about to be fulfilled through his betrothed, Mary. Luke 1:26-38 records the announcement by an angel to Mary of the impending fulfillment of the Isaiah 7:14 prophecy of a virgin birth was about to be fulfilled through her. The birth of Jesus Christ was miraculous or supernatural, but more than simply miraculous. A miracle is a supernatural event effected by God that is discernible. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ was miraculous in a way that exceeded miracles connected with the birth of others (e.g. Isaac and John the Baptist, Genesis 12; 15; 17; 21:1-7; Luke 1:5-25, 36).

The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity, and it pertains to the deity of Jesus. The virgin birth was the means by which God came to this earth to live among men (John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 2:16-17; Philippians 2:6-8).

Furthermore, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is the basis for God's plan to redeem fallen mankind. Redemption of humanity has long been the subject of prophecy and associated with a Messiah or Savior (Genesis 3:15; 49:10; Isaiah 7:14). The New Testament confirms that the mission of Jesus Christ was to save mankind from sin (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10). Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world, which if there were removed from the Bible, the Bible would be reduced to a mass of unrelated and unimportant words. The virgin birth facilitated the delivery of a perfect sin-sacrifice by which sins could actually be remitted (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus Christ is the only way by which anyone can be saved from his sins (Acts 4:12; Romans 10:13; Acts 2:38).

Enemies of Christianity Deny the Virgin Birth of Christ

Enemies of Christianity object to and discount the truthfulness of the virgin birth. Enemies of the Christianity include atheists and modernists, the former denying the existence of God and His system of religion while the latter is a religionist who devalues the supernatural intervention of God recorded in the Bible. Consequently, enemies of Christianity attack as fictitious every Bible miracle. Especially, enemies of Christianity attack the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, since these two miraculous events are crucial to the validity of Christianity. So, enemies of Christianity would like to reduce the Bible to mythology and fairy tales. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ did not come under attack until the 18th century through so-called *higher criticism*.

Modernists and liberals pose a greater threat than atheists. Atheists such as Francis Voltaire and Thomas Paine were announced opponents of Christianity, and therefore, their complaints are more easily discernible. Modernists and other religious liberals, though, purport to be proponents of Christianity while they actually undermine it. Modernists and liberals, through their covert and masked attacks on the Bible, are more dangerous because they do not announce their opposition to the Bible and Christianity.

Modernists object to the virgin birth of Jesus Christ on the grounds that it is biologically impossible. Parthenogenesis (reproduction without fertilization) is limited to lower plants and invertebrate animals, and it is impossible with higher life forms such as man. Therefore, since modernists disbelieve Bible miracles, they conclude the virgin birth could not have occurred. Christians, though, believe in the Bible miracles (including the virgin birth), for we know that nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37).

Modernists argue that the Gospel of John, though speaking of the deity of Jesus Christ, says nothing regarding the virgin birth of Jesus. Actually, every reference to the incarnation of Jesus Christ is a reference to the virgin birth (John 1:1-3, 10, 14-15, 18). The apostle John combined references of the incarnation of Jesus Christ with references to the deity of Jesus Christ. Especially John 1:14 attests to the virgin birth, or harmonizes with other Gospel records (Matthew and Mark) respecting the incarnation of the second person of the Godhead.

Modernists claim that neither Jesus Christ nor any apostle referred to the virgin birth of Christ. Romans 1:3-4 refers to a member of the Godhead taking the form of a human (the incarnation) and implies a reference to the virgin birth. Likewise, Galatians 4:4 refers to the incarnation, and therefore, by implication refers to the virgin birth.

Modernists claim that Joseph was the father of Jesus, and they cite Mary saying Joseph was the father of Jesus (Luke 2:48). Further, Modernists remind us that the Jews commonly viewed Jesus as the son of Joseph (Luke 2:41; Matthew 13:55; Luke 3:23; 4:22). It is true that Joseph was the *foster* or *stepfather* of Jesus, and the world was unaware of the divine nature of Jesus until He began His miraculously accompanied ministry.

Modernists argue that the birth of Jesus, like birth stories of famous or illustrious men, have been embellished or augmented with fables and myths. The virgin Coatlicue clutched a ball of feathers that had fallen from heaven to her bosom and conceived a son, Huitzilopchi, war god of the Aztecs. The virgin mother of Quetzalcoatl conceived by swallowing a rare stone. So, modernists claim that the virgin birth of Jesus Christ

is comparable to these mythological birth stories. However, the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is substantiated by Old Testament prophecy, New Testament fulfillment, the expectation by Old Testament Jews and acceptance by Christians from the New Testament to the present. **The Christian relies on biblical evidence to substantiate the virgin birth.**

Modernists claim that the early church did not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Nothing within the Bible or out of the Bible suggests that the early church did not believe in the virgin birth of Christ. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ only came under attack through higher criticism in the 18th century.

The Birth of Jesus Christ Is Historical

The Bible predicted the birth of Jesus Christ, and the virgin birth of the Messiah or the Savior was the subject of Old Testament prophecy (Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:10; Isaiah 7:14). The **place** of the Savior's birth was predicted through prophecy to be in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The **time** when the Savior was to be born was predicted through prophecy to be during the fourth world kingdom from the time and including Babylon (Daniel 2:31-45) – which was during the time of the Roman Empire.

Bible history confirms the fulfillment of Bible prophecies respecting the birth of the Messiah. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:1-7), and He was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus, while Cyrenius was governor of Syria and Herod the Great ruled Palestine (Luke 2:1-2; Matthew 2:1).

Secular history also confirms the birth of Jesus. Examples of history books that acknowledge the historicity of Jesus' birth include: *Italy* by John S.C. Abbott (301), *A History of Rome* by Arthur E.R. Boak (334) and *World Civilizations* by Edward Burns and Philip Ralph (360-363). Secular histories that are favorable toward Christianity as well as history books that are antagonistic toward Christianity both attest that **Jesus of Nazareth was an historical person.**

The Childhood of Jesus Christ

Not much appears in the Bible about the first 30 years of the life of Jesus. What little is known has been exploited through manmade holy days or holidays. Often, biblical facts about the life of Jesus are overshadowed by baseless tradition, denominational doctrine and idle speculation. The four Gospel records chronicle the life of Christ. At least two of these historians were inspired witnesses. The Holy Spirit, through divine inspiration, guided the sacred writers in the selection of the exact words to best depict the life of Christ. Further, the Holy Spirit provided these holy historians with all the biographical material relating to Jesus Christ in addition to what they witnessed. Matthew, a tax collector, was an apostle and an eyewitness of the life, death and resurrected Christ. Mark, the evangelist, was a coworker with the apostle Paul. Luke, a medical doctor, was a Gentile who labored with the apostle Paul. John was an apostle and an eyewitness of the life, death and resurrected Christ.

Secular history, though sometimes belligerent toward Christianity, also records information about the life of Jesus Christ. Flavius Josephus (37-93) was born in the generation after Christ and was contemporary with the apostles; he was a Jewish historian and not a follower of Jesus Christ, but he recorded part of the life of Jesus Christ. Carius Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian who wrote about A.D. 100 and was contemporary with the generation following the death of the apostles; he was not a Christian, but mentioned part of the life of Christ. More recent histories also acknowledge and record parts of the life of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel records together provide the sum of necessary information about the life of Christ. Not much is recorded about the first 30 years of the life of Christ. However, all we need to know about the life of Christ has been provided to us in the Gospel records (John 20:30-31).

Secular history adds further confirmation to the sacred biography of Jesus Christ. However, wherever secular history and the biblical biography of Christ may disagree, Christians have greater confidence in the biblical account. Secular history is not for the Christian the ultimate source of information, and it is not always trustworthy.

The Gospel Records

Luke 2:1-7 records the birth of Jesus Christ. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). The birth of Jesus occurred about 4 B.C. Joseph and Mary traveled from their residence in Nazareth to the ancestral home in Bethlehem by the decree of the emperor for a census. This incident over which Joseph and Mary had no control facilitated the fulfillment of prophecy respecting where the Messiah would be born (Micah 5:2). The Roman census was for the purpose of compiling a corrected list from which to assess taxes. Nowhere remained for the couple to lodge once they arrived in Bethlehem, and hence Jesus was born in a stable. The humility with which the Son of God entered the world is staggering when compared with the birth typical of the rich and famous. Tradition reveres a cave in Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus; a church building stands over the spot with a star on the floor marking the supposed location of the animal's manger or food dish in which the newborn babe was laid.

Luke 2:8-20 pertains to angels and shepherds. Angels announced the birth of Jesus Christ to shepherds who were attending their flocks by night. The birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated by many as a holy day (holiday) on December 25. There has been much variation and dispute regarding the birthday of Jesus throughout history, and it has been observed at various times throughout the year. It is not likely that the birth of Jesus Christ occurred in the winter months since shepherds usually enclose their sheep at night from November through March. Bethlehem is on a parallel with Jackson, Mississippi and has comparable weather in the winter (cold, rainy with some snow or ice).

Subsequently, the shepherds went to see baby Jesus. The nativity scene usually pictured includes Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus, some animals, the shepherds, the wise men, angels over the stable and a star in the sky. In reality, the angels had gone before the shepherds left the fields seeking Jesus, and the wise men (following a special star) did not arrive until months after Christ's birth.

Luke 2:21-38 chronicles the circumcision and presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Eight days after his birth, Jesus was circumcised and named. Jesus Christ was a Jew of the tribe of Judah and of the family of David (Heb. 7:14; Luke 2:4). Our Lord was born under the Jewish covenant or Old Testament, to which He and His family were amenable. Leviticus 12:1-3 required that Jewish males be circumcised on the eighth day after birth.

Jesus Christ was presented before the God and redeemed (Luke 2:22-24). The presentation was made after 41 days of purification had past for his mother (Leviticus 12:4-8). A lamb was to be sacrificed unless the family were too poor to afford a lamb, then they could offer two turtledoves. God had decreed that the firstborn of man and beast was to be redeemed (excepting among sheep, goats and calves which not redeemed were sacrificed) (Exodus 13:2, 12-13; 34:19-20; Numbers 3:13; 8:17; 18:17). The sacrifice to redeem Jesus was a poor man's sacrifice.

A prophet named Simeon and a prophetess named Anna both testified that Jesus Christ was the Messiah for which Israel had long waited (Luke 2:25-38). Evidently, both Simeon and Anna had been recipients of divine revelation. Simeon mentioned the mission of Jesus Christ to save the Gentiles (cf. Isaiah 62:2). Both attributed the redemption of Israel to Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10).

Matthew 2:1-12 records the visit of the wise men. The wise men, at least two but an unknown number, came seeking Jesus Christ. These easterners were likely non-Jews amenable to Patriarchy and may have been recipients of divine revelation. They followed a star, probably some miraculous light resembling a star, which led them to Jesus Christ. The wise men inquired of Herod the Great about the location of the baby, King Jesus. Herod, fearing usurpation of his throne, planned to kill the baby Jesus. After consulting the Old Testament Scriptures about the prophecy of the Messiah's birth, the wise men were sent to Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

The wise men found Jesus Christ. Evidently, by the time of the arrival of the wise men, Jesus and His family were no longer lodging in the stable, but in a house. Some time but less than two years had elapsed since the birth of Jesus. Though the number of wise men is not revealed in the Bible, three kinds of gifts were bestowed: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh were both resins from trees, possessing acute fragrances for which they were highly treasured.

Matthew 2:13-18 chronicles the flight to Egypt and the slaughter of babies. The wise men departed without reporting back to Herod, being warned in a dream to return another way home. Joseph was warned in a dream to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus. Herod the Great wanted to kill Jesus Christ because he feared this spiritual King of the Jews would threaten his earthly kingdom. Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt for safety. Herod had all children two-years-old and younger in the Bethlehem area murdered in his attempt to make sure he had killed Jesus. Going into Egypt from which they returned was a secondary fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Hosea 11:1.

Luke 2:39-40 records the return to Nazareth. Upon further direction from an angel in a dream, Joseph took Mary and Jesus back to Palestine. Herod the Great had died, but because Archelaus, his son, was made King, the family of Jesus settled in Nazareth of Galilee (described as their own city). Hence, Jesus resided in Nazareth, whereby he was called a Nazarene, a fulfillment of Scripture (Matthew 2:23). Note, there is a difference between a “Nazarite” and a “Nazarene.” A Nazarite was set apart for special service to God and was bound by certain vows (Judges 13:5; 1 Samuel 1:11). A Nazarene was an inhabitant of Nazareth.

For about a decade following there is no record of the life of Jesus. Sacred history is silent regarding this period of our Lord’s young life. Secular history records nothing about this period in the life of Christ either. Mythology and tradition claim that Jesus performed miracles as a child, especially repairing by miracle toys of His playmates. Apparently, nothing about the life of our Lord’s childhood was out of the ordinary to the extent that anyone suspected that He was the Son of God (Matthew 13:54-56). Therefore, we can readily dismiss miraculous toy-repairing by Jesus Christ during His childhood. Luke 2:40 is the only record of this intervening period in the young life of Jesus.

Luke 2:41-60 chronicles attending the Passover at the age of 12. Jesus attended the Passover feast in Jerusalem with Joseph and Mary. Jesus lingered behind when Joseph and Mary began the journey home. Evidently, Joseph and Mary were traveling with a number of other individuals who were returning home to Galilee after the Jewish feast, and each thought Jesus was in the company of the other. Upon discovering that Jesus was not with their company, Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem to find Jesus, and they searched for him for three days. Finally, they found him in the Temple, discussing the Law with the doctors of the Law. The Jewish leaders were astonished at the skill of Jesus in the Scriptures. Joseph and Mary were surprised to find Jesus discussing Scripture with religious leaders. When chastened by His parents, Jesus spoke of His divine mission. Jesus returned to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary.

Luke 2:51-52 notes the maturing of Jesus to manhood. These two verses contain the only information regarding the maturation of Jesus over the next 18 years. Jesus was an obedient child. Under the Old Testament, obedience of children was emphasized (Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; Proverbs 23:13-14). Under the New Testament likewise, obedience of children is stressed (Ephesians 6:1).

Jesus Christ increased in wisdom and stature. He gained knowledge along with common sense whereby He could exercise His knowledge properly. Respecting stature, He grew physically into manhood.

Jesus increased in favor with God and man; we can safely surmise: Jesus was a good moral man; He was honest; He was a hard worker; He was not lazy, filthy mouthed, a thief, etc.; and our Lord possessed all the admirable characteristics that permit one to receive the approval of God and God-fearing men.

After 400 years of no new revelation from God, both people amenable to Patriarchy and Judaism received new revelation about the birth of Jesus Christ. Our Lord was reared in a family with a mother, a stepfather, stepbrothers and stepsisters (Matthew 13:54-46). Apparently, Joseph died since he is not mentioned after a point in time, and Jesus while on the cross entrusted the care of His mother to the apostle John. The 30 years before Jesus began his ministry served to prepare Jesus for his ministry of three years. Though little is recorded in the Gospel records about the first 30 years of Jesus’ life, most of the Gospel records address the three years of His ministry. All of humanity has been influenced by the final three years of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. However, you have not been influenced enough by the life of Christ and His ministry if you are not at this moment in a saved relationship with God. Erring Christians can take care of this lack by repenting and praying, whereas unbaptized believers can remedy this tragedy by obeying the instructions of Jesus in Mark 16:16.

Summary

That a man known as Jesus of Nazareth was born in Palestine in the days of the Roman emperors is a **fact**. Both the Bible and secular history substantiate this fact. Therefore, the birth of Jesus of Nazareth is absolutely true. That Jesus Christ was born of a virgin is also a **fact**. The Bible, through Old Testament prophecies and New Testament fulfillment, substantiates the virgin birth of Jesus. Faithful Christians from the first century through the present have accepted the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, and the virgin birth of Jesus Christ is as factual as anything contained in the Bible and is absolutely true. Incidentally, at least three English translations inaccurately and errantly represent the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The *Revised Standard Version*, *Good News for Modern Man* and the *New World Translation* each replace the word “virgin” respecting the birth of Christ with the words “young woman” or “young maidens.” Young women have been bearing children for centuries, but only once did a virgin bear a child – Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth through the means of the virgin birth for the purpose of saving souls; unless we obey the Gospel, we make the virgin birth and mission of Jesus Christ respecting us void. Jesus Christ came to earth to save unbaptized believers (Mark 16:16), and He is also willing to save erring Christians (1 John 1:7-10).

Earthly Ministry

Much of the first 30 years of Jesus’ life is obscure, only highlights of which appear in the Gospel records. However, the last three years of Jesus’ life and ministry on earth fill the Gospel records. Obviously one lesson cannot adequately chronicle the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ, or even begin to note our Lord’s masterful teaching. We must content ourselves today with an overview of all that appears in the sacred record about the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ. That sacred record notes sufficient information for one with an honest heart to correctly conclude that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Christ and the Savior of the world (John 20:30-31).

Preparation Preceded the Earthly Ministry

The first 30 years of Jesus’ life prepared Him for His three years of ministry. At age 12, Jesus acknowledged His divine mission as the Son of God (Luke 2:49). For the next 18 years, the Incarnate Son of God grew to manhood physically and interacted with humanity and God (Luke 2:52). Jesus waited 30 years before undertaking His ministry, signaling that among mankind maturity must precede fruitful labors (Luke 3:23).

The preaching and ministry of John the Baptist prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophecies predicted a prophet like Elijah would arise and prepare the way for the Messiah’s ministry (Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1; 4:5; Matthew 3:1-3; Luke 3:2-6). John the Baptist prepared the way of the Lord by preaching that the kingdom was at hand (Matthew 3:2). He preached repentance followed by baptism for the remission of sins (Luke 3:3). John the Baptist baptized penitent persons in prospect of salvation (Matthew 3:5-8; Acts 19:1-6). He preached that the Messiah would come and baptize some with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and others with the baptism of fiery punishment (Matthew 3:10-12). John the Baptist baptized Jesus Christ “to fulfill all righteousness” and identified Him as the long sought Messiah (Matthew 3:13-17). He condemned sin wherever he found it without regard to personal danger because of such preaching (Luke 3:18-20; Matthew 3:7-9; 14:3-12).

The events surrounding the beginning of Jesus’ ministry prepared Him for and set the backdrop for His ministry of three years. The baptism of Jesus Christ marked the beginning of His earthly, public ministry. For everyone besides Jesus Christ, baptism with John’s baptism was for the remission of sins (Matthew 3:5-6). Jesus, though, had no sins (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). Jesus Christ was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (i.e. every Jew during the ministry of John the Baptist was required to be baptized, Matt. 3:15). Though He had no sins, Jesus Christ was baptized as a part of the obedience He rendered to the Father (Hebrews 5:8-9). Of course, the baptism of Jesus serves as an example to the rest of humanity for all time. Shortly after the baptism of Jesus, He began preaching, too (Matthew 4:17).

The temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness by Satan further prepared our Lord for his ministry. Immediately following His baptism, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13). Jesus successfully resisted each temptation of the devil by quoting Scripture. He was tempted in all points as we are tempted, and yet He did not sin (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15). Jesus Christ gave us the example that if we resist the devil he will flee from us (James 4:7; Ephesians 4:27; 1 Peter 5:8-9). Sinlessly pure in the face of temptation, Jesus Christ thereby was prepared to commence His public ministry.

The calling of some of His disciples was a significant preparatory event in the early ministry of Jesus Christ. First, Jesus called Andrew and Peter (John 1:35-42). Next, Jesus selected Philip and Nathaniel (John 1:43-51). So far, Jesus only named four disciples who later became his apostles.

Our Lord's miracle of turning water to grape juice was His first miracle and the first public demonstration of Jesus' divine ministry (John 2:1-11). This miracle was the only one performed by Jesus Christ on a joyful occasion. After this miracle, Jesus abode in Capernaum on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee for a few days.

The Judean Ministry

The first segment of our Lord's ministry could be labeled "The Judean Ministry." Jesus Christ first went to Jerusalem. There He cleansed the Temple for the first time, casting out the moneychangers and their merchandise (John 2:13-22). Thereafter, Jesus performed miracles, leading many people to believe on Him (John 2:23). Jesus Christ had His first recorded discourse (this one privately) with a Pharisee named Nicodemus (John 3:1-21).

Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem and went to the countryside of Judea. There, Jesus taught and baptized (John 3:22). This was the same area in which John the Baptist and his disciples had been teaching, and John the Baptist confirmed to his disciples that Jesus is the Christ (John 3:25-36).

Jesus next left Judea and entered Samaria while going back to Galilee (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; John 4:1-4). Jesus left Judea after John the Baptist was imprisoned and after the Pharisees had heard that Jesus had made more disciples than John had made. Jesus entered Sychar of Samaria, meeting the woman at the well (John 4:5-26). The conversation with the woman at the well was Jesus' second recorded discourse (also private) and during which He identified Himself as the Messiah. Many Samaritans believed Jesus was the Messiah (John 4:27-42). After staying two days in Samaria, Jesus and His disciples left for Galilee (John 4:43).

The Galilean Ministry

The next segment of our Lord's ministry could be called "The Galilean Ministry." The Galileans generally received Jesus as the Christ because they had already seen him perform miracles in Jerusalem during the days of the Passover (John 4:45). Jesus taught in the synagogues throughout Galilee and was "glorified of all" (Luke 4:14-15). However, Jesus' hometown of Nazareth rejected Him and tried to kill Him (Luke 4:16-30). Jesus went to Cana and there was petitioned by a nobleman of Capernaum to heal his son (John 4:46-53). Jesus Christ resided in Capernaum (Matthew 4:13; Luke 4:31-32).

Jesus called the four fishermen: Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11). This was the second calling of Peter and Andrew. The occasion of the great catch of fish that threatened to break the nets and sink two ships preceded the willing departure of the fishermen to be disciples of Jesus.

Jesus Christ continued to preach throughout Galilee, performing many miracles and healing the sick (Matthew 4:23-25; 8:2ff). People from Syria (north of Galilee), Decapolis (east of Galilee) and Judaea and Jerusalem came to Jesus Christ in Galilee with sick to be healed. Every sick person coming to Jesus Christ was healed.

Several other events occurred during our Lord's Galilean ministry. Jesus gave His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). He healed a centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13) and performed miracles at Capernaum, including healing Peter's mother-in-law and healing a man with an unclean spirit (Matt. 8:14-17; Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:31-41). Jesus healed a leper (Matthew 8:2-4), stilled a storm on the Sea of Galilee

(Matthew 8:18, 23-27) and cast out demons in the country of the Gadarenes (Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-40).

Jesus called Matthew to be His disciple (Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32), raised Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:17-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56), healed a woman, healed the blind, healed the mute and cast out demons (Matthew 9:27-33). He raised the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and Jesus was anointed with spices by a penitent woman (Luke 7:36-50). Our Lord told the Parable of the Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-42).

Jesus selected His apostles (Matthew 10:2-4). The disciples of John the Baptist inquired of Jesus Christ if He was the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-30). Jesus healed a man's withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14), taught multitudes at the shore of Galilee (Matthew 13:1-2), told the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13) and told the parables of the Seed, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Costly Pearl and the Net (Mark 4; Matthew 13).

Next, the second rejection of Jesus Christ by the residents of Nazareth occurred (Matthew 13:54-58). John the Baptist was executed (Matthew 14:1-12). In addition, Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men plus women and children (Matthew 14:13-23), walked on the water of the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 14:24-36) and went to the area of the cities of Tyre and Sidon (north of Galilee) where He cast a demon from a Gentile girl (Matthew 15:21-28).

Afterward, Jesus returned to the area surrounding the Sea of Galilee where He performed many miracles (Matthew 15:29-31). He miraculously fed 4,000 men plus women and children (Matthew 15:32-38). Jesus healed a blind man near Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26). The apostle Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Christ and Son of God – the Messiah (Matthew 16:13-20). The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ occurred (Matthew 17:1-13), and later, Jesus Christ paid tribute money at Capernaum (Matthew 17:24-27).

Jesus closed His Galilean ministry when He attended the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem (John 7:1-52). While in Jerusalem, an adulterous woman was brought to Him by His enemies to try to catch Him in His words, whether He would condemn her to stoning or have her freed (John 7:53-8:11). Jesus Christ taught that He is the light of the world (John 8:12-30).

The Perea Ministry

Another segment of our Lord's ministry could be named "The Perea Ministry." Jesus Christ left Galilee for the land on the far side of the Jordan (Matthew 19:1-2; Mark 10:1). This is when, our Lord sent out the 70 disciples (Luke 10:1-24). Jesus Christ told the account of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), healed a blind man (John 9:1-41), taught the lesson about the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-21) and is when Jesus attended the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem (John 10:22-42).

Jesus told the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:1-59), the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:1-9) and healed a crippled woman (Luke 13:11-13). He told the Parable of the Wedding Guest (Luke 14:1-24), taught about counting the cost (Luke 14:25-35) and taught the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-7).

Then, Jesus presented the Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16) and told about the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The Lord discussed the unprofitable servant (Luke 17:1-10) and raised His friend Lazarus from the grave (John 11:1-46). Jesus no longer walked freely in public because the high priests, other chief priests and the Pharisees plotted to kill him (John 11:54). Jesus healed ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19), gave the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8), contrasted the penitent prayers of the tax collectors with the arrogant prayers of the Pharisees (Luke 18:9-14) and presented the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27). Jesus was anointed with precious ointment in Bethany (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3; John 12:1-8), and all that remained was for Jesus to lend Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to provide redemption to the world!

Summary

In conclusion, Jesus was born about 4 B.C.; within a year or so He and His family fled to Egypt. Upon returning from Egypt, His family settled in Nazareth where Jesus resided until He began His public ministry. At age 12, Jesus attended the Passover in Jerusalem in about A.D. 8. John the Baptist began his ministry in

the spring of A.D. 26. Our Lord's Judean ministry began about the time of the Passover in A.D. 27 (April 11-18) and continued until about A.D. 28. The Judean ministry lasted about nine months, and Jesus Christ talked with the Samaritan woman at the well about December of A.D. 27. The Galilean ministry lasted about a year from the spring of A.D. 28 to the spring of A.D. 29. The Perea ministry lasted from A.D. 29 to March of A.D. 30.

This brings the life and ministry of Jesus Christ up to the beginning of the last week of His ministry. The Gospel records contain nearly as much information about the last week of Jesus' life as they do respecting the rest of His life and ministry. The last week included His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the second cleansing of the Temple, several parables, prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming, the institution of the Lord's Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' arrest, His trials, His torture, crucifixion, resurrection and Ascension. Within two months following Jesus' final week leading up to His death, Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the church was established and about 3,000 converts were added to it.

The earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ occurred so that He could be the sin-sacrifice for humanity on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). His life, death, resurrection and Ascension are meaningless to every soul who fails to put Jesus Christ on in baptism for the remission of his sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38). Everything Jesus did to seek and save the lost is meaningless to every erring child of God who fails to repent (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Dear Reader, don't make the mistake of wasting the greatest sacrifice ever made so that you and I could be saved from our sins and have a valid hope of spending eternity in heaven.

Master Teacher

Scripture amply demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher, to whom we should go for instruction, which instruction should mold our lives. Jesus Christ excelled beyond comparison in everything that He did; Jesus Christ is preeminent as the Creator, as God Incarnate, as Sacrifice on Calvary's Cross, as Savior, as King, as Judge – as well as Master Teacher. There is no one else to whom we can turn who is a more able Teacher than Jesus Christ.

Teacher

What, though, does it mean to be a teacher? Primarily two Greek verbs express what it means to be a teacher. First, "*didasko*" means "to give instruction (e.g., Matt 4:23; 9:35; Rom 12:7; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 2:12; 4:11" (*Vine's*). Second, "*matheteuo*" means "to teach...Matt. 28:19 [28:20 = "*didasko*"]; Acts 14:21" (*Vine's*). In addition, synonyms as well as related nouns and adjectives in the New Testament express what it means to be a teacher.

God is man's Teacher. God was man's teacher under the old covenant; "God himself is described as a teacher. He taught Moses (Exod. 4:15)" (Daugherty 131). God, likewise, promised to teach mankind under the new covenant (Isaiah 2:2-3). It should be no surprise, then, that when Jesus Christ came to earth in the flesh that He was the Master Teacher.

Master Teacher

Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher. A primary feature of the short ministry of Jesus Christ was teaching (Matthew 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23; 26:55). Jesus, the Master Teacher, frequently used figurative language in His teaching (i.e., the PowerPoint, etc. of his day). For instance, "Jesus, the Master Teacher, reveals the mysteries of the kingdom through the teaching of parables" (Ridgeway 38). With word-pictures depicting their everyday lives, the Master Teacher used circumstances with which they were familiar to teach them spiritual truths about which they knew little or nothing. Bruce Daugherty emphasizes that Jesus Christ taught more than lessons, but He instructed people, often individuals besides great audiences (Mark 4:1).

Jesus is the Master Teacher because he taught people, not just lessons. Notice how many individuals are listed in the Gospels: Nicodemus (John 2:1), Peter (Luke 5:1-11), the Samaritan woman (John 4), Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) and the woman of Syro-Phoenicia

(Mark 7:24-30). This ability to see individuals, especially those emarginated by society, distinguished Jesus as the Teacher come from God. (Daugherty 133)

Jesus Christ possesses the authority to be the Master Teacher (Matthew 28:18-20). According to Jesus (Matthew 21:23-27), “there are only two sources of authority, heaven or men” (Craft 5-6). “Officers” or “Temple guards” (NIV) sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to seize Jesus came back empty handed because they were awed by the Master Teacher (John 7:32, 45-46). As Denver Cooper put it: “The Master Teacher dared to be different. He spoke with authority” (59). That heavenly authority rested on the revealed Word of God.

Jesus is the Teacher without equal because of his trust in the Word of God. Jesus placed great emphasis on the Scriptures (Matt. 4:4; 22:29, 31; John 5:39). In contrast, the teachers of Israel did not know the Scriptures (Matt. 22:29; John 3:10, 12). Teachers today must emphasize the Scriptures in their lessons. In a day in which some Bible classes imitate television talk shows, we must return to the Scriptures. The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). It is able to build up Christians (Acts 20:32). It alone tells us of Jesus (John 5:39; 8:31-32, 47). (Daugherty 133)

Jesus Christ was the Master Teacher because He always taught what people needed (not wanted, 2 Timothy 4:2-4) to hear. Unlike us, Jesus as Divine was the “incomparable Teacher because he knew what was in man (John 2:23-24)” (Daugherty 132). Like Jesus, we need to teach God’s Word so that it has an impact on people’s everyday lives.

Jesus is the teacher without comparison because he taught people in their everyday situations. For many people, religion is separated from their daily life. Not so for Jesus. He taught in parables and stories drawn from daily life. Maybe this is why the common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:37). Jesus demonstrated the impact of Scripture on every day life (Mark 7:1-13). Because of his connection to everyday living his teaching stood in stark contrast to the teaching of the Pharisees (Luke 11:46, 52; Matt. 23:3-4). (Daugherty 133)

Jesus Christ practiced what He taught (Acts 1:1). Jesus Christ is the Master Teacher, in part, because, unlike the Pharisees (Matthew 23:3-5), He practiced what he preached (Matthew 16:24). The most important model on the planet is the one who personifies the Word of God.

Finally, Jesus is the Incomparable Teacher because he modeled what he taught. Jesus is our model for everything, including obedience (John 13:17; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 2:21). The apostle Paul considered himself a role model for his converts (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil, 3:17). Paul praised his Thessalonian converts for having become imitators of their teachers and the Lord (1 Thess. 1:6-7). As teachers of God’s word today, we must have the goal of obedience as we teach (Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 2:17-21, 25). But to call for obedience means that we ourselves must first be obedient. We cannot lead where we will not go. We cannot give what we do not have first for ourselves. ...We are not simply imparting knowledge as we teach, but we are to be modeling behavior that can be imitated.” (Daugherty 134)

The teaching of Jesus Christ demonstrated His Deity. None of our Lord’s enemies were able to triumph over Him in their verbal confrontations with Him – evidencing the Deity of Jesus Christ. “As various groups of Jewish leaders tried their best to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people, the Master Teacher silenced them one by one” (Board 270).

Confrontational Christ Brethren we are in a war with the devil and we must not forget it. The Lord is described as both a lamb and lion in the scriptures. ...The basic lesson must be this: when the Lord is personally attacked he does not seek vengeance – He does not retaliate (1 Peter 2:22-23). ...But, when an attack was made upon His teaching – His doctrine – it was a different matter, He fought back, and He fought hard. He refuted, He condemned. (Matthew 23:15, 25, 27-28) (Craft 14-15)

No other teacher in history has had a more profound and lasting effect on humanity than Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher.

Jesus' teaching ministry only lasted three brief years. He wrote no books. He held no university chair. He did not travel extensively from his humble birthplace. Yet, through the men he trained, Jesus has impacted the world like no other teacher. This was because his teachings reflected his divinity. (Daugherty 135)

Jesus Christ taught others to be teachers. Jesus, the Master Teacher, purposed to teach His disciples so they in turn could teach others; He told His disciples that He would make them "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18-22). Likewise, the apostle Paul also instructed Timothy to teach those who could teach others, too (2 Timothy 2:2).

God has placed Teachers in the Lord's church. Most of the offices of responsibility in the primitive church pertained to teaching and subsequent edification (1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11). First Cor. 12:28 lists "apostles...prophets...teachers." Ephesians 4:11 lists "apostles...prophets...evangelists...pastors [elders]...teachers." Preachers, elders and teachers must arm themselves with God's Word to be the most effective teachers they can possibly be.

Two works of ministry in the Lord's church involve teaching. Evangelizing the world involves teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost (Matthew 28:19-20). Edification or building up the church in the holy faith involves teaching (1 Corinthians 14:12, 26). Every Christian has a responsibility to learn God's Word thoroughly enough that we can instruct others in it (Hebrews 5:11-14; 1 Peter 3:15).

Summary

Bruce Daugherty well summarizes Jesus Christ as the Master Teacher.

Teaching was a prominent feature in the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 4:23). The Gospels are composed of a great amount of teaching material. The Sermon on the Mount, the Parables and the discourse on the Mount of Olives are all indicators of the importance of teaching in Jesus' ministry. The reaction of the people to Jesus' teaching also indicates that Jesus was the Master Teacher. The Bible says that the people were astonished at his teaching (Matt. 7:28-29; 13:54). They also marveled at his teaching (John 7:15, 32, 44-46). It was teaching that helped set Jesus apart from the other teachers of his day and it is the teaching that also helps demonstrate his Deity. (Daugherty 131)

T. Pierce Brown emphasizes that every Christian who teaches, and especially preachers, need to teach with the purpose of making a real difference in the lives of those who audit our words. "Most of us who spend our lives in this business of teaching believe that Jesus is the MASTER TEACHER, and it is our business to strive to teach in such a way that, as Paul puts it in Galatians 4:19, 'Christ be formed in you'" ("Closing"). "Religion that makes a difference is a religion that is seen Monday through Saturday, not just on Sunday!" (Daugherty 133).

We can best learn to be successful as teachers by imitating the teaching methods and subject material of Jesus Christ; "The method and message of the Master Teacher and his inspired followers should be ours" (T. Pierce Brown "Sneak").

Jesus is the Master Teacher because he taught to change men according to the will of God. There are teachers who have great intellectual content to their lessons. There are also teachers who touch the emotional heartstrings of their audiences. But the will is also important in our teaching. Jesus taught to reach the will of man (Matt. 5:48; 7:21-23; 19:16-22; 22:37-40). The intellect deals with knowledge, information and facts. The will deals with direction, motivation and change for life. As a Teacher, Jesus gave more than information. He gave teaching that resulted in reformation and repentance. Teachers, do our lessons give information that leads to a response? Does it call for a decision? There is a great need to have Bible studies and classes that are directed toward the decision making

process. We must call for a submission of the will of man to the will of God! (Daugherty 134)

With Bruce Daugherty we exclaim: “May we ever be disciples of Jesus, the Master Teacher” (135).

Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, has not left us to wonder about salvation. Jesus taught that every believer must be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). The apostles John and Peter emphasized that the blood of Jesus Christ is available to Christians who sin, too, upon their penitence and prayer (1 John 1:7-10; Acts 8:22).

Works Cited

- Board, John. “Opponents of the King.” *The King and his Kingdom in Matthew*. Louis Rushmore, ed. Moundsville: West Virginia School of Preaching, 2003. 264-271.
- Brown, T. Pierce. “Closing.”
- - -. “Sneak.”
- Cooper, Denver. “The Far Country.” 55-61.
- Craft, Eddy. “The Master Teacher & His Authority.” *What Jesus Taught About...* West Jefferson: West Jefferson Church of Christ, 2005. 5-18.
- Daugherty, Bruce. “Jesus--The Incomparable Teacher.” *Christian Evidences*. Louis Rushmore, ed. Moundsville: West Virginia School of Preaching, 2005. 131-136.
- Ridgeway, Jason. “The Parable of the Soils.” *The King and his Kingdom in Matthew*. Louis Rushmore, ed. Moundsville: West Virginia School of Preaching, 2003. 38-46.
- Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1985.

The Death of Christ

The Horrific Death of Jesus Christ

Crucifixion was a horrific form of capital punishment. Various forms of crucifixion were used by different nations throughout ancient history. Crucifixion at times and places ranged from a single post on which a person was impaled, to an upright post with a crossbar, to two rails forming an “X.” Most ancient nations practiced some form of crucifixion (e.g., Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Scythians, Indians, Germans, Persians and Assyrians (Varner 5).

The Roman Empire also employed crucifixion as a form of capital punishment. The Roman cross was comprised of an upright post of up to 9’ above the ground with a 7’ crossbeam (Hastings qtd. in Varner 4). Protruding from the upright post was a “peg” (*New Unger’s*) or “a small piece of wood forming a...seat ...designed to bear part of the weight of the body which would otherwise have been too great to be supported by the hands and feet alone. At the top of [the upright post] was a small tablet...which declared the crime and name of the victim” (Varner 4). The tablet above Jesus’ head on the cross read, “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews” (John 19:19; Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38).

The horribleness of crucifixion was intended to intimidate populations so they would be sure to practice civil obedience. Crimes punishable by crucifixion included piracy, assassination, perjury and treason (Varner 6). The Roman Empire ruled the conquered lands annexed to itself not through integration, but solely through object, iron-fisted and brutish control. Crucifixion was simply a part of that system of complete mastery.

The first step in the process of crucifixion was scourging; “...scourging was the terrible introduction to crucifixion – **‘the intermediate death’**” (Edersheim emphasis added). The victim was stripped and tied by his wrists to a short post, exposing his arched back to his tormenter. A whip consisting of a handle to which were attached several leather cords with pieces of bone and nails affixed to their ends relentlessly flogged the criminal until his flesh was tattered, exposing muscles, bones and perhaps entrails. “[S]even out of ten men died, literally beaten to death” (Varner 9). Prophetic Scripture about the scourging of the Messiah indicates the severity of it tore the flesh of our Lord into deep furrows (Psalm 35:15; 129:3; Isaiah 50:6).

After the scourging, the victim was forced to carry at least part of his cross to the crucifixion site. Crucifixion sites were outside cities on a prominent hill and near a popular highway (Hebrews 13:12). The tablet identifying the criminal and his crime was carried by a herald ahead of the victim (Varner 9).

The criminal was either tied to or nailed to a wooden cross. “Arrived at the place of execution, the sufferer was stripped naked...” (*McClintock and Strong*). Nails were driven through the wrists into the crossbeam versus the hands to help prevent one’s flesh from tearing away from the nails under the weight of the body. The feet were either nailed with two nails to the upright post or using one nail through both ankles atop each other (*Nelson’s*). “The cross was then driven into the ground, so that the feet of the condemned were a foot or two above the earth (in pictures of the crucifixion the cross generally much too large and high)... (*McClintock and Strong*). The combination of massive wounds from scourging and new wounds from the nails of crucifixion left one’s whole body a severely wounded, putrefied sore (Isaiah 1:6). Usually victims of Roman crucifixion lingered in slow, excruciating death over the next 36 hours, but some crucified persons barely held on to life for three days, and occasionally longer (“nine days,” *New Unger’s*) – depending upon physical conditioning and variables such as the extent of scourging.

The suffering of death by crucifixion was intense, especially in hot climates. Severe local inflammation, coupled with an insignificant bleeding of the jagged wounds, produced traumatic fever, which was aggravated [by] the exposure to the heat of the sun, the strained (sic) of the body and insufferable thirst. The swelled [flesh] about the rough nails and the torn lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood [i.e., due to improper circulation] and a terrific throbbing headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread foreboding. **The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths.** Tetanus not rarely supervened and the rigors of the attending convulsions would tear at the wounds and add to the burden of pain, till at last the bodily forces were exhausted and the victim sank to unconsciousness and death. The sufferings were so frightful that “even among the raging passions of war pity was sometimes excited” (BJ, V, xi, 1). (ISBE emphasis added)

The one to be crucified was stripped naked of all his clothes, and then followed the most awful moment of all. He was laid down upon the implement of torture. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams, and at the centre of the open palms the point of a huge iron nail was placed, which, by the blow of a mallet, was driven home into the wood. Then through either foot separately, or possibly through both together, as they were placed one over the other, another huge nail tore its way through the quivering flesh. ...to prevent the hands and feet being torn away by the weight of the body, which could not “rest upon nothing but four great wounds,” there was, about the centre of the cross, a wooden projection strong enough to support, at least in part, a human body, which soon became a weight of agony. Then the “accursed tree” with its living human burden was slowly heaved up and the end fixed firmly in a hole in the ground. The feet were but a little raised above the earth. The victim was in full reach of every hand that might choose to strike. A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible and ghastly – dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds, all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries, especially of the head and stomach, became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and, while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst. Such was the death to which Christ was doomed. (qtd. in *Smith’s*)

Customarily, four soldiers and a centurion stood guard at a crucifixion to prevent rescue of the victim (John 19:23; Matthew 27:54). The Romans allowed in Israel some variance to the usual procedure for crucifixion. Outside of Israel, victims of crucifixion were left to rot on their crosses, and their bodies were ravaged by scavenger birds and dogs. The Law of Moses forbade the hanging of a body on a tree overnight, which rule was applied likewise to crucifixions on crosses (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Acts 5:30; 10:39; Galatians 3:13). The Romans permitted the breaking of the leg bones of persons being crucified to hasten their deaths so their bodies could be removed from the crosses before end of day (John 19:31-34).

Jesus did not just die for you and me, he voluntarily submitted to the most horrible of physical deaths so that we could live spiritually. “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary has fundamental significance to Christianity. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross was not a surprise. Old Testament prophecy foretold that the Messiah would humble Himself to such a death (scourging and crucifixion) (Psalm 22:16-18; 69:21; Isaiah 53:1-12). Jesus, Himself, foretold that He would suffer crucifixion on the Roman cross (Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27).

...[T]he time of our Saviour’s crucifixion is recorded by Mark to be “*the third hour;*” that is, the whole space from nine o’clock to twelve was not quite gone, though it was near at an end; and by the evangelist here it is said, that it was “*about the sixth hour;*” that is, near our twelve o’clock. (John 19:14) (Poole)

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the culmination of His earthly ministry to save the world from its sins (John 3:16-17; 1 John 3:16). The Christian’s imitation of the crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection of Christ leads to salvation (Galatians 2:20; 6:14; Romans 6:3-13). By means of the cross, Jesus Christ made reconciliation of humanity (Jew and Gentile) to an infinitely holy God possible (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20).

Other factors directly relating to Christianity have to do with the cross of Christ. Through the cross of Christ, the Old Testament was replaced with the New Testament (Colossians 2:14). Through the crucifixion, Jesus Christ became the anti-type of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:46; John 19:33, 36).

In addition, imagine for a moment the shame or curse of being hanged on a tree that Jesus Christ suffered in our stead. Under Judaism, hanging a dead body on a tree was a signboard of disgrace and shame (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Jesus Christ, the Holy Son of God, suffered disgrace and shame that rightly belongs to you and me (Galatians 3:13). The ignoble or humiliating death of Jesus Christ on the cross for many in the first century was a stumbling block to belief, but Christians turned the awful death of Jesus Christ into a glorious memorial to salvation through Christ (1 Corinthians 1:18, 23). The shame of the cross suffered for us by Jesus resulted in His coronation as King Jesus, King of our lives (Hebrews 12:2).

However, many have made themselves enemies of the cross, including both non-Christians and erring Christians (Philippians 3:18). Especially Christians need to be careful that they do not make the “cross of Christ” of “none effect” by substituting human wisdom in place of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17). Many today also are offended by the cross of Christ (Galatians 5:11).

Jesus Christ humbled himself by laying aside for a while the glory due Deity in heaven to die as a sacrifice for sinful mankind – you and me (Philippians 2:7-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). “But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is meaningless to you and me, unless it has a positive effect on our lives. Jesus Christ left the glorious domain of heaven to be a *suffering Savior* for humanity (John 3:17). Unless we take advantage of the Gospel of Christ, our Lord’s leaving heaven and His vicarious sacrifice on the cross of Calvary were pointless (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 5:9). Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost, but we must cooperate with God (Luke 19:10; Philippians 2:12).

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is severely discounted whenever anyone, and especially Christians, fail to practice Christianity in their every waking moments. Jesus is not the Lord of those who neglect or

refuse to do His bidding (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21). Mankind, and especially Christians, are obligated to think good things and do good things (Philippians 4:8; Titus 2:12). Christians are obligated to worship God at least weekly in His own appointed way (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Christians must evangelize the world with the Gospel, edify themselves with the Word of God and extend benevolence to Christians and non-Christians when they can (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 2:2; Galatians 6:10). Christians must be zealous of good works (Titus 2:14; James 2:18).

Think about how our Lord was affixed to the cross of Calvary. Literally, of course, iron nails driven through His flesh into a rough wooden beam fastened Jesus to the cross. However, Jesus had the power Himself to come down from the cross, or to call legions of angels to free him and destroy this world (Matthew 27:40, 42; 26:53). Essentially, though, not the nails, but **your sins and mine held our Lord tightly to the old rugged cross of Calvary**. Every sin you and I commit is one more nail attempting to crucify Jesus Christ again (Hebrews 6:6). A form of the Greek word for “cross” or “crucifixion,” a compound word meaning “again” and “crucify,” appears in Hebrews 6:6 to describe apostate Christians who were “virtually guilty of crucifying Christ again” (Vine).

In conclusion, note these points: “To the Romans, the cross never had any symbolical meaning being regarded as a means of punishment and execution. With the spread of Christianity, the cross subsequently acquired momentous historical, theological and legal symbolism...” (Varner 12). In a sense in its rudimentary form, crucifixion on a cross was comparable to execution by guillotine, the gallows, drawing and quartering, firing squad, the electric chair or lethal injection. Everything about being crucified was calculated to cause enormous shame for the victim as well as his family and associates, besides the horror of that death. However, **for the child of God, the cross is the emblem of victory through Jesus Christ, our Savior**.

Is Jesus Christ your Savior today? Jesus is not your Savior today if you are a Christian whose sins are nailing Jesus Christ to the cross again (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Jesus Christ is not your Savior today if you have never obeyed the Gospel by crucifying the old man of sin and by being buried by baptism into the death of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-6).

Works Cited

- Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, n.d.
- International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE)*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.
- McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2000.
- Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.
- New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.
- Poole, Matthew. “John 19:14.” *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 1997.
- Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2003.
- Varner, W. Terry. *Origin and Use of the Cross*. Marietta: Therefore Stand Publications, 1999.
- Vine, W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1981.

Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the core of the Gospel message preached in the first century, and it remains the heart of the Gospel message throughout the New Testament. “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

One simply cannot overemphasize the significance of the resurrection of Christ. Among other considerations, the hope of our resurrection depends upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ. “Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you” (2 Corinthians 4:14). “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Why Jesus' Resurrection Matters

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, never to return thereto, is a critical aspect of Christianity. Had Jesus Christ not resurrected from the grave, there would have been absolutely **no hope for sin-laden, lost humanity!** Though Jesus Christ was the Son of God, without His resurrection human hopes would have been forever dashed. Though Jesus Christ was the long prophesied Savior or Messiah, without His resurrection He could have saved no one. Although Jesus Christ shed His precious blood on Calvary's cross, without the resurrection its purchase price would have been ineffective. Though Jesus Christ had fulfilled all other prophesies, without the resurrection all of that would have been meaningless. Though multitudes of souls under Patriarchy and Judaism faithfully obeyed God, without the resurrection of Jesus Christ none of that would have gotten anyone closer to an eternity in heaven with God. All would be vanity without the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The church could not have been established without the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the ultimate climax of His mission to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Unlike others who had been resurrected from the dead, Jesus Christ did not die again. Other men's works cease at death, but not so with Jesus Christ whose work included His own resurrection from the grave. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the deathblow to Satan and the assurance that we will be resurrected from the grave someday. Failure to resurrect from the grave would have disproved Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah and the Son of God. Simply put, **without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there would be no Christianity!**

When Was Jesus' Resurrection?

Jesus Christ resurrected from the grave on Sunday, April 9, A.D. 30 (or A.D. 33 depending whether allowances are taken into consideration for an error in our calendar). Jesus Christ was crucified Friday, April 7. Many awesome events transpired that day: an earthquake, the veil of the Temple was torn in half, darkness engulfed the earth and dead saints walked throughout Jerusalem. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus hurriedly buried Jesus Christ before the Sabbath began that evening at 6:00 p.m.

Saturday, April 8, the Sanhedrin persuaded Pilate to seal and guard the tomb of Jesus Christ. The Jewish leaders did not expect Jesus Christ to resurrect, but they feared the disciples would steal the body of Jesus and claim that he resurrected. Pilate provided soldiers for the tomb to be guarded until after the third day.

Sunday, April 9, Jesus Christ arose! The world calls this day "Easter Sunday," but the Bible contains no religious instruction commemorating it as a holy day. An angel rolled back the stone sealing the tomb. The guards were frightened by the resurrection of the Lord but were bribed by the Jews to say Jesus' disciples stole his body while they slept. Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and other women went to the tomb while it was yet dark, but they found the tomb empty. They reported the empty tomb to Peter and John who ran to the tomb to see for themselves.

Resurrection Day Appearances of Jesus

The resurrected Christ made several appearances on the day of his resurrection. Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Christ (Mark 16:9); Jesus had cast seven demons out of her. She told the apostles but they did not believe her (Mark 16:10-11). A group of faithful women also saw the resurrected Lord (Matthew 28:9-10). Jesus Christ appeared to two disciples as they walked in the country, but they were not believed when they told other disciples (Mark 16:12-13). Jesus Christ appeared to Peter (Luke 24:34). Jesus appeared to ten of the apostles (John 20:13-23). Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ was already dead, and Thomas was not present with the rest of the apostles (John 20:24).

Additional Resurrection Appearances

The resurrected Christ showed Himself alive for 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). On April 16, Jesus Christ appeared to the remaining eleven apostles, including Thomas (John 20:26-28). Later, Jesus appeared to seven apostles at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23). Another occasion of a great catch of fish

occurred. Jesus impressed Peter with the need to be loyal and humble by repeatedly asking Peter if Peter loved Christ. Jesus Christ appeared to the eleven apostles at the Ascension (Luke 24; Acts 1). Obviously, the candidates for apostle to replace Judas had seen the resurrected Lord as that was one of the requirements to be an apostle (Acts 1:21-23). Over 500 brethren at one time saw the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:6).

Post Ascension Resurrection Appearances

The resurrected Christ appeared to some after his Ascension. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, saw the resurrected Christ just before Stephen died from stoning (Acts 7:55-56). Saul of Tarsus (the apostle Paul) saw the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1 Corinthians 15:8).

Summary

The death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus Christ was prophesied. Jesus Christ took the form of flesh, lived on the earth, died and was resurrected. The enemies of the Jesus Christ tried in vain to keep Him in the tomb, and they could offer no evidence that He had not resurrected, which most certainly they would have done from Pentecost forward when Jesus Christ was preached that He arose from the grave (Acts 2:24, 31-32; 3:15; 4:10, 33; 5:30-32; 10:40-41; 13:30-34; 17:2-3, 31; 26:23; Romans 1:4; etc.). The resurrection of Jesus Christ was proved by appearances in which He appeared at different hours of the day and on several different days. Jesus walked, talked and ate food with his disciples.

The disciples who had mourned His death and were skeptical concerning His resurrection were convinced that He resurrected, and they were willing to die torturous deaths if necessary while defending the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Over 500 brethren had seen the resurrected Christ at one time, a sufficient body of witnesses to satisfy any judge and jury.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ became the basis for the promotion of Christianity. Without the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christianity would be empty and useless (1 Corinthians 15:19). The heart of Christianity is contained in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4! “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for you and me, and He resurrected so that your sins and my sins could be remitted. “And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Corinthians 15:17). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is meaningless to anyone who either has become an erring child of God or has never been baptized for the remission of sins (Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:26; Acts 2:38).

Ascension

Comparatively speaking, the Bible treats the Ascension of Christ less often in its pages than several other Christian doctrines. Yet, many biblical passages are more or less dependent upon and imply the Ascension of Christ. Irrespective of the amount of space dedicated to the Ascension of our Lord in the Bible, it is a crucial and cardinal doctrine of Christianity. For instance, the Ascension of Jesus Christ enabled Him to act as Intercessor (Romans 8:34), Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) and Advocate (1 John 2:1) for Christians before Almighty God. In addition, note: “The spiritual value of the Ascension lies, not in Christ’s physical remoteness, but in His spiritual nearness. He is free from earthly limitations, and His life above is the promise and guarantee of ours” (*ISBE*).

The Ascension Defined

The Ascension of Jesus Christ is “...his visible passing from earth to heaven in the presence of his disciples, on the Mount of Olives, forty days after the resurrection...” (*McClintock and Strong*). Three accounts of the occurrence of the Ascension appear in the New Testament. “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19 NKJV).

“And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50-51).

Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey. (Acts 1:9-12)

The Incarnation through the Virgin Birth was the mechanism by which Jesus Christ came to earth. Conversely, the Ascension was the instrument by which Jesus Christ transferred from this terrestrial sphere to the celestial realm.

There is just not much information in the New Testament respecting the activity of the Ascension. While conversing with His apostles atop Mount Olivet, our Lord arose into the air and continued to rise until the clouds concealed Him. Two angels nearby on the mountain informed the disciples that one day Jesus Christ would return in similar manner as He departed (Acts 1:11). “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7).

Prior Ascensions

The Old Testament records two ascensions respectively of prophets of God, though unlike Jesus, they did not die and resurrect from the dead prior to their ascensions. The first of the two references lacks any elaboration. “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). A New Testament passage corroborates Enoch’s ascension. “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Hebrews 11:5-6).

Then, 2 Kings 2:1-18 chronicles the ascension of the prophet Elijah. Unlike the information pertaining to the ascension of Enoch, an elaborate description – painting a vivid picture in the human mind – depicts Elijah’s ascension. The fanfare with which Elijah climbed into sky was more flamboyant than Jesus’ ascent into the heavens. “Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that **suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire**, and separated the two of them; and **Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven**” (2 Kings 2:11). The common factor in the three ascensions was the removal of the prophets and Jesus Christ from the earth to heaven.

Predictions of the Ascension of Christ

Predictions or prophecies of the Ascension of Christ appear in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. For instance, one learns from Acts 2 that Psalm 110 pertained to the Ascension of our Lord. Part of the first recorded Gospel sermon strings together the **death** of Christ (Acts 2:23), His **resurrection** (Acts 2:24-31) and Christ’s **Ascension** (Acts 2:32-36).

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.’” “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:32-36; cf., Psalm 110:1-7)

Furthermore, Jesus Christ repeatedly advised His disciples that eventually He would ascend and not be with them personally anymore. “...because I go to My Father and you see Me no more” (John 16:10).

Doubtless, since they had never observed an ascension before or anything comparable to it, they were as puzzled about the Ascension of Christ beforehand as they were about other matters, such as the nature of Christ's kingdom (Acts 1:6).

Consider these utterances of Christ to His disciples about the impending Ascension. "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (John 6:62). "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). "You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). "Then some of His disciples said among themselves, 'What is this that He says to us, A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father?'" (John 16:17). "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father" (John 16:28). "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'" (John 20:17).

Allusions to the Ascension of Christ

The New Testament freely refers to Jesus Christ being in heaven, which is the consequence of His Ascension. Some passages say in so many words that Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven (Ephesians 4:8-10; 1 Timothy 3:16). Other, indirect references imply that the Ascension has taken place since Jesus Christ is in heaven now. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). "He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10). See also Acts 3:21; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 1:3; 9:24; 1 Peter 3:22.

Summary

The Ascension of Christ is so much more than merely moving His habitation from the earth to heaven. First, the Ascension provided an explanation of the whereabouts of the resurrected Lord. Secondly, the Ascension was Christ's grand entry back into heaven and the signal of the commencement of the next phase in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ relative to the salvation of human souls.

Works Cited

International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE). CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2006.
McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2006.

Creator and Sustainer of Creation

Jesus Christ is principally responsible for the creation of all that exists. In addition, Jesus Christ is responsible for the continued existence of all creation. The array of passages are numerous that directly attribute to Jesus Christ the role of Creator.

Member of the Godhead

The Godhead, comprised of three divine Persons, created everything. The Godhead is comprised of three Persons, and commonly, this Bible doctrine is known as the Trinity or the Triune God. Three persons of the one Godhead appear in several New Testament passages (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 1:30-35; 3:21-22; 24:49; John 14:16-17, 25-26; Acts 2:32-33; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-6; 2 Timothy 1:3, 13-14; Hebrews 2:3-4; 6:4-6; 10:29-31; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 5:4-6; Jude 20-21). Old Testament passages also acknowledge the three divine persons in one Godhead (Isaiah 42:1; 61:1-2; Luke 4:18; Hebrews 1:10;

Psalm 102:25-27). Otherwise, Scripture refers to the three persons in one God as the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9). We may find it difficult to understand, but the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit are one in that Godhead (John 10:30).

The collective cooperation of the divine persons in the one Godhead created everything that is. Plural pronouns in Scripture evidence the plurality of divine persons responsible for creation (Genesis 1:26; cf. Genesis 3:22; 11:7). The plural noun for God in Scripture indicates the plurality of divine persons responsible for creation (Genesis 1:26 *Elohim*). “The supreme moment of creation arrived as God created man. The narrative presents God as calling on the heavenly court, or the other two members of the Trinity, to center all attention on this event” (Wycliffe). “The text tells us he was the work of ‘ELOHIYM (OT:430), the Divine Plurality, marked here more distinctly by the plural pronouns US and OUR; and to show that he was the masterpiece of God’s creation, all the persons in the Godhead are represented as united in counsel and effort to produce this astonishing creature” (Clarke). “Its form is plural, but the construction is uniformly singular, i.e. it governs a singular verb or adjective, unless used of heathen divinities (Ps 96:5; 97:7). It is characteristic of Hebrew that extension, magnitude and dignity, as well as actual multiplicity, are expressed by the plural” (*ISBE*).

Creator

Scripture emphasizes the role of Jesus Christ in creation. Many New Testament passages frankly attribute creation to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was co-eternal with God the Father, and Jesus Christ created everything that was created (John 1:1-3). Jesus Christ was the agent of God the Father for the creation of everything (1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9). Jesus Christ the Creator of the world came to the world (John 1:10).

Sustainer

Scripture also affirms that Jesus Christ sustains all creation. The same power with which Jesus created everything, He uses to sustain that creation (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). Hence, Jesus Christ is the Ruler of His creation (Revelation 3:14). “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the **ruler** of God’s creation” (Revelation 3:14 NIV emphasis added). “And to the messenger of the assembly of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the witness--the faithful and true – the **chief** of the creation of God” (*Young’s Literal Translation* emphasis added). “The beginning of the creation of God...Not the first of creatures as the Arians held and Unitarians do now, but the originating source of creation through whom God works (Col 1:15,18, a passage probably known to the Laodiceans, John 1:3; Heb 1:2, as is made clear by Rev 1:18; 2:8; 3:21; 5:13)” (*Robertson’s*). “The beginner, or author...” (*Vincent’s*).

Summary

Jesus Christ is the Master of many roles: God in the flesh or incarnate, Master Teacher, Sacrifice, Savior, King and Judge. Jesus Christ is also the Creator and sustainer of creation. Jesus Christ Who created all things is also the only one through Whom mortals have access to redemption and the Father (Mark 16:16; John 14:6). Erring Christians who have strayed can return to the Lord for another cleansing (Isaiah 44:22; Jeremiah 24:7; Hebrews 8:10-12).

Works Cited

- Clarke, Adam. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.
- International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE)*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.
- Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1997.
- Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1997.
- Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1962.

Lawgiver & Prophet

Jesus Christ is the **Lawgiver** of the New Testament, whereas Moses was the lawgiver of the Old Testament (John 1:17; 7:19). Jesus Christ is the Great **Prophet** of the New Testament, whereas Moses was the great prophet of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; John 1:45; Acts 3:22; 7:37). The various biblical names, titles and functions ascribed to Jesus Christ commingle into one grand, divine character, including Lawgiver and Prophet. “As in Judaism, messianic titles and functions merge into one another. Thus Jesus is the kingly as well as the prophetic Messiah in Jn. 6:14-15; Mt. 21:9ff. He is Christ as well as prophet in Acts 3: 18ff” (Kittel and Friedrich). “Moses was ruler, lawgiver, deliverer, and prophet; Christ was all this to the people, but they rejected him” (Boles). Jesus is Lawgiver and Prophet.

Lawgiver

What does the Bible mean by the use of the word “lawgiver”? The English word “lawgiver” appears only six times in both testaments combined: five in the Old Testament and once in the New Testament. However, the Hebrew word sometimes translated “lawgiver” appears 19 times. It pertains to making laws. Ultimately, Jehovah is the Lawgiver, the One from whom all divine law comes (Isaiah 33:22 and James 4:12). However, God appointed Moses as lawgiver of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ as Lawgiver of the New Testament.

Moses occupied a special position as lawgiver of the Old Testament. Moses was more than a prophet, for he was a lawgiver with whom God communicated directly instead of through visions and dreams (Numbers 12:6-7; cf. Deuteronomy 34:10). The apostle John wrote that Moses gave the Law (Old Testament), whereas Jesus Christ personally brought the Gospel (New Testament) (John 1:17; 7:19). Moses did not author the Law or Old Testament, but he was the one who inaugurated it for God among men. Likewise, Jesus Christ inaugurated the Old Testament’s replacement, the New Testament, for God among men.

Jesus Christ as antitype to Moses, is the Lawgiver of the New Testament. The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ definitively transfers the responsibility as God’s lawgiver from Moses to Jesus Christ (Matthew 17:5; cf. Matthew 3:17; John 12:28; 2 Peter 1:17-18). Commenting on Matthew 17:5, one commentator wrote:

In the presence of Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the head of the prophets, God pointed out Jesus and declared that he was his Son and that he now should be heard. The withdrawal of Moses and Elijah was suggestive; a greater than both of these remained. ...Moses and Elijah had disappeared as suddenly as they had appeared; they had withdrawn from the scene and left only Jesus to occupy the field as a lawgiver and prophet. (Boles)

Prophet

What does the Bible mean by the use of the word “prophet” respecting either Moses or Jesus Christ? Prophets of God sometimes were both foretellers and forth tellers, more often the latter.

The ordinary Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi*, derived from a verb signifying “to bubble forth” like a fountain; hence the word means one who *announces* or *pours forth* the declarations of God. The English word comes from the Greek *prophētēs* which signifies in classical Greek *one who speaks for another*, especially *one who speaks for a god*, and so interprets his will to man; hence its essential meaning is “an interpreter.” The use of the word in its modern sense as “one who predicts” is post-classical. (Smith)

There were many Old Testament prophets and New Testament prophets as well besides the special references to Moses and Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:11).

The first person whom the Bible calls a prophet (Heb. *nabi*) was Abraham (Gn. 20:7; cf. Ps. 105:15), but OT prophecy received its normative form in the life and person of Moses, who constituted a standard of comparison for all future prophets (Dt. 18:15-19; 34:10;

Messiah). Every feature which characterized the true prophet of Yahweh in the classical tradition of OT prophecy was first found in Moses. (*New Bible Dictionary*)

Moses occupied a special position as the great prophet of the Old Testament. The relationship that Moses sustained with God as His special prophet exceeded that of any other prophets, until Jesus Christ came into the world (Deuteronomy 34:10; cf. Numbers 12:6-7). Moses was the great Old Testament prophet who foreshadowed the great New Testament prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). There was no prophet of the same caliber and function of Moses until Jesus Christ.

Great Prophet of the New Testament

Jesus Christ as antitype to Moses, is the Great Prophet of the New Testament. Jesus was recognized as a prophet of God by the common people in first century Israel (Matthew 21:11; Luke 7:16). Because of His miracles and teaching (validated by His miracles), Jesus was viewed by people of His generation as the Prophet of whom Moses prophesied (John 6:14; 7:40). Philip declared to his brother Nathaniel that Jesus is the Prophet of whom Moses prophesied (John 1:45). The Samaritans believed that Jesus Christ was the Messiah or Prophet of whom Moses wrote (they only revered the first five books of the Old Testament) (John 4:25-26, 42). “But to be a Prophet meant to a Samaritan that He was the Messiah, since they acknowledged none other after Moses” (Edersheim). Jesus Christ himself applied Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 to Himself, and He declared that had the Jews believed the prophesies of Moses, they would have recognized Him as the Prophet of whom Moses wrote (John 5:46). Jesus claimed to be the Prophet of which the Old Testament prophesied (Luke 4:16-21; 13:33; John 4:26) (Messiah or Prophet to the Samaritans). God the Father declared that Jesus was the One, superseding Moses, to whom mankind should hearken (Matthew 17:5). Commenting on Matthew 17:5, one commentator wrote, “Jesus is the prophet and the lawgiver now. He is the one who speaks from heaven, and the mediator of the new covenant. (Heb. 12:22-25.)” (Dorris).

Prophet Jesus is superior to the prophet Moses, and the New Testament institution is superior to the Old Testament institution (Hebrews 3:2-6). Moses as prophet and lawgiver administered God’s law while on earth. Jesus Christ as the Great Prophet and Lawgiver administers God’s law (Gospel or New Testament) from heaven.

That Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 has specific reference to Jesus Christ as the great New Testament Prophet cannot be discounted since inspired writers apply it to our Lord (John 1:45; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). “Deut 18:15 It is, however, to be observed, that while Moses introduced the Old dispensation, Christ brought in the New, of which the former was a type as it is written” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). Remember, several of the names, titles and functions ascribed in Scripture to Jesus merge, including Lawgiver and Prophet. “The Mediator is not only the arch Prophet and High Priest, but He is also the King of kings...” (Pink).

The Messiah is the same person as “the seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15), “the seed of Abraham” (Gen. 22:18), the “Prophet like unto Moses” (Deut. 18:15), “the priest after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4), “the rod out of the stem of Jesse” (Isa. 11:1, 10), the “Immanuel,” the virgin’s son (Isa. 7:14), “the branch of Jehovah” (Isa. 4:2), and “the messenger of the covenant” (Mal. 3:1). This is he “of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write.” The Old Testament Scripture is full of prophetic declarations regarding the Great Deliverer and the work he was to accomplish. Jesus the Christ is Jesus the Great Deliverer, the Anointed One, the Saviour of men. (Easton)

Jesus Christ as the Great Prophet and Lawgiver was authorized to replace the Old Testament with the New Testament (Matthew 28:18 ASV; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8:6).

Moses, in God’s name, told them that, in the fulness of time, they should have a prophet raised up among them, one of their own nation, that should be like unto him (Deut. xviii. 15, 18), – a ruler and a deliverer, a judge and a lawgiver, like him, – who should therefore have authority to change the customs that he had delivered, and to bring in a better hope, as *the Mediator of a better testament*. (Henry)

As the Great Lawgiver and Prophet, we today must hearken to Jesus Christ (Matthew 17:5; John 5:24; 12:48). Jesus said to believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). After baptism, Jesus expects Christians to remain faithful, but there is a remedy for the sins of Christians, too (Revelation 2:10; Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

- Boles, H. Leo. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- . *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1989. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- Dorris, C.E.W. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Mark*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1992. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- Easton, M.G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. n.p.: n.p., n.d.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, n.d.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Complete Commentary in Six Volumes*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, n.d.
- Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.
- Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- New Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1962.
- Pink, Arthur W. *The Life of David*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, n.d.
- Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2003.

High Priest

As High Priest, Jesus Christ does for us before the Heavenly Father what we cannot do for ourselves, namely making intercession with God. “Here on earth our Lord was a priest in a preeminent sense, both in His sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world and in His intercession. He is also our present High Priest, interceding for us in heaven” (*New Unger's*). As High Priest, Jesus Christ leads Christians as the New Testament priesthood.

After the Order of Melchisedec

Jesus Christ is a Priest after the order of Melchisedec. The priesthood of Melchisedec differed from the Aaronic priesthood under the Law of Moses. Melchisedec's priesthood did not pertain to a certain tribe or family within a tribe like the Aaronic priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-3; Genesis 14:18-20). The priesthood after the order of Melchisedec is “unchangeable” and is ‘forever’ or ‘continues’ (Hebrews 6:20; 7:23-24, 28).

The writer of Hebrews presented evidence that the priesthood of Melchisedec was superior to the priesthood under the Law of Moses (Hebrews 7:4-10). Consequently, since the priesthood of Jesus Christ is after the order of Melchisedec, then our Lord's priesthood also is superior to the Aaronic priesthood (Hebrews 7:11). The priesthood under Christianity is different from and superior to the priesthood under Judaism (Hebrews 7:12-17).

God the Father made Jesus Christ our High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 5:10). God called Jesus Christ to be His Priest after the order of Melchisedec in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Hebrews 5:4-6; Psalms 2:7; 110:4). Jesus Christ was made High Priest with a divinely made oath (Hebrews 7:20-21).

High Priest in Heaven

Jesus Christ is our High Priest, and He is called “the Apostle and High Priest” (Hebrews 3:1). God the Father appointed Jesus Christ to be our High Priest (Hebrews 5:5), and as High Priest, Jesus Christ is “over

the house of God” (Hebrews 10:21). It is as our High Priest, Jesus Christ is “merciful and faithful” (Hebrews 2:17).

Jesus Christ as our High Priest has “passed into the heavens” (Hebrews 4:14), and He “is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1). However, Jesus Christ would not qualify to be a priest if His priesthood pertained to Judaism (Hebrews 7:13-14; 8:4).

Superior Priesthood

Jesus Christ, our High Priest, is superior to the high priests under Judaism. First, Jesus Christ is a superior High Priest because though “tempted as we are,” He is “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Since Jesus Christ came in the flesh and was tempted in the same ways we are tempted, our High Priest has compassion on us. As High Priest, Jesus Christ ministers in a greater tabernacle than in which Aaronic priests ministered (Hebrews 9:11). The superiority of Jesus Christ as High Priest includes making a single offering rather than daily and annual offerings (Hebrews 9:25; 10:11-12). Unlike other high priests that served under the Law of Moses, Jesus Christ as our High Priest “is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26-28).

The purpose of a high priest is to “offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Hebrews 5:1). Hence, Jesus Christ as our High Priest was “appointed” to “offer both gifts and sacrifices” (Hebrews 8:3). Whereas the high priest under Judaism went into the Holy of Holies once annually to atone for sins, Jesus Christ as our High Priest entered once into the true Holy of Holies, not with animal blood, but with his own blood (Hebrews 9:7-12, 25).

Christians as Subordinate Priests

Christians are subordinate priests to Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). “Prayer, praise, the contribution, indeed, all the items and acts of worship are thus figuratively included in the sacrifices which Christians, as priests officiating under Christ, the High Priest (Hebrews 9:11-28), are to offer in the spiritual temple, the church...” (Woods).

Summary

In conclusion, Jesus Christ is everything that the high priest under Judaism was and more also.

The priests of Israel were but dim shadows, obscure sketches and drafts of the one Great Priest of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Without drawing out at length the parallelism between the type and the archetype, we may sum up in a few brief sentences the perfection found in the priestly character of Christ: (1) Christ as Priest is appointed of God (Heb 5:5). (2) He is consecrated with an oath (Heb 7:20-22). (3) He is sinless (Heb 7:26). (4) His priesthood is unchangeable (Heb 7:23-24). (5) His offering is perfect and final (Heb 9:25-28; 10:12). (6) His intercession is all-prevailing (Heb 7:25). (7) As God and man in one Person He is a perfect Mediator (Heb 1-2). (*ISBE*)

“But the atonement made by the High Priest, under the Law, was but a shadow of the atonement which Christ made by the offering of his own blood for the sins of the people” (Milligan). In addition, the priesthood of Jesus Christ is unique like the priesthood of Melchisedec. Finally, Christians are subordinate priests to Jesus Christ our High Priest.

As our sinless, High Priest in heaven with God, Jesus Christ is our perfect Mediator or Intercessor (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:25; 8:6). However, Jesus Christ our High Priest can only intercede and mediate for faithful children of God (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:22; Revelation 2:10).

Works Cited

International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE). CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.

Milligan, Robert. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. Nashville: 1989. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.

New Unger's Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.

Woods, Guy N. *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Peter, John and Jude*. Gospel Advocate Commentaries. Nashville: 1991. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.

Head of His Church, Body & House

The concept of one being the “head” of something is a familiar one (e.g., heads of corporations, animals and people have heads that direct their bodies, heads of families, etc.). *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* lists 21 definitions for the noun “head,” four definitions for the “head” as an adjective and 10 definitions for the word “head” used as a verb, for a total of 35 primary definitions. Meanings for the word “head” include: the part of the animal or human body having the brain and the mouth, one side of a coin, an individual as in counting heads, the upper of something such as a stream or the opposite of the foot of something, director or leader, the leading element of something, the top of something, the toilet on a ship, place of honor, headlines pertaining to the printed page, something rising to the top, a machinery attachment, to behead or decapitate, a course set for travel, to originate and to go in a certain direction.

Scripture represents Jesus Christ as being Head of His church, Head of His spiritual body and Head of His spiritual house or family. Several of the definitions for the word “head” apply to Jesus Christ in His relationship to the church, His spiritual body and His spiritual family. Let's compare the appropriate definitions of the word “head” with biblically described roles of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Head of His Church

The apostle Paul distinctly and repeatedly wrote by divine inspiration that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. Paul affirmed in two chapters of the Ephesian epistle that Jesus Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23). In Ephesians 1:22-23 and 5:23, the apostle Paul used the words “church” and “body” interchangeably. Paul also emphasized to the church at Colosse that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church while He is also Head of the body (Colossians 1:18).

Only Jesus Christ is the Head of His church. This means that Jesus Christ alone is the brains and mouth for the church. Our Lord alone is the director or leader of His church. Jesus alone occupies the place of chief honor in the church. Jesus Christ alone has arisen to the top respecting His church. Jesus Christ alone as Head of His church determines the direction or course of the church. No one else, and especially no one on earth, is head of the church that Jesus established (contrary to what religious leaders may claim for themselves).

Jesus Christ Is the Head of His Spiritual Body

The apostle Paul distinctly and repeatedly wrote by divine inspiration that Jesus Christ is the Head of His spiritual body. We already observed that the apostle Paul used the words “church” and “body” interchangeably in Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23; Colossians 1:18. In Ephesians 4:15-16, as well as Colossians 2:19, the apostle Paul described the church as a body with its many members over which Jesus Christ is the Head (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Romans 12:4-5).

Only Jesus Christ is the Head of His spiritual body. This means that Jesus Christ alone is the brains and mouth for His spiritual body. Our Lord alone is the director or leader of His spiritual body. Jesus alone occupies the place of chief honor in His spiritual body. Jesus Christ alone has arisen to the top respecting His spiritual body. Jesus Christ alone as Head of His spiritual body determines the direction or course of His spiritual body. No one else, and especially no one on earth, is head of our Lord's spiritual body (contrary to what religious leaders may claim for themselves).

Jesus Christ Is the Head of His Spiritual House or Family

The apostle Paul distinctly and repeatedly wrote by divine inspiration that Jesus Christ is the Head of His spiritual house or family. The apostle used the words “church” and “house of God” as interchangeable

terms (1 Timothy 3:15). *Robertson's* records of 1 Timothy 3:15 about the words "house of God": "Probably here 'household of God,' that is 'the family of God.'" Likewise, the writer of Hebrews acknowledged that Jesus Christ is "over his own house" (Hebrews 3:2-6). The apostle Peter added that Christians are the spiritual stones with which Christ's spiritual house is built (1 Peter 2:5).

Only Jesus Christ is the Head of His spiritual house or family. This means that Jesus Christ alone is the brains and mouth for His spiritual house or family. Our Lord alone is the director or leader of His spiritual family. Jesus alone occupies the place of chief honor in His spiritual house. Jesus Christ alone has arisen to the top respecting His spiritual family. Jesus Christ alone as Head of His spiritual house determines the direction or course of His spiritual house. No one else, and especially no one on earth, is head of our Lord's spiritual house or family (contrary to what religious leaders may claim for themselves).

Jesus Christ Is "Head" in Other Senses, Too

The designation "Head" appears in Scripture respecting Jesus Christ in other references as well. Jesus Christ is "the chief cornerstone" (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42-43; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6-7). "CORNERSTONE The stone at the corner of two walls that unites them; specifically, the stone built into one corner of the foundation of an edifice as the actual or nominal starting point of a building" (*New Unger's*). "CORNERSTONE A stone placed at the corner, or the intersecting angle, where two walls of a building come together. In biblical times, buildings were often made of cut, squared stone. By uniting two intersecting walls, a cornerstone helped align the whole building and tie it together" (*Nelson's*). This stone of prophecy that the Jewish leaders rejected but God chose is Jesus Christ (Genesis 49:24; Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33). Jesus Christ is the living cornerstone to the same spiritual building that is comprised of Christians as living stones (1 Peter 2:5-7).

In addition, Jesus Christ is "the head of every man" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Jesus Christ "is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10).

Summary

In conclusion, it is apparent that the church, body and house or family, each of which Jesus Christ heads, are different references to the same divine institution. Since Jesus Christ is Head of the church, and the church and the body are the same thing, then Our Lord is likewise Head of His spiritual body (Ephesians 1:22-23). Colossians 1:18 records this information in reverse; since Jesus Christ is Head of the body, and the body and the church are the same thing, then Our Lord is likewise Head of His church. Jesus Christ is the Head of His spiritual house or family. Jesus Christ is unquestionably Head of His church, His spiritual body, His house or family and everything that matters.

If Jesus Christ is not the Head of your life, then you need to obey the Gospel (Romans 6:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Jesus saves the obedient and adds them to His church, which is His spiritual body and His spiritual family (Hebrews 5:9; Acts 2:47). Those who are already the spiritual stones that comprise our Lord's spiritual house or family need to remain faithful and repent when they stumble in sin (Revelation 2:10; Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft & Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, 1997.

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. CD-ROM. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993.

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.

New Unger's Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.

Messiah & King

The terms Messiah and King relative to Jesus Christ are interrelated. Together, they bring to fruition all the Old Testament prophecies about the redemption of fallen humanity. Jesus is Messiah and King."

Messiah Defined

What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the Messiah? The Word Messiah (OT) or Messias (NT) appears in both testaments. The **Hebrew word** for Messiah is *mashiyach* (maw-shee'-akh), which means "anointed; usually a consecrated person (as a king, priest, or saint); specifically, the Messiah" (*Biblesoft's*). This Hebrew word appears 39 times in Old Testament: 37 times as "anointed" and twice as "Messiah" (Daniel 9:25-26). The "Heb. *mashiyach* in all the thirty-nine instances of its occurring in the Old Testament, is rendered by the LXX [Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT] 'Christos'" (Easton). The **Greek word** for Messiah (Messias) is *Messias* (mes-see'-as), which is "of Hebrew origin" (*Biblesoft's*). Messiah ("Messias") only appears twice in the New Testament (John 1:41; 4:25).

The New Testament more often uses another word as a synonym for Messiah. The Greek word "*christos*" (khris-tos') translated "Christ" means "anointed, i.e. the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus" (*Biblesoft's*). "*Christos* means 'smeared on,' 'anointed,' and as a noun (to' christon) 'ointment.' It never relates to persons in the nonbiblical sphere" (Kittel and Friedrich).

The Hebrew word *mashiach*, transliterated "Messiah," is an adjective made from a verb, and could be translated roughly "anointed one." The New Testament *christos*, made from the verb meaning "anoint," has an equivalent meaning. Thus Messiah and Christ represent the same concept. **(It should be remembered that Christ is not a last name, with Jesus as the first name, as many seem to think.)** (Karleen emphasis added)

To us "Christ" has become a proper name, and is therefore written without the definite article; but, in the body of the gospel narratives, since the identity of Jesus with the promised Messiah is still in question with the people, the article is habitually used, and the name should therefore be translated **"the Christ."** (*Vincent's* emphasis added)

Messi'ah (*anointed*). This word (*Mashiach*) answers to the word *Christ* (*Christos*) in the New Testament, and is applicable in its first sense to any one anointed with the holy oil. The kings of Israel were called *anointed*, from the mode of their consecration. 1 Sam 2:10, 35; 12:3, 5 etc. This word also refers to the expected Prince of the chosen people who was to complete God's purposes for them and to redeem them, and of whose coming the prophets of the old covenant in all time spoke. He was the Messiah, the *Anointed*, i.e. consecrated as the king and prophet by God's appointment. (Smith)

"*Christos*" appears 572 times in the New Testament and is translated as "Christ" in all instances except Acts 10:48 where it is translated as "Lord." "The word Christ is...almost invariably used instead of Messiah in the NT as the official designation of our Lord" (*New Unger's*).

Messiah Prophesied

What does it mean to otherwise lost humanity that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and King? Literally hundreds of Messianic prophecies populate the Old Testament. "The Messianic prophecies are too numerous to be quoted" (Easton). Free and Vos quote another has to having determined "that there are 332 distinct prophecies in the Old Testament that have been literally fulfilled in Christ" (241).

Over 300 prophecies in the Bible speak of Jesus Christ. Specific details given by these prophecies include His tribe (Gen 49:10), His birthplace (Mic 5:2), dates of His birth and death (Dan 9:25-26), His forerunner John the Baptist (Mal 3:1; 4:5; Matt 11:10), His career and ministry (Isa 52:13-53:12), His crucifixion (Ps 22:1-18), His resurrection (Ps 16:8-11; Acts 2:25-28), His ascension (Ps 2; Acts 13:33), and His exaltation as a priest-king (Ps 110; Acts 2:34). (*Nelson's*)

The number of passages in the OT regarded by the Jews in pre-Christian times as prophetic of the Messiah is much larger than that of the special predictions to which Christians have commonly appealed. It is stated by Edersheim to be more than 456... (*New Unger's*)

The Christ child was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (Luke 2:25-32). Many of the Psalms are Messianic (2; 16:7-11; 67; 68:28-35; 69; 72:1-19; 93; 96; 97; 98; 99; 110; 118:19-29). Philip acknowledged that the Old Testament prophecies declared a Messiah (John 1:45). Jesus Christ chided His apostles for not knowing that the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah foretold His suffering (Luke 24:25-27).

Inspired first century apostles and preachers constantly referred to Old Testament prophecies about the Christ (Acts 3:14-18, 22-26). The apostle Paul “reasoned...with them from the Scriptures” through his teaching and preaching that the Old Testament foretold of the suffering, but victorious, Messiah (Acts 9:22; 17:2-3; 26:22-23; Romans 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The apostle Peter, likewise, preached about the prophesied suffering Christ (Messiah) (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Jesus Christ Confirmed to be the Messiah

There was an air of expectancy in the first century for the coming of the long promised Messiah. “To the prevalence of the Messianic hope among the Jews in the time of Christ the Gospel records bear ample testimony. We see from the question of the Baptist that ‘the coming one’ was expected (Matt 11:3 and parallel), while the people wondered whether John himself were the Christ (Luke 3:15)” (*ISBE*). Andrew found his brother Peter to inform him that the long awaited Messiah had come (John 1:40-41). The woman at the well who conversed with Jesus admitted that the world waited for the coming Messiah (John 4:25-26, 29). The Samaritans acknowledged that Jesus “is the Christ [Messiah] and Savior of the world” (John 4:42). Peter strongly affirmed that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) (Matthew 16:15-16; Acts 4:26-27).

Further, Jesus unmistakably declared Himself to be the Messiah. Jesus told the woman at the well that He is the Messiah (John 4:25-26). Jesus affirmed to the high priest and other religious leaders that He was the Christ (Messiah) (Matthew 26:63-64), which they considered sufficient evidence of blasphemy to have Him killed.

God the Father anointed Jesus at the Christ (Messiah) (Acts 4:26-27). The word translated “Messiah” means “anointed” and “is used in the Old Testament of kings and priests, who were consecrated to office by the ceremony of anointing” (*ISBE*). “...[P]riests (Ex. 28:41; 40:15; Num. 3:3), prophets (1 Kings 19:16), and kings (1 Sam. 9:16; 16:3; 2 Sam. 12:7) were anointed with oil, and so consecrated to their respective offices” (Easton). Jesus of Nazareth is Prophet, Priest and King, anointed of God for each of these roles, which rolled into one Jesus is the Christ, our Messiah.

King

However, the Jews popularly held a skewed or incorrect view of what that Messiah would be like.

In **Jewish thought**, the Messiah would be the king of the Jews, a political leader who would defeat their enemies and bring in a golden era of peace and prosperity. In **Christian thought**, the term Messiah refers to Jesus' role as a spiritual deliverer, setting His people free from sin and death. The word Messiah comes from a Hebrew term that means “anointed one.” Its Greek counterpart is Christos, from which the word Christ comes. Messiah was one of the titles used by early Christians to describe who Jesus was. ...Most expected the Messiah to be a political leader, a king who would defeat the Romans and provide for the physical needs of the Israelites. (*Nelson's* emphasis added)

To think “Messiah” in the first century was to think “king,” and properly so. *Merriam Webster* in its first definition defines “Messiah” as “**1a**: the expected king and deliverer of the Jews.” The typical first century Jewish mistake was to expect the Messiah-King to establish a physical kingdom rather than a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36).

Jesus of Nazareth (God incarnate through the virgin birth) is the Messiah-King. The Great King was prophesied to make His triumphal entry into Jerusalem riding the lowly donkey (Zechariah 9:9), which Jesus Christ did (Matthew 21:5). Jesus was “born King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2), according to the Wisemen’s interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures and direct revelation from God. Jesus acknowledged that He was “the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:11, 29, 37). The apostle Paul wrote that Jesus “the King” is “eternal, immortal, invisible” (1 Timothy 1:17). Jesus Christ is the “only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16). Jesus Christ is “King of saints” (Revelation 15:3).

Summary

In conclusion, the need for a Messiah first grew out of the tragedy of sin introduced in the Garden of Eden, because of the maliciousness of the devil, through duping humanity represented in the first pair. Immediately, God began preparing mankind for redemption through a Messiah-King (Genesis 3:15; Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 3:10-11; 1 Peter 1:18-21).

The prophecies concerning Christ were a part of the plan that Deity made before the creation. When God accomplished his eternal plan through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ it demonstrated the wisdom of God, (1 Corinthians 1:20) the power, the majesty and the glory of God... Paul concluded the letter to the Romans pretty much as he began it. With a beautiful doxology that is as follows: (25)“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery *which was* kept secret since the world began (26) but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith (27) to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27) (West 10).

God the Father provided fallen humanity a Messiah-King, but it is up to humanity to avail itself of the salvation from sin our Messiah makes possible.

Indeed, Jesus Christ is “King of [spiritual] Israel” (Luke 27:42), but is King Jesus the King of your life today? Jesus is not the Messiah-King of your life if you have neglected or refused to be baptized for the remission of your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Jesus is not the Messiah-King of your life if you are a Christian whose life is tarnished with sin (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). If Jesus is not the Messiah-King of your life right now, please obey the Gospel this very moment (Hebrews 5:9).

Works Cited

- Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
- Easton, M.G. *Easton’s Bible Dictionary.* Oak Harbor: Logos, 1996.
- Karleen, Paul S. *The Handbook to Bible Study.* CD-ROM. New York: Oxford UP., 1987.
- Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume.* CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993.
- Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.
- New Unger’s Bible Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.
- Smith, William. *Smith’s Bible Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2003.
- Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament.* CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1997.
- West, D. Gene. *Messianic Prophecies Outlined.* Cameron: Rushmore, 2000.

The Preeminent Christ

When studying about Jesus Christ, it is not difficult to emphasize the unique and incomparable role of our Lord. *Nave's Topical Bible* lists about 250 names or designations for Jesus Christ. A small sampling of these headings include, Creator, Pre-Incarnate God, the Incarnate God, Master Teacher, at the Cross, Savior, Messiah, King, High Priest, Mediator, Intercessor, Advocate, Lawgiver, Prophet, Head of His church, Head of His Body, Head of His house and Judge. All biblical designations for Jesus Christ point to Jesus Christ as the Preeminent One.

Preeminence Defined

What do we mean by “preeminence”? *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines “preeminence” as “having paramount rank, dignity, or importance.” A Hebrew dictionary defines the word for “preeminence” (*mowthar*, appearing only in Ecclesiastes 3:19; Proverbs 14:23; 21:5) as including the ideas of “literally, gain; figuratively, superiority” (*Biblesoft's*). A Greek dictionary defines the word for “preeminence” as “to be in the first position, with the implication of high rank and prominence - ‘to be the first, to have superior status’” (Louw and Nida). Another Greek dictionary concurs and adds a facet to the definition of “preeminence” (*proteuo*, appearing only in Colossians 1:18): “to be first (in rank or influence)” (*Biblesoft's*).

Jesus Christ is Preeminent

No one enjoys preeminence that rightfully belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ. Satan desired preeminence over Jesus Christ. One temptation that Satan hurled at Jesus Christ was the offer to surrender the kingdoms of this world to our Lord in exchange for Jesus worshipping him (Matthew 4:8-9). As King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ triumphed over all the kingdoms of this world anyway (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 11:15).

Even Christians sometimes seek preeminence that belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, some Christians seek preeminence within the Lord's church, as Diotrephes did (3 John 9-10). The Greek word for “preeminence” in 3 John 9 is a related but differing word from the “preeminence” ascribed to Jesus Christ in Colossians 1:18. The word for “preeminence” in 3 John 9 is the compound word *philoproteuo*, meaning “to be fond of being first, i.e. ambitious of distinction” (*Biblesoft's*). This wrong use of “preeminence” ascribed to Diotrephes appears only in 3 John 9.

Other religious people also seek preeminence that rightfully belongs only to Jesus Christ. One of the titles of the Catholic pope is “Vicar of Christ,” which is defined: “A title of the pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honour and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ” (“Vicar of Christ”). The Mormon Church has its “Prophet and President”: “The current prophet and President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Gordon B. Hinckley” (“Living Prophets and Apostles”). Various religious groups have exalted leaders that purport to have the prerogative to change divine law and implement new religious doctrine. However, only Jesus Christ is the Head of His church and the Preeminent One (Colossians 1:18).

Only Jesus Christ can rightfully be identified as the Preeminent One. The preeminence of Jesus Christ is evident in passages exalting Him. Speaking prophetically, Zacharias (father of John the Baptist) referred to Jesus Christ as “the Highest” (Luke 1:76). “The preeminence of Jesus is here designated by the ‘Most High’” [ASV] (Boles). The “only begotten” passages applying to Jesus Christ speak to his preeminence (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).

Jesus Christ has experienced both the majesty of Deity and the contrasting poverty of human creation. In Jesus Christ, all things in heaven and on earth speak to his preeminence (Ephesians 1:10). “Ephesians and Colossians are twin epistles, similar in thought and style, extolling the preeminence of Christ...” (*ISBE*) as evidenced by comparing Colossians 1:18 and Ephesians 1:10.

Colossians 1:18 defines Jesus Christ as the Preeminent One. Being Head of the body and the church (along with all the other appellations applied to Jesus Christ,) speaks to the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

Having a fleshly body whereby He experienced existence as creation in addition to being Creator, resurrected to die no more, Jesus Christ alone is the Preeminent One. “The terms head, beginning, firstborn, express the pre-eminence of Christ in the new creation, which has its birth in his resurrection (1 Cor 15:22; Rev 1:5; 3:14)” (*Wycliffe*). “As firstborn of all creation, head of the church, and firstborn from the dead, Christ is *proteuon* (“preeminent”) in everything” (Kittel and Friedrich). “...Christ, being Owner, Lord, and Prince of every creature, as he is God-man, or ordained to human nature, he hath the preeminence of the whole creation, and is the chief, Ps 2:7, 8 Heb 1:2, 6” (Poole). “...that he might come to have first place in everything” (Bauer, Gingrich and Danker).

Several commentators address the preeminence afforded Jesus Christ in the last portion of Colossians 1:18. “The last phrase of 1:18 may also be translated, ‘That he might have the preeminence among all,’ referring to Christ’s preeminence among the dead as well as the living. Christ has preeminence both among all things and among all people, living and dead alike” (Fields 152). “Here begins the second phase of this grand statement of the preeminence of Christ, the first pertaining to all creation, and this pertaining to the new spiritual creation, that is, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Coffman). “‘He HIMSELF (and none other) may become the One holding the first place.’ Both ideas are included – priority in time and priority in dignity: now in the regenerated world, as before in the world of creation (Col 1:15; Ps 89:27; John 3:13)” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

Summary

In conclusion, no one on earth or in heaven and not Satan compares to the matchless Jesus Christ as the Preeminent One. “Pre-eminence of Christianity i.e. the higher power and honor due to Jesus the Christ. This doctrine is laid down in Col 1:18. In all things in nature, in person, in office, work, power, and honor, Christ has the pre-eminence above angels and men, or any other creature” (*McClintock and Strong*). The Greek word “*proteuo*,” meaning “to be first (in rank or influence) and translated “preeminence” only appears in the New Testament at Colossians 1:18 and applies exclusively to Jesus Christ – the Preeminent One (*Biblesoft’s*).

However, Jesus Christ is **not** the Preeminent One in your life **if** you are not a true Christian, and not a hyphenated-denominational Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). Jesus and His spokesman, the apostle Peter, told how one becomes a Christian, whereupon Jesus adds one to His church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41, 47). The apostles Peter and John also addressed how sins committed by Christians can be removed (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). May Jesus Christ truly be the Preeminent One in your life!

Works Cited

- Bauer, Walter, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. CD-ROM. Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1979.
- Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
- Boles, H. Leo. *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1991. CD-ROM. Austin: Wordsearch, 2005.
- Coffman, James Burton. *James Burton Coffman Study Library*. CD-ROM. Abilene: ACU P., 1989.
- Fields, Wilbur. *Philippians, Colossians and Philemon*. CD-ROM. Joplin: College P., 1969.
- International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE)*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.
- Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1997.
- Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- “Living Prophets and Apostles.” *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. 8 Jun. 2006 <<http://www.mormon.org/learn/0,8672,940-1,00.html>>.
- Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains* CD-ROM. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.
- Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993.
- McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2000.

Nave's Topical Bible. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft and TriStar Publishing, 1990.

Poole, Matthew. *Matthew Poole's Commentary on the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 1997.

"Vicar of Christ." *New Advent*. 8 Jun. 2006 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15403b.htm>>.

Wycliffe Bible Commentary. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody, 1962.

The Sacrifice of Christ

Without the vicarious (in our stead) sacrifice of Jesus Christ, humanity could only experience a temporary, hapless, purposeless and meaningless existence. The world knows one verse of Scripture better than any other, which speaks to God sending Jesus Christ into the world to work out the salvation of humanity; that verse is John 3:16. A similar Scripture resounds with the same message, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all..." (Romans 8:32).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the subject of the Bible, beginning in the first book of the Bible (Genesis 3:15). Over 300 passages throughout the Bible foretold the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (cf., Psalms 22; 34; Isaiah 53; Daniel 9). It is not surprising, then, that the apostle Paul focused on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He indicated that nothing is more important than or as important as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; the apostle wrote, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). How important is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Without His sacrifice, there would be no purchase price or ransom for our sins (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:5-6).

However, Christ's sacrifice involves far more than His crucifixion. Our Lord laid off the honor of being God to be made in the form of mortal man. Philippians 2:6-8 refers to Jesus Christ and reads, "who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." He was no less God or Deity than He was before His incarnation, but to pay humanity's debt of sin, Jesus Christ voluntarily relinquished the glory due Him to become the Perfect Sacrifice.

In addition, Jesus Christ left the glory and splendor of heaven to live a poor existence on earth. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone" (Hebrews 2:9). Even more, our Lord was willing for a time to be separated from God (because of man's sin that He bore for us). Our Lord's words on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) record the agony He suffered for the interruption of divine fellowship. This instance gives greater meaning to one of the statements of the apostle Paul, "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). One of the eternal punishments for unrighteous souls will be separation from God.

The benefit of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ pertains to His resurrection and Ascension. The Old Testament prophets focused on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:22-23). It is no wonder, then, that the apostle Paul defines the heart of the Gospel as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Jesus Christ built into the establishment of the Lord's Supper memorial His sacrifice for the remission of men's sins (Matthew 26:28). Further, we are reconciled through the death of Jesus Christ, which we act out when we obey the Gospel by imitating the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection. (Romans 6:3-5)

Jesus Christ takes away the sins of those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Therefore, Christians can eagerly await the return of our Lord. "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). Those sins

were nailed to the cross in the very Person of our Savior, Jesus Christ; “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ means to you and me that we ought to take our Christianity seriously and not lightly. The Christian martyrs following the establishment of the Lord’s church mean that we ought to take our Christianity seriously and not lightly (Acts 12:1-2; apostles of Christ; extra-biblical historical references to Christian martyrs). The sacrifices of contemporary Christians mean that you and I ought to take our Christianity seriously and not lightly. In many parts of the world in which we live today, it either is illegal or deadly dangerous to become a Christian and practice true Christianity.

Do you practice sacrificial Christian living, sacrificial Christian service and sacrificial Christian worship? I have to ask myself those same questions. If you have never put Jesus Christ on in baptism (Galatians 3:27), the baptism that is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), the baptism that saves (1 Peter 3:21), then you have not really begun the Christian walk just yet. If you are not taking Christianity seriously in your life (putting it first above all else, Matthew 6:33; 10:37-39), or if you are guilty of sin though you are a Christian, there is a remedy. Forasmuch as the apostle Peter was afforded the opportunity to pronounce the *first law of pardon* (for non-Christians) in Acts 2:38, Peter also was permitted to pronounce the *second law of pardon* (for Christians when they sin) in Acts 8:22. The apostle John verified that erring Christians can be forgiven; “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary’s cross was an incomprehensible price paid for the redemption of humanity. However, that redemption is not automatic or without human participation. Dear Reader, do not allow the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to be wasted on you. Become a Christian today! If an erring Christian, return to faithfulness before it is too late!

Justification

Two related Greek words are translated with the English word “justification” three times in the New Testament (Romans 4:25; 5:16, 18). One of the Greek words (Romans 5:16), “*dikaioma*,” means “a statute or decision” (*Biblesoft’s*), and the other, “*dikaiosis*,” means “acquittal” (*Biblesoft’s*). We are primarily interested in the latter, an acquittal for our sins only possible through the sacrificial death, burial **and resurrection** of Jesus Christ. “Who was delivered for our offences, and **was raised again for our justification**” (Romans 4:25 KJV). “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:18 NKJV).

Note, though, that the words “the free gift came” are not in the original and have been added. While justification can neither be purchased nor earned, it certainly is not free given the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made to make it possible. Furthermore, although in a sense justification is free to humanity, justification is only available conditionally. Only those who have been justified have received justification, and one is justified by “grace” (Romans 3:24; Titus 3:7), by “faith” (Romans 3:28; 5:1), by Christ’s “blood” (Romans 5:9), “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 6:11), by “Christ” (Galatians 2:17) and by “works” or active, obedient faith (James 2:21, 24-25).

Several principles work harmoniously together regarding the salvation of souls. Whereas “justification” is an acquittal for sins committed, “redemption” is a buying back of the sinner. Yet, we are saved by obedience (Hebrews 5:9) and by baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

Works Cited

Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.

Sanctification

The Greek “*hagiasmos*” is translated as “sanctification five times in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). It means the state of purity (*Biblesoft’s*). “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Our Lord Jesus Christ is the source of true wisdom, of righteousness, of sanctification and of redemption. Almighty God desires you and me to the personal recipients of wisdom from above, real righteousness, sanctification and eternal redemption. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). The sanctification of a soul is something that occurs through divine **and** human participation. Humans cannot be saved without the divine participation and the Godhead will not save souls without human participation. The human side of the participation leading to sanctification manifests itself in “belief of the truth” and “obedience.” “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2).

Precious souls are “sanctified by the truth” (John 17:19), “sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus]” (Acts 26:18), “sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:16), “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:2), “sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 10:10), by “the blood of the covenant” [Christ’s blood] (Hebrews 10:29) and “sanctified by God the Father” (Jude 1). Christians are those who have been sanctified (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2). Synonyms for “sanctification” are “washed” and “justified” (1 Corinthians 6:11).

The “word of truth” is the key to human sanctification (John 17:17, 19). By it, our Lord has sanctified the church. “That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). Jesus used His own blood in the process of sanctification. “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Many words speak to the salvation of souls and work together to provide a fuller and complete concept of human redemption. Those who are Christians are saved, justified, redeemed, sanctified, washed, etc.

Works Cited

Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.

Savior

Unable to save himself from his sins, mankind desperately needs a divine Savior. Fortunately, Jesus Christ accepted God the Father’s mission for Him as our Savior. We need to arm ourselves with biblical information regarding Jesus Christ as Savior before we can obtain redemption for ourselves.

Both testaments teach about a divine Savior of humanity. The definition of the word “savior” has a basic meaning, but the true significance depends upon the context in which it appears. The 15 judges between the time of Joshua and King Saul were *physical, human saviors* (Judges 2:16; 3:9, 15). However, regarding salvation or redemption, Jesus Christ is mankind’s *spiritual, divine Savior*. “SAVIOR. A term applied in Scripture, in its highest sense, to Jesus Christ, but in a subordinate manner to human deliverers” (*New Unger’s*). “1: one that saves from danger or destruction; 2 : one who brings salvation; *specifically capitalized* : JESUS” (*Merriam*).

Hebrew and Greek have their respective words that are translated into English as “Savior.” The English word “Savior” appears 37 times in the KJV: 13 in OT; 24 NT. The Hebrew word translated “Savior” is “*yasha*” (yaw-shah’), though altogether the Hebrew word appears 207 times and is translated also as “save,” “rescue,” “deliverer,” “avenging” and “help.” The Greek word translated “Savior” is “*soter*” (so-tare’) and means “deliverer” (*Biblesoft’s*).

Both testaments also use synonyms for the word “Savior.” “Redeemer” and “Savior” appear as synonyms in Isaiah 49:26 and 60:16. The word “redeemer” signifies what is meant respecting Jesus Christ as mankind’s Savior (Isaiah 59:20; Titus 2:13-14). “REDEEMER In the New Testament, Christ is viewed as the ultimate Redeemer, although the Greek word for redeemer is not used. Jesus gave His life as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Thus, the apostle Paul speaks of believers as having “redemption through His blood” (Eph 1:7)” (*Nelson’s*). The apostle Peter also wrote that redemption is available to humanity through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). See also Romans 3:24-25.

Biblical information gathered from both testaments disclose the **reason** and **function** of Jesus Christ coming from heaven into the world to be mankind’s spiritual Savior. A divine Savior in the person of Jesus Christ who came from heaven to earth is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. The spiritual promise made to Abraham was realized when Jesus Christ came to this poor world of sin as its Savior (Genesis 12:3; Luke 1:68-77). As our Savior, Jesus Christ fulfilled prophecies about removing mankind’s sins (Isaiah 53:10-11; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Zechariah 9:9).

Jesus Christ came into this world for the express purpose to function as the Savior of mankind. Our Heavenly Father expressly sent Jesus Christ into the world to be our Savior (John 3:17; 1 John 4:14). At the birth of Jesus, an angel announced to shepherds that their “Savior, who is Christ the Lord” was born (Luke 2:11; compare what an angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21). Jesus Christ came to be “the Savior of all men” (though some will not receive him as Savior) (1 Timothy 4:10). John the Baptist declared that Jesus Christ would function as Savior by taking “away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Samaritans acknowledged that Jesus “is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). Jesus affirmed that He came to be the world’s Savior (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10; John 12:47-48). Jesus Christ became Savior upon His resurrection and subsequent Ascension back to heaven (Acts 5:31). Strictly speaking, though, Jesus Christ is the Savior of the body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23).

By consulting the Word of God (Bible) about the mission of our Savior, we can obtain salvation for ourselves. Studying Scripture will enable one to find salvation from the Savior (2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 3:18). Christians can look confidently toward the end of time for the return of the Savior (Philippians 3:20).

Jesus Christ is our Savior, who “was manifested to take away our sins” (Titus 1:4; 1 John 3:5). Because Jesus Christ is Savior, the apostle Peter acknowledged that Jesus possessed “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Because Jesus Christ is Savior, the apostle Paul repeatedly affirmed that salvation is obtainable exclusively through Jesus Christ (Acts 13:23, 38-39; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:9). With Job’s statement in Job 19:25 we concur confidently: “I know that my redeemer liveth” (i.e., Jesus Christ our Savior).

Armed with biblical information regarding Jesus Christ as Savior, we can obtain redemption for ourselves. Jesus is Savior to those who obey the Gospel (Romans 6:17; Hebrews 5:9). Non-Christians obey the Gospel by turning to the Word of God and deriving faith from biblical evidence (Romans 10:17), repenting of sins (Acts 17:30), acknowledging Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24; Romans 10:9-10) and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:37). Erring Christians obey the Gospel by repenting of sin and praying for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Is Jesus Christ your Savior today?

Works Cited

- Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
- Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Springfield: Merriam-Webster, 1993.
- Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.
- New Unger’s Bible Dictionary.* CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody P., 1988.

Redemption

Redemption Requires a Redeemer

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth” (Job 19:25). Once prosperous from every consideration, then destitute of this world’s goods and even of his health, yet Job maintained the hope of a heavenly hereafter that sufficiently overshadowed every present distress. Job demonstrated confidence in the Lord to whom he gladly trusted his eternity. Job earnestly desired that the consolation with which he was comforted based on this hope would be realized by many others as well.

Job’s hope and confidence was three-fold: (1) Job was confident that the Redeemer lives; (2) he also fully expected that the Messiah would someday appear to rescue his and other souls; and, (3) Job was hopeful and confident regarding the general resurrection in which he would participate.

These reflections encouraged Job in the face of his severe adversity and served as the basis of his hope. Likewise, contemporary children of God who find themselves greatly afflicted or facing death can appropriate to themselves consolations through the same hope. Certainly, for the rest of us who are relatively free from great trials, we can also through this hope known to Job find sufficient strength to satisfactorily cope with daily difficulties.

The Redeemer of whom Job spoke is the Christ (i.e., Savior, Christ, Messiah), whose function and certain ministry on earth was first intimated in Genesis 3:15. That our Redeemer lives is the foundation of all our hope; if our God were dead as some declare, we could have no hope. Job had sure hope based on the resurrection long before the earthly walk of Christ, His crucifixion and triumphant resurrection; we see so much more clearly than Job and yet he harbored great hope — the same hope we now have.

Unlike idolaters whose worship pertains to dead gods fashioned from stone, wood, metal and the imaginations of men, Christians have a living Savior. Our Great Prophet is alive evermore, whereas other world religionists, for instance, revere dead (buried) prophets. Jews reject the Christ and have no Savior (Redeemer). Only Christians have a living Savior — who resides in heaven at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-10; 7:55-56).

Jesus our Messiah is coming back to rescue the righteous. In Job’s day, the first advent of our Lord was still future, to which he referred (19:25). However, when Jesus returns, He will not stand on the earth (Zechariah 6:12-13; Hebrews 8:4).

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is the hope of both Old and New Testament children of God; our eternity depends on it. While necessarily the “first” coming preceded the future “second” coming, were Jesus not to come again, the “first” coming would be meaningless. The Second Coming of the Lord is the cardinal hope of Christians (1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and the dreadful fear of the ungodly (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The general resurrection is pending (John 5:28-29). Job believed in a bodily resurrection (19:26), which is also a principle of Gospel truth (1 Corinthians 15:49-54; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2-3). Our hope for eternity rests on our resurrection from the grave; we know we shall be resurrected because the resurrection of Christ guarantees our resurrection. Without our resurrection all would be hopeless (1 Corinthians 15:19). We have a common hope with Job and God’s people of all dispensations: (1) our Redeemer lives; (2) our Redeemer is coming for us; and (3) our Redeemer will resurrect us.

Job desired that his hopes might be recorded in a book or engraved in stone so that others might develop the same kind of hope and become beneficiaries of the same consolations. His words, though, are immortalized in the eternal volume, the Bible, for all of every time to see.

Modern man has often derived comfort from Job’s words as one sings them: “I know that my Redeemer lives.” May our Redeemer live in each of us as we always abide in the Gospel.

The Divine Plan of Redemption

Jesus Christ is the singular key to human redemption, because without Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Savior and Redeemer, none of us could possibly be saved. Yet, there are a number of aspects relative to

the redemption of mankind that work perfectly and intricately together to make possible the salvation of humankind. Furthermore, the redemption of souls involves both deity and humanity, for as much as people **cannot** save themselves apart from God, while at the same time, God **will not** save anyone without his or her obedient participation in the divinely-given plan of redemption.

God's redemptive plan includes roles by God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and by any man or woman who desires to be saved from sin and entertain a real hope of spending eternity in heaven. Therefore, the roles of each person of the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9) as well as the role of the ones being saved are **essential**. Mankind has a role in his own salvation, without which activity in accordance with the revealed instructions of God in the New Testament, he cannot be saved. The salvation of humans is conditional upon their obedience (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17), but no one can be saved or redeemed without the participation of the Godhead.

The Father's part in human redemption involves love (John 3:16), grace (Ephesians 2:8), mercy (Titus 3:5) and the Gospel (Romans 1:16). Christ's part includes the shedding of His innocent blood (Revelation 1:5) and being the Mediator between mortals and the Father (1 Timothy 2:5). The Holy Spirit provided the communication between the mind of God and earthlings through the inspired revelation of the New Testament (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 9:15).

Man's part in his own salvation or redemption can be variously described. He must have faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24). That faith leads to repentance of past sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30). To be saved, a sinner must be willing to acknowledge before others his or her belief that Jesus Christ is Lord (Romans 10:9-10). Baptism or immersion (Colossians 2:12) for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21) results in redemption from past sins (Romans 3:25). Our Lord referred to this as being born again (John 3:3-5).

Generally, one must be obedient to the Gospel of Christ to be saved (Hebrews 5:8-9). This will include purity of life and mind (Revelation 22:14), which involves laying aside evil (James 1:21). Faithfulness must characterize the child of God, even if he or she would have to forfeit his or her life for that faith (Revelation 2:10); Christians must endure (Matthew 10:22). The faithful Christian must demonstrate his or her faith by works of obedience (James 2:24). This is how a person calls on the name of the Lord to be saved (Romans 10:14).

Man's role in his own redemption is only possible after he has gained knowledge from the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). Christians, then, can pass along that saving knowledge – the Gospel of Christ – to other humans so that they can have access to redemption, too (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21).

Defining Redemption

Two families of words with similar definitions translate in the New Testament to “redeem” and “redemption.” They have similar meanings with different emphases. The Greek verb “*exagorazo*” means to buy out, such as to buy a slave out of slavery to grant him or her freedom. The verb “*agorazo*” appears in Revelation 5:9 regarding human salvation, which reads, “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation’” (NKJV).

The Greek verb “*lutroo*” means “to release on receipt of ransom (akin to “*lutron*,” ‘a ransom’)... signifying to release by paying a ransom price, to redeem” (*Vine's*). It appears in Titus 2:14, which reads, “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” The word “*lutroo*” appears in 1 Peter 1:18 as well. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.” “While both [*exagorazo*] and [*lutroo*] are translated ‘to redeem,’ “*exagorazo*” does not signify the actual ‘redemption,’ but the price paid with a view to it, “*lutroo*” signifies the actual ‘deliverance,’ the setting at liberty” (*Vine's*).

Nouns “*lutrosis*” and “*apolutrosis*,” “a strengthened form” (*Vine's*) of “*lutrosis*,” appear in the New Testament and relate to human redemption in several familiar passages. “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal

redemption [*lutrosis*]” (Hebrews 9:12). “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption [*apolutrosis*] that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). “In Him we have redemption [*apolutrosis*] through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption [*apolutrosis*] of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15). The concept of redemption (*lutrosis*) is of “redemption from the penalty of sin” (*Thayer’s*).

Overview of Redemption

By *divine redemption*, we mean the *redemptive plan that is divine in origin*. In other words, “How did God in the New Testament state that He is willing to save people from their sins?” It is unreasonable to believe that God will accept one or more manmade redemptive plans **instead of his plan** for the salvation of lost souls.

God the Father through His **mercy** (Titus 3:5) and **grace** (Ephesians 2:8) designed a redemptive plan. Essentially, by God’s mercy He withholds punishment from us that we deserve. By God’s grace, we receive good things from Him that we do not deserve.

Through mercy and grace, God sent Jesus Christ to be our Savior (John 3:16). Jesus brought the divine redemptive plan with Him (John 1:17). Jesus Christ died on the cross for our salvation (Hebrews 9:28). Through mercy and grace, God caused the Holy Spirit to reveal the redemptive plan through the New Testament (2 Peter 1:20-21). The Holy Spirit, along with the Father and the Son, participates in the redemption of souls: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In addition, God’s redemptive plan requires the participation by those who would be saved. Jesus is said to be the author of salvation to them who “**obey** Him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And being perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” This obedience includes **hearing** the Word of God only (Romans 10:17); “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” The Word of God leads to Bible **faith** (John 8:24); “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.” Faith leads to **repentance** (Luke 13:5); “I tell you, no; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Repentance is followed by **professing Christ** (Romans 10:9-10); “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

Then comes **immersion** (Romans 6:3-5); “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are **buried** with him **by baptism** into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been **planted** together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (KJV). From then onward, Christians must practice **faithfulness** (Revelation 2:10); “Fear none of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give thee the crown of life.”

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done their parts for the redemption of lost souls. Have you, dear Friend, participated in your own redemption according to God’s redemptive plan, or have you subscribed to a mere manmade redemptive plan, which is unable to save your soul? Eternity is too long and souls are too precious to accept a *counterfeit plan of salvation*. Divine redemption is within reach of every soul and is all that will matter in judgment.

Works Cited

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2006.

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. CD-ROM. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

Forgiveness

“Redemption” and “forgiveness” are synonyms. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). “Forgiveness” means “pardon” (*Biblesoft’s*).

Mortals must have a willingness to forgive their fellow men, or else God will not forgive those who are unwilling to forgive (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:35). An unwillingness to forgive others will render one’s prayers void (Mark 11:25-26). However, preceding forgiveness, sinners must repent. “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Luke 17:3-4). We cannot truly forgive those who because of their impenitence God has not forgiven, but we must be willing to forgive. Those who have repented and have been forgiven by God, the child of God **must** forgive likewise. “This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

Christians must be forgiving of one another as well (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Consequently, when we also repent of our sins, God will forgive us of our sins, too. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The Christian’s forgiveness is obligatory toward those who repent. However, brethren often, by their actions, refuse to forgive the penitent; this must not be the case with the children of God. With what treatment we treat others, God will likewise treat us regarding our own sins (Matthew 7:2). The erring child of God can seek forgiveness through penitence and prayer (Acts 8:22), and the non-Christian can achieve forgiveness or salvation from past sins through faith followed by baptism (Mark 16:16).

Works Cited

Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.

Mediator, Intercessor & Advocate

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between humanity and God, and He is Intercessor between mankind and God, too. In addition, Jesus Christ is mankind’s Advocate with God. **Jesus Christ is mankind’s sole access to a Holy God (John 14:6).**

Mediator

Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between humanity and God, but just what is a “mediator”?

One who goes between two groups or persons to help them work out their differences and come to agreement. A mediator usually is a neutral party, a go-between, intermediary, or arbitrator who brings about reconciliation in a hostile situation when divided persons are not able to work out their differences themselves. A mediator can also be the negotiator of an agreement. After the agreement is made, he can then witness to its content and serve as the administrator or guarantor to make sure its provisions are followed. A mediator needs legal authority and recognized power to function effectively. (*Nelson’s*)

No one else in heaven or on earth better knows both the divine and the human circumstances, therefore, making Jesus Christ the only qualified Mediator between man and God. Further, Jesus Christ has “all authority... in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18 ASV) necessary to mediate effectively. “Mediator, a person who intervenes between two parties at variance, in order to reconcile them” (*McClintock and Strong*). The *ISBE* notes that a mediator is a “middleman,” and further the English Word “mediator” appears in the Old Testament only in the Septuagint for Job 9:33 plus six times in the New Testament. **The hostility**

between mankind and God is sin that man has committed (or omitted James 4:17), and through addressing the problem of sin, Jesus Christ mediates between man and God. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says that a mediator is an "umpire."

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have their respective mediators. Moses functioned as the mediator between Israel and God under Judaism (Exodus 20:19-22; Deuteronomy 5:5). The apostle Paul acknowledged that Moses was the mediator of the Old Testament (Galatians 3:19-20). However, Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 9:15; 12:24). Speaking of the New Testament, our Lord "is the mediator of a better covenant" (Hebrews 8:6). Again, the mediation of Jesus Christ revolves around removing the hostility of man's sin between mankind and God (1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 9:12-15).

Intercessor

Jesus Christ is Intercessor between mankind and God, but what is an intercessor?

Intercession of Christ. This belongs to the office of Christ as Priest and refers generally to the aid that He extends as mediator between God and mankind. In a particular sense Christ is represented as drawing near to God and pleading in behalf of men (Rom 8:27; Heb 7:25), and thus, in harmony with the idea of intercession, He is called our Advocate (1 John 2:1). (*New Unger's*)

Literally, the word "intercession" means "to come between" (*ISBE*). Simply put, in the Bible, intercession is: "The act of petitioning God or praying on behalf of another person or group" (*Nelson's*). *Nelson's* notes that some of the earliest occasions of someone acting as an intercessor were in the persons of Abraham for the City of Sodom and Moses for Israel. However, successful intercession also depends upon those for whom intercession is made obeying the Word of God (John 17:9). There was no need of an intercessor between man and God until sin separated between the first pair and God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8).

The apostle Paul characterized the ministry of our Lord as "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Formerly, the prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah or Christ would make "intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). Being "at the right hand of God" since his Ascension, Jesus Christ is precisely positioned to make "intercession for us" (Romans 8:34). The intercession made for us by Jesus Christ is ongoing, "he always lives to make intercession for" us (Hebrews 7:25) or as Easton expresses it: "This intercession is an essential part of his mediatorial work." "The ministry of reconciliation" pertains to making "reconciliation for the sins of the people" – you and me (Hebrews 2:17 KJV).

Scripture also notes two additional intercessors besides Jesus Christ. First, the Holy Spirit participates in intercession between mankind and God (Romans 8:26-27). In a much inferior consideration, Christians through their prayers make intercession for their fellow mankind (1 Timothy 2:1).

Advocate

Jesus Christ is mankind's Advocate with God, but what is an advocate?

ADVOCATE (Grk. *parakletos*, "paraclete"). One who pleads the cause of another. The term is applied by Jesus to the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7), where it is rendered Helper [NKJV] ["Comforter" KJV]; and by John to Christ Himself (1 John 2:1). The word advocate (Lat. *advocatus*) might designate a consulting lawyer or one who presents his client's case in open court; or one who, in times of trial or hardship, sympathizes with the afflicted and administers suitable direction and support. (*New Unger's*)

Nelson's says of "advocate": "One who pleads another's cause before a tribunal or judicial court." *McClintock and Strong* notes that the Jews were unfamiliar with the role of an advocate until they came under Roman rule and had to use advocates or lawyers to more effectively represent their cases in court proceedings.

Our Lord is our "Advocate" or defense attorney before the bar of God the Father in heaven (1 John 2:1).

Christians need an Advocate because of the ADVERSARY, the devil or Satan, who accuses us before God (1 Peter 5:8; Rev 12:10). If Satan is the “prosecuting attorney,” Christ and the Holy Spirit are the legal advocates, the “defense attorneys,” who help, defend, counsel, and comfort us; they plead the Christian’s case before God day and night, providing a continuing remedy for sin. (*Nelson’s*).

Jesus and the apostle John used a term known in the first century Palestine to refer to someone who represented another in a court of law (cf. Acts 24:1). There is no one better suited than Jesus Christ to represent humanity as Defense Lawyer before God Almighty in the divine court of heaven.

Regarding 1 Timothy 2:5, Albert Barnes observes that Jesus Christ is willing to be the one Mediator for **all humanity** (kings, their subjects, rich, poor, master, slave), whereas Matthew Poole expresses it: “all men have the same Mediator.” Adam Clarke observed that as Mediator, Jesus Christ is the “peace-maker” between man and God to take care of man’s sin problem. *Vine’s* adds that Jesus Christ is more than Mediator, but as the sacrificial Lamb He Himself is the means by which the hostility of sin is removed between man and God (Isaiah 59:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:21). “Christ is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). He makes reconciliation between God and man by his all-perfect atoning sacrifice” (Easton).

Summary

Though willing to be Mediator, Intercessor and Advocate for all humanity, Jesus Christ can only serve in those capacities for obedient souls (Romans 6:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 2:10). Jesus Christ **is not** your Mediator, Intercessor and Advocate if you do not believe He is the Son of God, have not repented of your sins and have not been immersed in water (baptized) for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Jesus Christ **is not** your Mediator, Intercessor and Advocate if you are an unfaithful Christian (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

- Adam Clarke’s Commentary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.
Barnes’ Notes. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.
Easton, M.G. *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*. Oak Harbor: Logos, 1996.
International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE). CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1996.
Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, Editors. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2000.
Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1986.
New Unger’s Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Chicago: Moody, 1988.
Poole, Matthew. *Matthew Poole’s Commentary on the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Escondido: Ephesians Four Group, 1997.
Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1985.

Judge

Although Jesus Christ came to earth as mankind’s Savior and returned to heaven as the Christian’s Intercessor and Advocate, He will be humanity’s Judge at His Second Coming. The same Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled roles during His incarnation and after His Ascension that differ from the role He will undertake at the end of time as Judge.

Final Judgment

What does the Bible teach about the certainty of a Final Judgment? The Bible teaches that Final Judgment is an appointment for which a soul can neither be late nor avoid (Hebrews 9:27). Final Judgment,

and Jesus Christ being the Judge, is a matter of fundamental, Christian doctrine (Hebrews 6:1-2). Final Judgment will be so thorough that even “the secrets of men” and “the counsels... [“purposes” *Biblesoft*’s] of hearts” will be examined (Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

As the Scriptures represent the final judgment “as certain [Eccl. 11:9], universal [2 Cor. 5:10], righteous [Rom. 2:5], decisive [1 Cor. 15:52], and eternal as to its consequences [Heb. 6:2], let us be concerned for the welfare of our immortal interests, flee to the refuge set before us, improve our precious time, depend on the merits of the Redeemer, and adhere to the dictates of the divine word, that we may be found of him in peace.” (Easton)

JUDGMENT, LAST In Christian theology the Last Judgment is an act in which God interposes directly into human history, brings the course of this world to a final close, determines the eternal fate of human beings, and places them in surroundings spiritually adapted to their final condition. (*ISBE*)

Who Will Be Judged?

Who will be judged in the Final Judgment? The living and the dead will be judged in Final Judgment. The apostle Peter preached (and Luke the inspired historian recorded) that Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; cf. 1 Peter 4:5). The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1). The “small and great” will be judged (Revelation 20:12). “Ungodly men” will be judged (2 Peter 3:7; Jude 14-15). “The persons to be judged are, (1) the whole race of Adam without a single exception (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 15:51, 52; Rev. 20:11-15); and (2) the fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6)” (Easton).

Standard of Judgment

By what standard will Final Judgment proceed? Souls will be judged according to how they conducted themselves on earth toward their fellow man. Jesus Christ portrayed Final Judgment as pertaining to how people treated each other, especially how the less fortunate were treated (Matthew 25:31-46). Souls will be judged according to what they have “done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). Solomon cautioned youth, for instance, to be careful respecting how they lived their lives because God would remember to bring their conduct into Final Judgment (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

Souls will be judged according to righteousness. The apostle Paul preached in Athens that Jesus “will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). There is a difference between the righteousness of man and the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). Man must appeal to Jesus Christ on His terms to be deemed righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Every soul will be judged according to the divine revelation by which he was bound (Revelation 20:12). Every soul will be judged ‘according to his works’ (Revelation 20:12; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Before the institution of the Lord’s church in the Gospel Age, non-Jews lived under Patriarchy and will be judged in accordance with it. Jews who lived prior to the New Testament era will be judged according to Judaism as God gave it to inspired men, beginning with Moses. Everyone who has lived since the establishment of the church (Acts 2) through the present and into the future will be judged by the New Testament or Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Who Will Preside as Judge?

Who will be the Judge in the Final Judgment? Jesus Christ will be the Judge in Final Judgment. The Heavenly Father assigned the role of Judge to Jesus and gave him the authority to execute Final Judgment (John 5:22, 27-29). Everyone must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). No human being has the prerogative or right to pronounce Final Judgment on anyone (James 4:12).

The Results of Judgment

What will be the result of the Final Judgment? Only two possibilities exist for outcomes of the Final Judgment. Jesus Christ identified the two possibilities as “the resurrection of life” and “the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29). Otherwise, Scripture refers to eternal heaven and eternal hell (Matthew 23:23; 25:46; John 14:3). Scripture nowhere portrays more than two possible eternal destinations, though some religious people imagine that there are four or more possible eternal destinations.

Admission to eternal heaven with God is variously illustrated in Scripture. The apostle Paul referred to “the righteous Judge” giving “the crown of righteousness” to each soul who is commended at the Final Judgment (2 Timothy 4:8). The apostle John recorded Jesus referring to “the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). The apostle Peter called it “the crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).

Summary

In conclusion, Jesus Christ alone has the authority and the responsibility as Judge of humanity in the Final Judgment, and there are only two possible eternal destinations following Final Judgment. Mankind will be judged in Final Judgment according to what he has done or failed to do while on earth (Matthew 25:31-46; James 4:17), and mankind will be judged in Final Judgment according to the revelation of God under which men lived respectively (Revelation 20:11-15).

What can we do to prepare ourselves for the Final Judgment and the certain prospect of meeting Jesus Christ as the great Judge? First, we can obey the Gospel of Christ whereby our sins are removed and we become Christians (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 11:26). Second, we can remain faithful to Christ and repent when we stumble in sin (Revelation 2:10; 1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
Easton, M.G. *Easton's Bible Dictionary.* Oak Harbor: Logos, 1996.
International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (ISBE). CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1996.

Authority

The Bible Attests to the Authority of Jesus Christ

To what extent does Jesus Christ possess authority? The Bible provides the definitive answer to this question. Mankind may attempt to dilute or completely offset the authority of Jesus Christ through manmade religious hierarchies and human creeds, but God's Word teaches that Jesus Christ alone possesses all religious authority.

Jesus Christ Has Authority as Head over the Church & the Body

The “head” of anything is the director of it, the physical body or some type of organization. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church for which He died to establish (Colossians 1:18). Therefore, He alone possesses all original authority respecting it. The same Scripture citation acknowledges that Jesus Christ, likewise, is Head of the spiritual body, which is a synonym for the church. A similar confirmation of the authority of Jesus Christ results from consideration of Him as King over His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

Jesus Has Absolute Authority

As the second person of Godhead, Jesus Christ is coequal with the Father and the Spirit (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19). Jesus Christ possesses absolute authority because He is one of the members of the Godhead (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9). Mention of the Godhead indicates a plurality of divine persons.

As coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ possesses the same absolute authority as the Father and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ possessed glory, authority and all that is attributable to Deity from before the creation of the world, John 17:5. Further, He possesses the form or essence of God (Philippians 2:6). In addition, Jesus Christ has absolute authority because He is the very image of Deity or God, Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3.

Jesus Christ Has Delegated Authority

The heavenly Father's approval of Jesus Christ amounts to delegated authority (Matthew 3:16-17; 17:1-5). "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5). That delegated authority is the basis of the *Great Commission*. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus Christ Has All Authority

Possessing both absolute authority and delegated authority for His mission from the Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ exclaimed that He has "all authority... in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18 NKJV). There is no room, then, for a man or a woman or a council of humans on earth to displace the authority of Jesus Christ. Dioceses, synods and the like have no divine authority to exist, and mortals are not authorized to make religious creeds, disciplines, manuals or catechisms.

Jesus Christ Claimed Authority

The early preaching of Jesus Christ evidenced his claim for at least as much authority as a prophet of God (Matthew 4:17; cf. 3:1-2). In addition, Jesus Christ evidenced a claim of authority by expanding the Old Testament commandments of God with the statement, "But I say unto you" (Matthew 5:20-48). The claim of authority for Himself is evident in that Jesus claimed the authority to pass eternal judgment on humanity (John 12:48; Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote that Jesus Christ has the authority to retrieve His followers and punish the wicked at time's end (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This Holy Spirit-guided declaration through the pen the apostle Paul corroborates our Lord's claim for authority.

Miracles of Jesus Christ Confirmed His Authority

The miracles of Jesus Christ confirmed his authority and validated his teaching. After listing miracles in Mark 16:17-18, Jesus stated that the purpose of miracles was to confirm the Word of God (Mark 16:20). Later, the writer of Hebrews noted that miracles had already begun confirming the Word (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Jesus Christ performed miracles whereby He demonstrated authority over nature. Our Lord stilled a storm at sea (Matt. 8:23-27), fed thousands by miracles (Matthew 14:13-23; 15:32-38), walked on water (Matthew 14:24-36), miraculously healed sick people (John 4:46-54; Matthew 8:2-4; 9:2-8; John 5:1-16) and turned water into grape juice (John 2:1-11). Jesus Christ performed miracles whereby He demonstrated His authority over the spirit world (Mark 1:23-26; Matthew 8:28-34; 9:27-34; 17:14-20), and Jesus Christ performed miracles whereby He demonstrated His authority over death (Luke 7:11-17; Matthew 9:18-26; John 11:1-46).

Summary

Jesus Christ has both absolute authority in religion as a member of the Godhead and delegated authority from the Father. Furthermore, Jesus Christ has **all authority** in heaven and in earth. The authority of Jesus Christ will continue as long as the world stands (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Faced with the authority of Jesus Christ, we can either conform to the teachings of Jesus Christ or be condemned by them (John 12:48). Conforming to the authority of Jesus Christ, non-Christians will heed our Lord's words to believe and be baptized to be saved from their sins (Mark 16:16). Conforming to the authority of Jesus Christ, erring Christians will return to the fellowship of Jesus through penitence, prayer and reformation of life (1 John 1:7-10).

The Second Coming

Nothing irrespective of what it is could be more of a cardinal principle of Christianity than the Second Coming of Christ. For instance, as essential as the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ is to the redemption of fallen humanity, without the Second Coming and Christ's subsequent retrieval of the saved, there would exist no mechanism for the transportation of the saved to the eternal city of heaven and the granting of eternal life. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

There is no Christian doctrine more often taught or to which Scripture alludes in the New Testament than the Second Coming of Christ. "In fact, in the New Testament alone it is referred to over 300 times" (*Nelson's*). Apparently, teaching and preaching about the Second Coming of Christ was not only a part of "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), but it was regular fare in teaching and preaching. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is explicitly and implicitly taught throughout the New Testament. An implicit reference to the Second Coming appears in the corrective instruction of the Corinthian Christians by the apostle Paul. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Scripture concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ may be divided into two categories, those that directly teach about it and those that either refer to it or mention it in passing as an axiomatic truth. Consider first verses of Scripture that teach specifically about the Second Coming.

Scriptures Teaching about the Second Coming

Matthew 24:36-51 is one such biblical context. Therein, one learns a number of facts respecting the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. (1) At least while our Lord was on earth during His incarnation, He was not aware of when the Second Coming would occur; only the Heavenly Father knew that detail at that time. (2) The Second Coming will come without warning signs as to when it will happen, and the Second Coming of Christ will occur suddenly. In those ways it will compare to the universal deluge of Noah's day. The apostle Paul also wrote about the suddenness of Christ's return. "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). (3) Therefore, when the Second Coming transpires, people be doing what they ordinarily do daily. (4) Hence, humanity needs to be prepared every day for the return of Jesus Christ. (5) The child of God needs to be faithfully serving our Lord each day in order to be found so doing upon the unannounced return of Christ. (6) Punishment will accompany the Second Coming as Jesus Christ returns this time as Judge. (7) Even Christians who indulge in sinful behavior, suspecting the Jesus Christ will tarry a little while longer, will face the same dreadful eternity of non-Christians.

The apostle Peter noted that mankind generally (including some children of God, Matthew 24:42-51) will ridicule the timeliness of the Second Coming of Christ, whereby they allow themselves opportunities to commit sin. "Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation'" (2 Peter 3:3-4). Nonetheless, not only will the Second Coming of Christ certainly occur, simultaneously, the universe or present habitation of humans will cease to exist.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and

the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:10-13)

Simon Peter concludes, “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...” (2 Peter 3:11-12) and “Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14). The new piece of information discerned about the Second Coming from 1 Peter 3 is that the universe will be *uncreated* at that time, too.

The three kingdom parables in Matthew 25 pertain to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The Parable of the 10 Virgins teaches preparedness. The Parable of the Talents affirms that Final Judgment will be a part of the Second Coming, and faithful activity in the service of our Lord or the lack thereof will be one feature of Judgment. The Parable of Judgment notes that all of humanity will fall under the scope of our Lord’s divine tribunal. Judgment will take into consideration how individuals have responded or did not respond to the benevolent needs of their fellow earthlings.

Jesus Christ Himself explicitly taught about His Second Coming. During one of His trials, Jesus affirmed His Deity and may have referred to His eventual return. “But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?’ Jesus said, ‘I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven’ (Mark 14:61-62). Jesus Christ certainly informed the apostles that He was coming back. “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3; see also 14:28).

At the Ascension of Christ, two angels stood by and gave some insight into the Second Coming of our Lord. “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:10-11). Compare this to similar information about the return of the Lord in Revelation 1:7, which reads, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Revelation 1:7). While at the Ascension, clouds concealed Jesus Christ, at the Second Coming, clouds will reveal Him. Notice once more that the Second Coming has universal application to all of humanity.

The apostle Paul also wrote about the Second Coming.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. **For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven** with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

And to give you who are troubled rest with us when **the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven** with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10)

We glean from these two quotations this additional information about the Second Coming. (1) Some of God's children will have died before the return of our Lord, while others remain alive. (2) Those who die before the Lord's return will not be at a disadvantage. (3) Jesus Christ's Second Coming will result in cross purposes – eternal salvation for the righteous and eternal punishment for the wicked. Every soul will find himself or herself categorized by Jesus Christ at the Second Coming into one of these two eternal destinations. Neither spiritual course corrections (Luke 16:19-31) nor negotiations with Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:21-23) are possible when either one's time is up or when time ends.

Scriptures Alluding to the Second Coming

Allusions to the Second Coming populate the New Testament. “Therefore judge nothing before the time, **until the Lord comes**, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God” (1 Corinthians 4:5). “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death **till He comes**” (1 Corinthians 11:26). “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's **at His coming**” (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). “**When Christ who is our life appears**, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:4).

And to **wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:10). “So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ** with all His saints” (1 Thessalonians 3:13). “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (1 Thessalonians 5:23). “That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless **until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing**” (1 Timothy 6:14). “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead **at His appearing** and His kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:1). “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved **His appearing**” (2 Timothy 4:8).

“So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will **appear a second time**, apart from sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). “Therefore be patient, brethren, until **the coming of the Lord**. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord** is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:7-9). See also 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; 1 Peter 5:4.

Second Coming the Christian's Hope

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is the basis of Christian hope. “Looking for the blessed **hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**” (Titus 2:13). The child of God who has prepared himself or herself through the Word of God has confidence regarding the Second Coming. “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have **confidence** and not be ashamed before Him **at His coming**” (1 John 2:28). I wonder why more professing Christians do not eagerly anticipate the Second Coming of our Lord? “For our citizenship is in **heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ**” (Philippians 3:20; cf. Hebrews 9:28).

Summary

Careful examination of the New Testament, however, makes it clear that the Second Coming will be a climactic historical event. The Lord will return in the same manner in which He left. His coming will be personal, bodily, and visible. The time of the Second Coming is unknown. In fact, Jesus stated that only the Father knew the time. Therefore, the return of the Lord should be a matter of constant expectancy. As He came the first time, in the “fullness of time” (Galatians 4:4), so will the Second Coming be. The believer's task

is not to try to determine the time of the Second Coming. We should share the gospel message diligently until He returns (Acts 1:8-11). (*Nelson's*)

Works Cited

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. CD-ROM. Nashville: Thomas Nelson P., 1986.

Homily: He Is My Everything

Genesis 3:15

Thesis: To view a synopsis of the extended mission of Jesus Christ.

Song: *He Is My Everything*

Introduction:

1. Jesus Christ is the scarlet thread running through the Bible – from the beginning to the end.
2. Jesus is the heart of the Bible, without which the Bible would be aimless.
3. The cross of Christ stands center of the Bible (doctrinally) and the extended mission of Christ – everything looks toward or back to the cross of Christ.

Body:

I. A Beautiful Declaration, Jesus Is Coming!

- A. A veiled promise (Genesis 3:15).
- B. A slightly more detailed promise (Genesis 12:1-3).
- C. There are 100's of prophecies about Jesus (Isaiah 7:14; 53).
- D. John the Baptist prepared the way for the coming of Christ (Matthew 3:1-3).

II. Wonderful News, Jesus Is Here!

- A. Angels announced a Savior is born (Luke 2:10-11).
- B. Jesus is the fulfillment of John's preaching (Matthew 11:2-11).
- C. Christ's earthly ministry ended, risen from the grave, He lingered, showing Himself prior to His Ascension (Matthew 28:6-7; Acts 1:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

III. Heavenly History, Jesus Christ Is Ascending!

- A. The awe-inspiring Ascension (Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11).
- B. Our Lord came into the world humbly; He left triumphantly and in glory.

IV. The Magnificent Present, Jesus Is Reigning!

- A. An angel foretold Jesus would reign (Luke 1:30-33).
- B. Jesus claimed a non-earthly kingdom (John 18:36-37).
- C. Jesus will reign until the end of time (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).
- D. The kingdom and the church are the same institution (Matthew 16:18-19).
- E. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is powerful (Mark 9:1; Romans 1:16; Acts 2:1-4).

V. The Happy Future, Jesus Is Coming Again!

- A. Jesus will appear a second time (Hebrews 9:27-28).
- B. Jesus is coming to gather His saints (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Conclusion:

1. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ.
2. Our lives need to be all about Jesus Christ.
3. Our lives should revolve around Jesus.
4. He should be the basis of our "way of life."

Invitation:

1. Jesus isn't your everything if He is not your Savior!
2. Look back to the cross for salvation through Jesus (Luke 19:10; Mark 16:15-16).
3. Look ahead for eternal rest in Jesus Christ (Revelation 2:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

Chapter 3: Holy Spirit

The Person

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device” (Acts 17:29 KJV). This verse and two other passages (Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9) specifically cite the “Godhead” and imply *divine personality*. The *number* of divine persons comprising the Godhead from other Scripture is learned to be *three*. Thus, men often apply the human terms “triune” and “Trinity” to God or to the Godhead, suggesting “three persons in one.” These three Divine Persons of the Godhead are uniformly identified in the Bible as God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ) and God the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:1; Acts 5:3-4). “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19 NKJV).

The Bible doctrine of three divine persons in one Godhead is fully documented in God’s Word (Matthew 3:16-17; John 15:26; Romans 15:30). However, man experiences difficulty in fully comprehending the fact of the Godhead because there is nothing on earth to which he can completely compare it. Students of God’s Word accept: (1) the fact of the Godhead and (2) that it is comprised of three divine persons. Whatever divine and personal qualities are biblically ascribed to the Father and the Son apply equally to the Holy Spirit as well. The Holy Spirit is not in Scripture relegated to consideration as an “it” or a mere influence.

The Holy Spirit Has Personality

The Holy Spirit, like the Father and Jesus (at least before his incarnation), has no physical form (John 4:24; Luke 24:39). However, this does not detract from personality. Personality is the product of personal expression, not physical traits alone. The absence of personal expression (e.g., among the mentally deficient) does not make one an animal, but personal expression verifies that the one making the expression is not animal, an “it” or merely an influence. So, the Holy Spirit, because *HE* expresses *HIMSELF* is not an “it” or a mere influence.

The Bible applies personal pronouns to the Holy Spirit, incidentally attesting to the individual personality of the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). The Holy Spirit also is ascribed these personal characteristics by Scripture: (1) He **speaks** (Matthew 10:20; John 16:13; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 13:2; 21:11; 28:25; 1 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 2:11; 14:13; 22:17). (2) He **testifies** (John 15:26; Acts 20:23; Romans 8:16; Hebrews 10:15). (3) He **teaches** (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:13). (4) He **guides** (John 16:13). (5) He **searches** (1 Corinthians 2:10). (6) He **has a mind** (Romans 8:27). (7) He **has knowledge** (1 Corinthians 2:11). (8) He **has affection** (Romans 15:30). (9) He **has a will** (1 Corinthians 12:11). (10) He **has goodness** (Nehemiah 9:20). (11) He **can be grieved** (Ephesians 4:30; Isaiah 63:10). (12) He **can be despised** (Hebrews 10:29). (13) He **can be blasphemed** (Matthew 12:31-32). (14) He **can be resisted** (Acts 7:51). (15) He **can be lied to** (Acts 5:3). (Sweeny 35-39) (16) He **chose certain men** (Acts 13:2) and (17) He **makes intercessions** (Romans 8:26). (Howard 11-12)

Further, the Holy Spirit is attributed with characteristics of a person, too. The Spirit **descends** (Matthew 3:16) and **leads** (Matthew 4:1; Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18). The Holy Spirit **has a name** (Matthew 28:19), **reveals things** (Luke 2:26; 1 Corinthians 2:10), **has before taken shape or form** (Luke 3:22), **comforts** (John 14:16; Acts 9:31) and **dwells** (John 14:17; Romans 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14). He **gives utterance** (Acts 2:4), **can witness things** (Acts 5:32), **sends** (Acts 13:4), **reasons** (Acts 15:28), **forbids** (Acts 16:6-7), **appoints** (Acts 20:28), **justifies** (1 Corinthians 6:11), **gives gifts** (1 Corinthians 12:8-9), **writes** (2 Corinthians 3:3), **is sent** (Galatians 4:6), **can be fellowshipped** (Philippians 2:1), **sanctifies** (2 Thessalonians 2:13), **signifies** (Hebrews 9:8) and **can be mistreated** (Hebrews 10:29).

The foregoing personal characteristics of the Holy Spirit are tempered with *divine* qualities. The Holy Spirit is (1) eternal (Hebrews 9:14), (2) omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), (3) omnipotent (Micah 3:8) and (4) omnipresent (Psalm 139:7, 10). He also did or does participate in (5) creation (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13),

(6) providence (Psalm 104:30), (7) redemption (John 3:5), (8) the coming resurrection (Romans 8:11) and (9) was the source of miracles (1 Corinthians 12:9, 11) (Sweeny 39-42).

Lastly, as one would expect of a person, the Holy Spirit is addressed in God's Word by name. (While it is true animals and objects also *may have* names, typically every person does have a name.) Someone has suggested there are "...18 different names used in referring to the Spirit in the Old Testament and 39 in the New Testament for a total of 52 different names in the Bible since five of them are common to both Old and New Testaments" (L'Roy 6). These references include: the Spirit of God; Spirit of the Lord; my Spirit; Holy Spirit; Spirit; thy good Spirit; Spirit of truth; Spirit of Christ; Spirit of the Living God; Spirit of His Son; Comforter; right Spirit; free Spirit; Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might of knowledge and fear of the Lord; and Spirit of Holiness.

The Church & the Holy Spirit

What does the Bible, especially the New Testament, record concerning the Holy Spirit and His relationship to the Lord's church? Further, is there any difference between the role of the Spirit in the church of the first century and His role in the church of the present century?

The Holy Spirit of God makes his debut in Scripture in the opening verses of the Bible (Genesis 1:2). However, the Holy Spirit has not always interacted directly with creation, including the creature, man. For several hundred years following the close of the Old Testament until the announcements of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah (Luke 1:5-17, 26-33), the triune Godhead was silent. There was no new, public revelation recorded during this span of time (though, the prophet Simeon, perhaps about the commencement of the Gospel histories, was apprised of the then impending birth of the Messiah and promised he would see him before his death, Luke 2:25-29).

The role of the Holy Spirit with the Bible brings up consideration of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and miracles. What is the scope of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? From what source came the miracles performed by others than the apostles? What were the stated purpose and duration of miracles?

Holy Spirit Baptism: Limited Promise

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised solely to the apostles by Jesus, according to the Gospel record of John, chapters 14 through 16. Though, it is true that some of the teachings of the Lord in the context of John 14-16 generally apply to Christians today as well (e.g., Jesus will come back to get his saints, 14:1-3; true love exhibits itself by obedience, 14:15, 21, 23-24; disciples of Christ must bear fruit, 15:1-6), these things are also taught elsewhere in the Gospel. However, Jesus promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit only to the apostles, as Acts 1:4-5 clearly affirm. Associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit was Spirit enabled miraculous power (Acts 2:1-4). Acts 1:26 identifies the apostles as the recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. (Remember that the "*Chapter Two*" heading was arbitrarily placed in the text by mortal men and should pose no disruption of the narration from Acts Chapter One to Chapter Two.)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised exclusively to the apostles, and Scripture bears testimony that they alone received it in Acts Two. The role of the Spirit in the church of the first century included enabling the apostles of Christ to perform miracles (receiving new revelation and confirming that revelation with other miracles). Further, nowhere does the Bible ascribe to the Holy Spirit the responsibility of saving anyone from anything; those who believe contrariwise are mistaken. Read John 14-16 to discern the proper role of the Spirit in the first century church.

Other Miraculous Power

Not through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but through the imposition of an apostle's hands (with a single exception) others in the infant church received miraculous power, too. Cornelius, of course, and those who were with him represent the only exception to this biblical rule (Acts 10-11), and this owing to special circumstances surrounding the initial proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentile world. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and this miraculous power are included in the promise of Joel 2:28, 29, "And it shall come to

pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”

The manner of fulfillment and the degree to which individuals were enabled with the Spirit working miracles through them was left for New Testament definition. The apostles received a greater abundance of miraculous ability than others (2 Corinthians 12:12). Prophecy was fulfilled in the apostles through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whereas others saw the fulfillment through the imposition of apostolic hands (except at the house of Cornelius, already noted).

Purpose & End of Miracles

The purpose of the Spirit working miracles through the apostles and others in the early church is clearly stated in Mark 16:20. “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word** through the accompanying signs. Amen.” Once the Gospel (then, new revelation) was confirmed (Hebrews 2:3), and transmitted to written form (John 20:30-31 and the rest of the New Testament), attention was directed to the completed, perfected, written Word of God versus the verbal, partial revelations relied upon formerly (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25; Ephesians 4:11-14). Hence, when miracles had forever served their divinely prescribed purpose, and at least by the time the last apostle and the last person upon whom an apostle laid his hands to transfer power died, miracles ceased. At the same time the task of the Holy Spirit in which He miraculously participated in the work of the church also ceased.

The *purpose* of miracles was never primarily to heal the sick, speak in foreign languages without prior study or any other miraculous manifestation; miracles were not an end in themselves. The Corinthian church, which truly did possess miraculous power, became infatuated with miraculous display and overlooked the true purpose of miracles. For this error they were corrected by the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 12-14). Had miracles not the divine purpose cited above, and were they used purely at the discretion of men, no explanation can be rendered for **not** healing sick saints (2 Timothy 4:20) and **not** raising dead apostles (Acts 12:2). For that matter, if Bible miracles existed today, what plausible reason could men offer now for not healing the sick instead of building hospitals and not raising the dead instead of preaching funerals?

Several religious groups claim miraculous power in our day. However, these folks are incapable of duplicating Bible miracles (e.g., raising the dead, multiplying bread and fishes, walking on water, instantly healing visible diseased or broken bodies). It is astonishing and would be whimsical, too, were it not so tragic, that so many people today have the same erroneous infatuation with miracles as did the Corinthians, though **miracles have ceased**.

Summary

It is not strange that the Holy Spirit does not now interact miraculously with mankind. Comparatively speaking, the Godhead of whom the Spirit is part has only infrequently visited the human race with divine judgments, new revelations and other miracles. These have never been daily affairs!

It should come as no surprise to students of the Bible that the Spirit no longer enables men to perform miracles; the end of miracles was foretold in the Gospel. The church of the first century was correct when it understood and taught that the Gospel *was being* miraculously received and confirmed (2 Peter 1:21; Mark 16:20). The Lord’s church of following centuries is correct when it understands and teaches that the Gospel *has been* miraculously delivered and forever confirmed. The difference is that then the Holy Spirit exercised Himself miraculously, but now He does not.

Prophecies such as Joel 2:28-29 began to be fulfilled by the apostles’ reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Further fulfillment occurred when others received the power to perform miracles through the imposition of apostles’ hands upon them. Whereas the purpose of miracles was foremost to deliver and confirm new revelation (the Gospel), and the Gospel has been confirmed, miracles are no longer necessary. Further, since the apostles have died as well as those they empowered to perform miracles, in a sense, subsequent miracles have died also. However, the original miracles live on within the New Testament and are no less efficacious today than when first performed.

The Godhead has not always miraculously interacted with mankind. Therefore, it is not peculiar that the Holy Spirit does not now interact miraculously with men. Really, the approximately 6,000 years of human history has evidenced comparatively few instances of miraculous intervention. After initial creation by supernatural law (miracle), procreation has continued since according to natural law. Throughout the Old Testament the Godhead only infrequently (comparatively speaking) visited the human race with divine judgments and new revelations; divine judgments, new revelations and miracles were not *daily* affairs.

Though especially the work of the Holy Spirit was again apparent on earth beginning with the Gospel records through the first century, prophecies foretold the cessation of the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit once more (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-14). Hence, it should be no surprise to the honest Bible student that the Holy Spirit does not presently interact in a miraculous way today. The miraculous role of the Holy Spirit in the church is complete.

His Role with the Bible

The Holy Spirit is the Person of the Godhead responsible for the delivery of written, divine revelation to humanity. The Holy Spirit has participated (Genesis 1:2, 26; Judges 3:10; Job 33:4; Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:4) and still participates (1 Corinthians 12:13) in other activities of the Godhead, but He is the One through Whom mankind has received the Word of God in written form. "...No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20-21). "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2; cf. Isaiah 61:1).

Approximately 40 human penmen were divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit over a period of around 1,600 years to write down God's Word. "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Moses is one such Holy Spirit inspired scribe. "So it was, ...Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book..." (Deuteronomy 31:24). Divinely inspired writing was validated by prophecies and their fulfillment (Deuteronomy 18:22) as well as by miracles (Mark 16:17-18, 20; John 20:30-31). "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?" (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Thereby, divinely inspired writers and their written words were distinguishable from uninspired writers and their epistles. Now, false teachers and godly teachers, preachers and writers can be distinguished from each other by consulting the Bible. "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and **searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so**" (Acts 17:11). "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits**, whether they are of God; **because many false prophets have gone out into the world**" (1 John 4:1).

Every honest soul with a mature and working mind knows that God – the Great Designer and Creator – exists through the observation of the universe around us and our very selves, too. Mankind is without excuse for failing to acknowledge the existence of God. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). However, detailed information about the Godhead and God's plan for mankind in this life and eternally is only available through the Holy Spirit inspired Word of God – the Bible. In the Christian Age, the New Testament especially contains the information we need to know (i.e., Christian salvation, Christian worship, Christian living, Christian service, Christian doctrine, earthly blessings, prohibitions, how to make preparation to meet God in Judgment).

Work of the Holy Spirit

What Was the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Past?

Not everything the Holy Spirit did in the past is something that he is charged to do today. For instance, the Spirit participated in creation (Genesis 1:2). After creation, procreation and natural law continue what the Spirit began. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit conveyed new revelation from God to mortal men (2 Peter 1:21), but no new revelations are forthcoming today (Jude 3; Galatians 1:6-9). Also, the Holy Spirit empowered men to perform miracles (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), and yet they were imperfect, partial and temporary compared to the written revelation of God (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Ephesians 4:11-13; James 1:25). The Holy Spirit guided the apostles and caused them to remember what Jesus told them during the Lord's earthly ministry (John 14:26; 16:13); there are no apostles today and no survivors from the days of Christ's earthly mission. In short, nothing the Holy Spirit may have done in the past, apart from the written Word of God, is chargeable to Him to perform today.

What Is the Work of the Holy Spirit Today?

The Holy Spirit is active in the redemptive process when penitent believers are baptized (John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Thus, Bible baptism addresses the whole man – body and spirit. However, the new and spiritually purifying birth is effected "...through the word of God..." (1 Peter 1:22-23; James 1:18; 1 Corinthians 4:15; Ephesians 5:26). This process is easily discerned in Acts Two. (1) The mass heard the Word proclaimed (Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11, 14, 22, 29). (2) Many present believed the preaching (Acts 2:37). (3) They were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). (4) Several received the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41). (5) Those baptized were added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47) or translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; 2:12). What John 3:5 attributes to the Holy Spirit in conversion, Acts 2:47 and Colossians 1:13 attribute to Jesus Christ. In both instances, the Word is the medium through which the redemptive process occurs.

Another function of the Holy Spirit today is to teach man, which he does exclusively through the written Word of God. The Holy Spirit delivered Scripture (2 Peter 1:21; Acts 1:16). Scripture, also called "...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12), enables one to discern between good and evil and become spiritually strong (Hebrews 5:11-14). The spiritually strong or mature can in turn teach others, too.

Sweeney enumerates additional roles of the Holy Spirit today, each of which is inseparably tied to the Word of God. (1) He bears witness with our spirits that we are children of God (Romans 8:16). (2) The Spirit maketh intercession for us (Romans 8:26). "This is not a work done in us nor upon us, but is something done for us before the throne of God." (3) He changes us from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). (4) One day he will quicken our mortal bodies (Romans 8:11) (131-140).

What the Work of the Holy Spirit Never Was

It was never the work of the Holy Spirit to operate directly on a soul to save it. Yet, the false notion that the Holy Spirit operates directly to save souls is the most prevalently believed doctrine about the Holy Spirit today. There is no biblical evidence the Holy Spirit ever operated directly on any soul to save it from anything. Were souls saved through direct operation of the Holy Spirit, the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch would have been an excellent opportunity to record it in Scripture. To the contrary, an angel told Philip to go in the direction of the prospect (Acts 8:26). Then, the Spirit instructed him to go to the eunuch (Acts 8:29). Philip preached Jesus to him and baptized him in water (Acts 8:35-39). Salvation by direct operation of the Spirit would have eliminated (1) the angel, (2) Philip, (3) preaching Jesus and (4) the water.

The theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the heart of the sinner belongs to John Calvin, not to God. Direct operation of the Spirit is believed necessary because Calvinism presumes man's heart is totally depraved, and in that condition, unable to respond freely to the Gospel. "Calvinists do not deny that the Holy Spirit uses the Word in conversion, but contend that the Holy Spirit must operate directly and in

addition to the Word in conversion” (Camp 26). There are many problems with the theory of the direct operation of the Spirit which directly conflict with the Bible. Howard makes these observations:

If God should today convert a soul by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, through miraculous intervention, He would set aside the whole scheme of redemption, revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in the New Testament. ...four thousand years of planning, and requisitioning prophets, angels, His own Son, the apostles, and thousands of disciples, in providing the scheme of redemption... The false theory of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion would dispense with the gospel. ...The direct operation theory would dispense with the preacher of the gospel. ... (Romans 10:14) ... (1 Corinthians 1:21)... (29-30)

Camp adds:

(1) If the Holy Spirit operates directly and apart from the Word, then it must follow that the Word is insufficient. ...If the Spirit operates directly, He must supply something not supplied by the Word. If He supplies something not furnished by the Word, then the Word is insufficient. ... (2) If the Holy Spirit operates directly and apart from the Word, but in a non-miraculous way, then how does one know when the Spirit is operating? This was no problem when the Spirit operated directly and miraculously. There was tangible evidence to establish that it was the Holy Spirit working. “He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear,” (Acts 2:33). ... (3) The direct operation of the Spirit apart from the Word demands a miraculous operation. ... (4) If the Spirit operates directly and apart from the Word, what does the Spirit do? . . . (a) The Spirit could not lead contrary to the Word. ... II Corinthians 13:8 ... (b) If the Holy Spirit operated directly, He could not add any new revelation. Jude 3 ... (c) If the Holy Spirit operates directly today, it would be to interpret the Word, for if the sinner can understand the Word without the Holy Spirit interpreting it for him, why could not the Christian? There would be no point giving revelation if it was impossible to understand the revelation when it was given. ... (d) The direct operation of the Holy Spirit in the Christian strikes at the free moral agency in man. (31-34)

Various objections are noised against the insistence that the Holy Spirit operates today exclusively through the Word of God. Again, to Camp we turn for a concise list and refutation of these objections.

Brethren that contend for the operation of the Spirit apart from the Word try to dodge the question by saying that the Holy Spirit is not the Word. They attempt to show that if the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word, the Holy Spirit is the Word. No one believes this. The position of the Holy Spirit operating only through the Word does not lead to this conclusion. ... Christ operates in our redemption through his blood. He certainly does not operate in our redemption apart from His blood. Does the fact that Christ operates in redemption only through His blood mean that Christ becomes only blood? If Christ can operate in redemption only through His blood and not be only blood, why cannot the Holy Spirit operate only through the Word and not become the Word?

...the proposition that the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word that this makes the Bible take the place of the Holy Spirit. ... Either the Bible is a complete and sufficient revelation for God and meets all of our needs, or it's not. ... The question is not, Is the Holy Spirit working today; but, Is He working directly and without means, or is He working by means of the Word? ... Any claim for any influence of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word would be a miraculous operation. ... Before the New Testament was written, the Holy Spirit operated through inspired men. Now He operates through the inspired Book.

When the proposition is stated that the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word, some ask the question, “What about prayer?” Is the operation apart from the Word essential to prayers being answered? ... If the personal indwelling and the operation of the Spirit apart from the Word are necessary for God to answer prayers, then the following difficulty needs

to be explained. Did God hear and answer prayer before the Christian Age? If yes, then the personal indwelling and operation of the Spirit apart from the Word is not essential to God's hearing and answering prayers.

If the Holy Spirit operates only through the Word, then what about providence? ... The eighth chapter of Acts is the prime passage appealed to. Does the example of Philip and the eunuch prove the operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word in providence? If this example proves the operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word in providence today, then it also proves the direct intervention of angels in providence. ... Question: Did providence operate before the Christian Age? If no, what about Joseph? ... what about the book of Esther? ... third problem ... Is providence limited to Christians? Does God's providential work include sinners? ... Haman's defeat and death were just as much providence working to this end, as it worked for the benefit of the Jews.

... the infidel can memorize the Scriptures. ... Is an operation apart from the Word necessary in conversion? ... If their example concerning the infidel memorizing the Scriptures proves that the Holy Spirit must operate apart from the Word in sanctification, then it even more definitely proves that the Holy Spirit must operate apart from the Word in conversion, for the infidel is not a Christian. But not only is this true in reference to the sinner, they have the same problem with the Christian. Can a Christian backslide? Can a backsliding Christian memorize the Scriptures? ... It is not merely a matter of their memorizing the Scriptures, it depends upon whether or not they are willing to receive the Word and submit to it. Acts 2:41... (12-23)

Summary

1. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take the mind of God and make it known to man.
2. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to take the mind of God, give it to man unmixed with error.
3. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to confirm the truth as a divine revelation. Revelation without confirmation would have made it impossible to distinguish between a genuine revelation and a counterfeit one; therefore, confirmation was essential with revelation. (Camp 12)

The Holy Spirit operates today completely within the scope of and exclusively through the Word of God. ***He does not operate miraculously today*** (1) openly and independent of man as he did in the creation, (2) in conjunction with man as he did through inspired revelation and healing miracles, (3) through prayer or (4) through providence. Not miracles (which were visible), but providence (which is not discernible as it occurs) is the procedure through which the Godhead interacts with mankind respecting prayers. The same divine power behind miracles works behind the scenes today in the unfolding of God's providence.

Works Cited

Camp, Franklin. *The Word of the Holy Spirit in Redemption*. Birmingham: Roberts & Son Publications, 1974.

Howard, V.E. *The Holy Spirit*. second edition. West Monroe: Central Printers & Publishers, 1975.

L'Roy, Elmer. *The Holy Spirit*. Shreveport: Lambert Book House, 1966.

Sweeney, Z.T. *The Spirit and the Word*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, n.d.

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

Some biblical passages that people commonly acknowledge which address the indwelling of the Holy Spirit include the following. Whereas some Christians may desire to list additional passages that *may or may not* actually pertain to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, students of the God's Word likely concur that these verses of Scripture do address this scriptural topic.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed **the Spirit of God dwells in you**. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if **Christ is in you**, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the **Spirit** of Him who raised Jesus from the dead **dwells in you**, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His **Spirit who dwells in you**. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Romans 8:9-16)

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you**?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of **the Holy Spirit who is in you**, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). “And because you are sons, **God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts**, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Galatians 4:6).

The Indwelling of God, the Indwelling of Jesus Christ, the Indwelling of the Word of God and the Indwelling of Man

“And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As **God has said: ‘I will dwell in them** And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people” (2 Corinthians 6:16). “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...” (Ephesians 3:17). “Let the **word of Christ dwell in you** richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). “Now he who keeps His [Jesus’] commandments **abides in Him [Jesus], and He in him**. And by this we know that **He [Jesus] abides in us**, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24). “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, **God abides in us**, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that **we abide in Him, and He in us**, because He has given us of His Spirit... Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, **God abides in him, and he in God**” (1 John 4:12-13, 15).

Who indwells whom? Note from the passages above who is indwelling whom. Not only does the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian, but also: (1) God dwells within the Christian. (2) Jesus Christ dwells within the Christian. (3) The Word dwells in the Christian. (4) The Christian dwells in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In view of the biblical evidence that not only does the Spirit dwell in the child of God, but each member of the Godhead indwells the Christian, there is no scriptural reason to suppose that the Holy Spirit dwells in one differently from how God or Jesus Christ dwells within a child of God? Hence, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit must not be permitted to displace in our minds the indwelling of God, the indwelling of Jesus Christ, the indwelling of the Word or the indwelling of man in God.

Noting the indwelling of the Christian in God ought to enlighten us respecting the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christians. There is no biblical basis for imagining that the Holy Spirit dwells in one differently from man’s dwelling in God? The same process through which God indwells man facilitates man’s indwelling of God (1 John 3:24; 4:13). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit does not deserve more emphasis than the indwelling of God, Jesus Christ or the Word in man, or the indwelling of man in God, etc. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God, Jesus Christ and the Word in man, and the indwelling of man in God are more nearly alike and relatively equal than different. Each case of indwelling either works together or they are antagonistic and contradictory toward each other. The latter notion would pitch the Bible against itself, and therefore, it must be a false concept about indwelling.

How Does Indwelling Occur?

The question is not only how does the Holy Spirit indwell the Christian, but *how does indwelling occur*. Remember, God, Jesus Christ and the Word dwell within the Christian along with the Holy Spirit. Further, the Christian dwells in God, too. So, the question *is not* “How does the Holy Spirit indwell the child of God?” but “How does indwelling occur?” Ascertaining from Scripture how “indwelling” occurs will answer at the same time: (1) “How does the Word dwell in man?” (2) “How does God dwell in man?” (3) “How does Christ dwell in man?” (4) “How does man dwell in the Godhead?” and (5) “*How does the Holy Spirit dwell in the child of God?*”

Members of the Lord’s church, more or less about equally apportioned between the viewpoints, possess primarily two differing views as to the *manner* by which the Holy Spirit indwells Christians. Yet, faithful children of God (1) acknowledge the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the child of God as a New Testament teaching, (2) concede that Bible miracles attributed to the Holy Spirit in the first century infancy of the church are not now occurring, and (3) on that basis, Christian fellowship prevails. For the purpose of this treatise, it is sufficient to accentuate the legitimacy of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and it is not necessary to delve into polemics respecting the manner by which the Holy Spirit indwells the child of God.

Chapter 4: Baptism

Word Meaning

The English word “baptism” is not a translation from the Greek, but rather it is a transliteration. That means the word “baptism” was brought over from the Greek to the English, only the Greek alphabetic letters were exchanged for English alphabetic letters. Hence, the Greek noun “*baptisma*” and the Greek verb “*baptizo*” appear respectively as “baptism” and “baptize” in English. A transliteration does not provide the meaning of a word, and that is probably why it was transliterated instead of translated in the first place. Had the translators actually translated “*baptisma*” and “*baptizo*,” the translation of those words would have run counter to denominational doctrines of sprinkling or pouring water over a candidate for conversion.

“*Baptisma*” and “*baptize*” have to do with immersion or submersion, which does not occur regarding sprinkling or pouring water over someone. However, one neither has to know Greek nor use a Greek dictionary or lexicon to discover the meaning of baptism. Two passages of Scripture in particular identify the activity involved in biblical baptism. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were **buried** with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His **resurrection**” (Romans 6:3-5). “**Buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). There is no “burial” in sprinkling or pouring, but there is both a “burial” in and a “resurrection” from the watery grave of Bible baptism. Sprinkling and pouring for baptism are not authorized in Scripture.

Scriptural Importance

Despite denominational claims to the contrary, the New Testament clearly teaches that baptism is the point at which one become as Christian and his or her sins are forgiven and removed. Perhaps in anticipation of the human resistance to water in the plan of God for the redemption of mankind, God caused an abundance of verses of Scripture to appear in the New Testament that teach that the remission of sins initially occurs at the occasion of baptism.

Jesus summarized the plan of salvation to couple together belief or faith with baptism for salvation to occur. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16). The apostle Peter’s Gospel invitation on the birthday of the church coupled together repentance and baptism in order to receive the forgiveness or remission of sins. “Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...’” (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul was told at the time of his conversion to be baptized and to call upon the name of the Lord. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). All of the other cases of conversion in the Book of Acts cite baptism, too. The apostle Peter declared that baptism saves. “There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

It doesn’t matter how many times someone affirms that baptism does not save, because that does not change the fact that the Gospel of Christ teaches that it does. Baptism or immersion in water for the purpose of receiving the remission of sins, when it is preceded by examining God’s Word from which faith arises (Romans 10:17), faith that Jesus is the Christ (John 8:24), repentance (Luke 13:3) and confessing Christ to be Lord (Romans 10:9-10), results in the forgives of sins and one’s addition by the Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to the church of the Bible (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism, then, is not essential, but instead it is essential.

One Baptism

There is only one baptism that is valid today. By the time the apostle Paul penned his epistle to the Ephesians, there was only one lawful baptism – the baptism of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:16). “One Lord, one faith, **one baptism**” (Ephesians 4:5). The baptism of John the Baptizer was preparatory and preceded the establishment of the church and the Great Commission baptism. After the beginning of the church in Acts 2, the baptism of John was no longer effective, as evidenced by the apostle Paul baptizing correctly 12 men in Acts 19:1-7.

Incidentally, the reference to the Red Sea crossing in the Old Testament is figurative and not literal (1 Corinthians 10:2). No one today is to be “baptized into Moses” in a similar way. The baptism of fire is also figurative, and it refers to eternal punishment (Matthew 3:10-12). John the Baptizer addressed a crowd in which were his and our Lord’s religious enemies, penitent souls and some who later would be the apostles of Christ. The future apostles in that group would receive later the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Wicked, impenitent souls someday will receive the baptism of fire or eternal punishment. No one will truly desire to be baptized with this fire. There is only one baptism that remains, and that is immersion in water for the remission of sins, following one’s belief, repentance and confessing Christ.

Chapter 5: Faith

Word Meaning

Anatomy of Faith

The New Testament word for “faith” comes from the Greek “*pistis*,” which means, “primarily, ‘firm persuasion,’ a conviction based upon hearing...is used in the NT always of ‘faith in God or Christ, or things spiritual’” (*Vine’s*). *Strong’s Concordance* adds, “persuasion, i.e. credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation...” (*Biblesoft’s*). The *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* simply defines “*pistis*” as “faith, trust; faithfulness.” The *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines “faith” (*pistis*) as “the content of what Christians believe – ‘the faith, beliefs, doctrine.’” Thayer’s lexicon says of “faith” that it is “conviction of the truth of anything, belief... in the N.T. of a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and conjoined with it.” The *New Bible Dictionary* records of “faith” (*pistis*):

In the NT faith is exceedingly prominent. The Gk. noun *pistis* and the verb *pisteuō* both occur more than 240 times, while the adjective *pistos* is found 67 times. This stress on faith is to be seen against the background of the saving work of God in Christ. Central to the NT is the thought that God sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Christ accomplished man’s salvation by dying an atoning death on Calvary’s cross. Faith is the attitude whereby a man abandons all reliance in his own efforts to obtain salvation, be they deeds of piety, of ethical goodness or anything else. It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ, of reliance on him alone for all that salvation means. (Morris 358)

While the block quotation accurately represents Bible faith, the salvation through Jesus Christ to which it relates requires human cooperation, too. That is, Bible faith leads a penitent sinner to act out his faith in such a way – on divine terms – so as to receive salvation from past sins. The gift of salvation is *conditional* upon obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9; Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21-23).

From the foregoing definitions of “*pistis*” or “faith,” one can discern that **biblical faith** relates to Christian doctrine or teaching that appears on the pages of the Bible. As such, then, biblical faith is **divine in origin**. Therefore, whatever on which a person bases his or her faith *outside of the Bible* is **not Bible faith!** On the other hand, **true Christian conviction** is the result of **biblical faith**. Bible faith (and what it calls the believer to enact in his or her life) brings about forgiveness of sins and outlines a godly way of life for the child of God to pursue. Religious faith arising from denominational, other world religions or idolatries, etc. or even nominal, not heartfelt faith of Christians is insufficient to save souls, produce godly living or lead one to the portals of heaven for an eternal habitation with God. In other words, not all faith is equally sufficient.

Some of the prominent passages regarding “faith” or “belief” (a synonym) certainly would include the following. “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were **obedient to the faith**” (Acts 6:7 NKJV). “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name” (Romans 1:5). “Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). “So then **faith comes by hearing**, and hearing by **the word of God**” (Romans 10:17). “But now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for **obedience to the faith**” (Romans 16:26). “Watch, stand fast in **the faith**, be brave, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). “For we **walk by faith**, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). “One Lord, **one faith**, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). “Till we all come to **the unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

“Above all, taking the **shield of faith** with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Ephesians 6:16). “And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and **joy of faith**” (Philippians 1:25). “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for **the faith of the gospel**” (Philippians 1:27). “Since we heard of your **faith in Christ Jesus** and of your love for all the saints” (Colossians 1:4). “Remembering without ceasing your **work of faith**, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). “But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the **breastplate of faith** and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and **belief in the truth**” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from **sincere faith**” (1 Timothy 1:5). “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great **boldness in the faith** which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 3:13). “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the **words of faith** and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed” (1 Timothy 4:6). “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have **strayed from the faith** in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). “And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for **salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Timothy 3:15). “To Titus, a true son in our **common faith**: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 1:4). “This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be **sound in the faith**” (Titus 1:13).

“Let us draw near with a true heart in **full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). “Now **the just shall live by faith**; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him” (Hebrews 10:38). “Now **faith is the substance of things hoped for**, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). “Looking unto **Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith**, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). “Knowing that **the testing of your faith produces patience**” (James 1:3). “Thus also **faith by itself**, if it does not have works, **is dead**” (James 2:17). “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?**” (James 2:20). “You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not by faith only**” (James 2:24). “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith without works is dead** also” (James 2:26). “And the **prayer of faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:15). “That the **genuineness** [“**trial**” KJV] **of your faith**, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). “Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained **like precious faith** with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1). “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to **contend earnestly for the faith** which was **once for all delivered** to the saints” (Jude 3). “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your **most holy faith**, praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

The sampling above of the noun form for faith as it appears in the New Testament broadens one’s understanding of biblical faith. Then, the verb form of faith or “believe” (*pisteuo*) possesses a lot more meaning when we read the words of Jesus Christ regarding salvation. “He who **believes** and is baptized will be saved...” (Mark 16:16).

Summary

The *system of faith*, otherwise known as the Gospel or the New Testament, is the only correct source for religious faith in the Christian or Gospel Age. One develops *personal faith* when he or she embraces this biblical faith.

Works Cited

- Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 2006.
- Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans P., 1990.
- Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida, eds. CD-ROM. New York: United Bible Societies, 1988.
- Morris, L. L. "Faith." Ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. *New Bible dictionary*. CD-ROM. Leicester: Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, 1996.
- New Testament Lexicon*. Joseph Henry Thayer, trans. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2006.
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Thomas Nelson P., 1985.

Saving Faith

Necessity of Faith & Importance of Obedience

Who could blame Moses for being distraught as he attempted to lead rebellious Israel through the wilderness of Sinai toward Canaan (Numbers 20:10)? Moses didn't want the job and tried to avoid the mission on which God sent him (Exodus 3-4). Israel fought the lead of God through Moses all along the way (Exodus 15:23-25, waters of Marah; Exodus 16:2-3, complained for food; Exodus 17:2-7, complained of thirst at Rephidim; Exodus 32, golden calf; Numbers 14:1-5, murmuring over report of the 10 spies; Numbers 16:1-40, rebellion of Korah and 250 other princes; Numbers 16:41-50, murmuring because former complainers died). Israel was murmuring against Moses and Aaron once more in Numbers 20:1-13.

God, though, did not chastise Moses for exhibiting frustration, but God punished him for disobeying him (Numbers 20:7-12; Psalm 106:32-33).

The command (Num 20:8) was "Speak ye unto the rock." The act of smiting, and especially with two strokes, indicates violent irritation on the part of Moses; as does also his unseemly mode of addressing the people: "Hear now, ye rebels." The form too of the question, "must we, etc.," directs the people not, as ought to have been the case, to God as their deliverer, but to Moses and Aaron personally. In fact the faithful servant of God, worn out by the reiterated perversities of the people, breaks down; and in the actual discharge of his duty as God's representative before Israel, acts unworthily of the great function entrusted to him. Thus, Moses did not "sanctify God in the eyes of the children of Israel." Aaron might have checked the intemperate words and acts of Moses, and did not. Hence, God punishes both by withdrawing them from their work for Him, and handing over its accomplishment to another. (*Barnes'*)

Aaron and Moses experienced "momentary wavering" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Instead of speaking to the rock with the rod of God in his hand, as God directed him, he spoke to the congregation, and in...inconsiderate words...In the ill-will expressed in these words the weakness of faith was manifested, by which the faithful servant of God, worn out with the numerous temptations, allowed himself to be overcome, so that he stumbled, and did not sanctify the Lord before the eyes of the people, as he ought to have done. Aaron also wavered along with Moses, inasmuch as he did nothing to prevent Moses' fall. But their sin became a grievous one, from the fact that they acted unworthily of their office. God punished them, therefore, by withdrawing their office from them before they had finished the work entrusted to them. They were not to conduct the congregation into the promised land, and therefore were not to enter in themselves (cf. Num 27:12-13; Deut 32:48 ff.). (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

“...they were doomed not to cross the Jordan or to enter the land of promise” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*); see also Numbers 20:22-29 (Aaron) and Deuteronomy 34:1-6.

Imagine reluctantly taking a job you did not want (at the age of 80), being verbally abused constantly by the people you’re leading, putting up with the inconveniences of wandering in a desert wilderness for 40 years, and then upon arriving at an Eden-like land not allowed to enter. That’s the retirement years of the man we know as Moses.

The relationship between faith and obedience is so close that the two concepts cannot be separated within Christianity. Scripture demonstrates that faith and obedience are inseparable aspects of Christianity.

Romans 11:30-32 illustrates the essential sameness of faith and obedience. The Greek words for “unbelief” and “not believed” in these three verses are translated as “unbelief” (Romans 11:30, 32; Hebrews 4:6, 11 KJV) and “disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2; 5:6; Colossians 3:6 KJV, NKJV), “believeth not” (John 3:36; Acts 17:5; 19:9; Hebrews 3:18; 11:31), “unbelieving” (Acts 14:2), “not obey” (Romans 2:8; 1 Pet. 3:1; 4:17) and “disobedient” (Romans 10:21; 1 Peter 2:7-8; 3:20). That is 13 times ‘unbelief’ and 10 times ‘disobedient’ of 23 occurrences in the King James Version of the Bible. The NKJV translates Romans 11:30-32 with the word “disobedience” in each instance the KJV in this passage uses the word “unbelief” or “not believed.”

Obedience is a key element of God-given religion, including Christianity. Jesus saves the obedient (Hebrews 5:8-9; Romans 6:17; 2 Corinthians 10:5). Jesus will punish the disobedient upon his Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:17). The result of the proper kind of love for God is obedience (John 14:15 ASV, 21). Obedience (works) is the natural result of the right kind of faith (James 2:14-26). God rebuked Moses and Aaron in Numbers 20:12 for not sanctifying God before the people by obeying him (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).

Noting the near sameness of faith and obedience, it is no wonder, then, that God rebuked Moses and Aaron for their unbelief when they disobeyed Him (Hebrews 3:16-19). The incident in Numbers 20:1-13 illustrates the seriousness of disobeying God even in matters that through human judgment we might view as insignificant. Leviticus 10:1-2 is another example of what might appear to us as a little thing (of disobedience) that had serious consequences.

Jesus remarked during His ministry that He is the Lord of those who obey Him (Luke 6:46). Jesus Christ is not your Lord if you have not obeyed Jesus (Mark 16:16). Jesus Christ is not your Lord if after being baptized for the remission of your sins you are not faithfully worshipping God, practicing godly living and serving God as He has directed (1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

Barnes' Notes. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 1997.

Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament. New Updated Edition. CD-ROM. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996.

One Faith

The System of Faith

The words “the faith” appear together many times in the Bible and mean the Gospel or New Testament. The following verse is an example of this. “Only let your conduct be worthy of **the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for **the faith of the gospel**” (Philippians 1:27). The commandments of God that every person today who has a reasoning mind must obey are called “the faith” and is about Jesus Christ. Revelation 14:12 makes this clear: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those that keep **the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.**”

It is also important to know that God does not expect people living today to obey the Law of Moses or the Old Testament. “The faith” replaced the Law of Moses, as the following verses show. “But before faith

came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:23-25).

When a person studies “the faith,” which is the Gospel, and decides to accept it as true, a personal faith or belief in Jesus Christ occurs. A **personal faith** can only occur through a study of “**the faith**.” This is what the apostle Paul taught in Romans 10:17: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

If a person does not have a personal faith in Jesus, he or she cannot please God. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

A person must have personal faith or belief to be saved from his or her sins; Jesus said “...you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Added to faith, one must also obey God in other ways, too, before God will take away sins. Submitting to immersion in water (baptism) is a natural result of personal faith learned from “the faith.” Faith joined with baptism takes sins away: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

First, to receive forgiveness of sins, one must obey the faith: “And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were **obedient to the faith**” (Acts 6:7). Secondly, every soul needs to practice the message of 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in **the faith**. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Chapter 6: Satan – Man’s Greatest Adversary

Introducing Satan

Studying the Book of Job is a good occasion to study about Satan since more verses in Job cite this infamous Bible character than occurs in any other Bible book (Jackson, *Book of Job* 98). People often ponder the **origin and nature of Satan**, and only the Bible can offer any insight respecting his identity. “The Bible does not address specifically the origin of Satan, yet there is adequate information to draw a logical, well-reasoned conclusion as to how he came into existence” (Thompson). Since one learns from Scripture that Satan is not deity but is subject to deity, it must be that Satan is a created being (as we are also). From the opening pages of the Bible, regarding creation, everything God created was initially “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). **Later**, man (Genesis 6:5-6) and beast (Genesis 6:7) departed from their original state (Genesis 6:12-13), for which reason God destroyed all but eight souls in the days of Noah (1 Peter 3:20). Likewise, Satan departed from his original state. “According to Psalm 103:20-21, angels do have divine regulations...” though “commandments given to angels are different from those given to man” (Jones 30). Mankind and Satan exercised the freewill with which God had endowed each of them to sin against God.

Several verses of Scripture reveal that Satan was once an angel who rebelled against God. In other words, Satan is “a good angel that went bad” (Stacy 49). Furthermore, Satan was not alone in this rebellion, but other angels participated with him in that rebellion; consider these. “For if God did not spare **the angels who sinned**, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4 NKJV). “And the **angels** who did not keep their proper domain, but **left their own abode**, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels**’” (Matthew 25:41).

Freewill

God created neither robotic angels nor robotic humans. Though God through omniscience has the capacity to know the future, inclusive of the fact that Satan and other angels would rebel, and that humanity, likewise, would rebel, He still chose to create angels and humans—with freewill. Therefore, both Satan and humans bear respective responsibility for their sinful actions. For instance, despite the fact that Satan introduced temptation to sin into the world, God punished Adam and Eve for their transgressions—because they were guilty.

Every passage that calls upon mankind to respond in a designated way implies the capacity of mankind to respond satisfactorily of his own freewill or volition. As an example, consider the following abbreviated plan of salvation found in the New Testament. Hear God’s Word and believe (Romans 10:17; Mark 16:16). Repent of sins (Luke 13:5; Acts 17:30). Profess Jesus as Christ (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37). Be immersed in water for the remission of sins (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Be faithful (Revelation 2:10). Erring Christians are also called upon by God through the Bible to repent and pray for forgiveness of sins (Acts 8:22-24).

In addition, every passage that warns mankind also implies the capacity of mankind to respond satisfactorily of his own freewill or volition; note the following verses. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12), and “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Every instruction in the Bible assumes man’s ability to comply with it or to refuse it, thereby confirming man’s ability (and responsibility) to use his freewill correctly (but acknowledging that he may opt to use his freewill incorrectly).

Names of Satan

Names of “Satan” (1 Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6; Matthew 4:10, etc.) found in the Bible include: “the devil” (Matthew 4:1; Ephesians 4:27, etc.), “Beelzebub” (Matthew 12:24), “wicked one” (Matthew 13:19), “enemy” (Matthew 13:28), “the god of this age” [“world” KJV] (2 Corinthians 4:4), “ruler [“prince” KJV] of this world” (John 12:31), “Belial” (2 Corinthians 6:15), “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2), “Adversary” (1 Peter 5:8), “Abaddon” or “Apollyon” (Revelation 9:11), “dragon, that serpent of old” (Revelation 20:2) and others. Additional verses describe his heinous character flaws, such as being the father of lust and lies as well as being a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). “No criminal known to man has more aliases than Satan himself” (Jones 34).

The Devil Is Real

The Devil, also known as Satan, is real. Though he is a spirit being without a fleshly body, the Devil is a real person. God the Father, the Holy Spirit and the angels are other spirit-beings who do not have fleshly bodies. They are all real persons, too.

...the devil is a personal being. Satan is not merely a personification of the principle of evil; in the Bible he is constantly viewed as a real personality. Personal names and personal pronouns are used with reference to him, and personal acts and attributes are ascribed to him. (Jackson, *Book of Job* 9)

We can know that Satan is a real person since: (1) He is mentioned along with other real persons, including Jesus Christ. (2) He is described with personal characteristics such as speaking, tempting and lying. (3) The Devil is one of several angels who sinned and were punished by God. (4) God has prepared an eternal place for Satan and his angels. See Matthew 4:1-11; 25:41; John 8:44 and 2 Peter 2:4.

The devil is evil and desires people to become evil like him. Further, Satan will be punished forever in hell, and he wants everyone to suffer the same punishment. In a figure, Scripture views the Devil as a vicious lion stalking his prey. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Fortunately, God today limits the power of Satan. See 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. Therefore, mankind is able to resist the influence of Satan. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

However, evil people are servants of the Devil, and they influence others around them to become evil also. The apostle Paul called a man a “son of the devil” (Acts 13:6-12) for trying to prevent another man from hearing the Word of God. Sometimes men who serve Satan appear to be righteous. “And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

When anyone practices sin, he is serving the Devil. “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). To turn away from righteous living is said in Scripture to be turning to Satan. “For some have already turned aside after Satan” (1 Timothy 5:15). Sadly, many people turn from God to Satan. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” [“devils” KJV] (1 Timothy 4:1).

The Devil is real and his evil influence is powerful. Many people are also evil and are children of the Devil. However, remember, Satan can be resisted. Therefore, each of us has the personal responsibility: (1) to resist the Devil, (2) not to practice sin, and (3) to submit to the will of God. Daily study of the New Testament will help one to accomplish these three goals.

Satanic Methods & Goals

Satan employs primarily two methods against humanity today. First, he makes a three-pronged assault about which we read in 1 John 2:16—“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” Secondly, “Satan comes in the garb of false religion” (Hailey 376), camouflaged as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). Not only do denominations misdirect believers away from the church of our Lord, but also the numerous world religions steer myriads of souls away from Christianity. Satan applies his craftiness (2 Corinthians 11:3) to both methods to obscure the Lord’s way to humanity.

The goal of Satan is to thwart the efforts of God to redeem mankind and provide for him an eternal home in heaven. It may be that Satan’s reaction to God’s creation of humanity was the catalyst for angelic rebellion in heaven. Ancient, uninspired *traditions* surmise that a portion of the superhuman angelic host who were charged with ministering to humans (Hebrews 1:14) became incensed at the thought of serving lowly man. Yet, one cannot say definitely that this was the reason for the revolt. “When that occurred, however—why they revolted, or what was the number of the apostates—we have not the slightest information, and on these points conjecture would be useless” (*Barnes’ Notes*). However, apparently “pride” was a significant factor in the angelic rebellion (1 Timothy 3:6).

In any case, Satan and his demonic, angel followers battle God, and they oppose mankind, too. The chief way in which the Devil and other renegade angels challenge God is through their efforts to ruin as much of humanity as they can. We may be the reason behind angelic rebellion as well as the focal point of relentless spiritual attacks. The “angels of Satan are limited in their destructive activity... because Satan himself is restricted according to I Corinthians 10:13” (Jones 33).

Dualism

Some attribute Satan’s origin to the doctrine of dualism. ... The doctrine advocates that God, the source of all good, has always existed. And that Satan, the source of all evil, has always existed. The theory goes on to state that both God and Satan are equal in power, knowledge, and strength. The dualist believes that throughout all eternity these foes have been fighting each other and that one day there will be a winner. However, the dualist does not know who will ultimately win. They say, “Hopefully, God, but who really knows?” But, the Bible tells us that Satan has already been defeated. His fate has been sealed. God is all-powerful, unlike Satan. Satan will one day be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and be tormented forever (Revelation 20:10). The Christian does not have to worry about how the battle will turn out. God has already won. (Jones 32-33).

Unless Christians are careful in their thoughts and words, they will unwittingly embrace the false doctrine of dualism. Satan has no hope whatsoever of triumphing over Almighty God.

Summary

“Satan holds the unenviable title of the Chief of all sinners. He is the original sinner. He has practiced sin longer than any other” (Stacy 58). Every other sinner is simply following in the footsteps and shadow of the Devil.

Indeed, Satan did realize many victories in his battle against God, including tempting mankind to sin in the Garden of Eden, from which the original pair was expelled. God, however, also realized many victories, ultimately and finally He is victorious, as was prophesied as early as Genesis 3:15. Especially the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave is the prime victory of God over Satan from which he can never recover. God wins! Hence, His faithful followers are winners, too. The whole Book of Revelation is a volume of God’s ultimate, complete and final victory over Satan. “After the cross, Satan could no longer accuse the brethren (Rev. 12:10-11)” (Jones 38).

Satan is behind the introduction of disease, disability and death into our world. As a consequence of the Satan inspired sin of Eve and Adam, plus widespread human sin leading up to the worldwide, Noahic flood,

God altered the created world. Not because of the guilt of sins, but rather **due to the consequence of sins** back in patriarchal times, people since then experience sickness, injury and death. Likewise, earthly catastrophes of hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, avalanches, flooding, sinkholes, etc. are the consequences of sin committed 4,000 to 6,000 years ago, which led God to modify His creation.

Satan was bad news, and he remains very bad news for the human race. The Devil may offer “passing pleasures of sin” (Hebrews 11:25), but the “way of the ungodly shall perish” (Proverbs 1:6). The good news is that Satan will flee when we resist him (James 4:17). The way in which we can successfully resist Satan is by using the Word of God against him, just as Jesus Christ did (Matthew 4:1-11). The Gospel armor will suffice to protect us from the devices of the Devil (Ephesians 6:10-17; Hebrews 4:12). Each of us needs to be courageous, spiritual warrior (2 Timothy 2:3)!

Satan is “waging war on earth,” and he “is the Christian’s personal enemy. ...Since Satan has waged war on the church, don’t be surprised that **he knows your name. He knows where you work and where you live**” (Jones 38 emphasis added).

Homily on Satan: A Roaring Lion

Thesis: To impress upon Christians the vulnerability to Satan when one does not avail himself of protection afforded through the combined defenses of other Christians.

Introduction:

1. The apostle Peter was inspired to write 1 Peter 5:8.
 - a. The word “sober” means “to be free from the influence of intoxicants” (*Vine’s*).
 - b. To be “vigilant” is “to keep awake i.e. watch” (*Biblesoft’s*).
 - c. “Adversary” means “an opponent (in a lawsuit)” (*Biblesoft’s*) and is ascribed to Satan (cf. 1 John 2:1).
 - d. The definite article (“the”) before the word “adversary” in the Greek indicates a particular adversary, here identified further (*Vincent’s*).
 - e. The word “devil” means “an accuser, a slanderer” (*Vine’s*).
 - f. Satan “is seeking” or plotting against one’s life (*Biblesoft’s*).
 - g. Some translations translate “walketh about” as “prowls.”
 - h. The word “devour” means “gulp entire” (*Biblesoft’s*).
2. Jesus said that Satan is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44).
 - a. The devil has children, according to the apostle John (1 John 3:10).
 - b. Satan also masquerades as “an angel of light,” and his followers represent themselves as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

Body:

I. Satan, like a lion, attacks the young and defenseless.

- A. Satan attacks the babe in Christ who is not sufficiently armed with the knowledge of God’s Word.
 1. Those who exercise themselves in the Word of God can more easily discern the difference between good and evil (Hebrews 5:12-14).
 2. Only a steady diet of God’s Word can transform a baby in Christ into a full-grown Christian (1 Peter 2:2; Ephesians 4:13-14).
- B. Satan attacks those who don’t know any better.
 1. The “naïve” (NIV) or “unsuspecting” (NAS) are susceptible to being misled (Romans 16:18).
 2. The Old Testament also contrasts the “prudent” saint with the “naïve” saint (Proverbs 14:15; 22:3 NAS).
 3. Again, only the Word of God can satisfactorily educate the non-discerning or “simple” person Psalm 19:7).
- C. Being or remaining young or defenseless Christians is just begging for Satan like a lion to

gobble us up (Isaiah 28:9).

II. Satan, like a lion, attacks the weak or sickly.

- A. Weak Christians are those whose consciences are not sufficiently educated.
 - 1. The apostle Paul cautioned strong Christians to be careful not to unnecessarily offend the weak consciences of their brethren (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8).
 - 2. Weak Christians do not have a right to remain weak or make demands on stronger Christians.
- B. Paul also described as weak and sickly Christians those who do not worship God properly (especially regarding the Lord's Supper) (1 Corinthians 11:30).
 - 1. Paul further instructed Christians to "support" or care for the "weak" (*Biblesoft's*) (Romans 15:1).
 - 2. Of course, weak and sickly Christians have a responsibility to participate in their own recuperation (Galatians 6:1-2, 5).
- C. Being or remaining weak or sickly Christians is just begging for Satan like a lion to gobble us up (Isaiah 35:3).

III. Satan, like a lion, attacks those alone or by themselves.

- A. Christians are not supposed to be alone, but they are to worship and study together.
 - 1. The early church met as often as they could to worship and study (Acts 2:42).
 - 2. God requires Christians to worship together at least on each Lord's Day (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
- B. Christians are not supposed to be alone, but they are to fellowship together.
 - 1. The early church met together for Christian fellowship as often as they could – sometimes daily (Acts 2:46).
 - 2. Sometimes that fellowship manifests itself in suffering together (Philippians 3:10).
 - 3. Christian fellowship includes cooperation in taking the Gospel to the world (Philippians 1:5).
 - 4. Fellowship may involve being prisoners together (Colossians 4:10; Philemon 23).
 - 5. Fellowship includes working together for the Lord (1 Thessalonians 3:2; Philemon 1).
 - 6. Importantly, Christians are "fellowheirs" (Ephesians 3:6).
- C. Being alone as Christians is just begging for Satan like a lion to gobble us up (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Conclusion:

- 1. The apostle Paul forewarned the Ephesian Christians not to "give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27).
- 2. Further, Paul instructed the Christians at Ephesus to put on the Christian armor to "be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).
- 3. James advised that when we resist the devil he will flee from us (James 4:7).

Invitation:

- 5. One is not resisting the devil so that he will flee as long as one has not obeyed the Gospel to become a Christian (Acts 2:38).
- 6. One is not resisting the devil so that he will flee as long as one gives the devil a place in his or her life (1 John 1:9).

Works Cited

- Barnes' Notes*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 2006.
- Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, 1994.
- Hailey, Homer. *Now Mine Eye Seeth Thee: A Commentary on Job*. Tucson: Religious Supply, 1994.
- Jackson, Wayne. *The Book of Job*. Abilene: Quality Publications, 1983.
- Jones, Brian W. *Our Fascination with Angels*. Parkersburg: Brian Jones, 1997.
- Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Seattle: Biblesoft, 1997.
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Nelson, 1985.

Chapter 7: The Ministry of Angels

Introduction to Angels

As is true regarding the biblical introduction of God or of Satan, the Bible does not dedicate space to precisely define either what are “angels” or in what other accommodative ways the term may be applied in Scripture. The Bible mentions “angels” “...incidentally as a fact, without furnishing any details to gratify curiosity” (*McClintock and Strong*). “The Bible rarely focuses on angels themselves; they are usually characters in larger stories about God’s dealings with man. Information that we know about angels is determined from whatever details emerge from these stories” (Parker 15). As with God and Satan, for instance, the student of the Bible must piece together information gleaned from several biblical references.

The Book of Job, though, introduces angels as a distinct, created group of beings to which Almighty God has assigned ministries or duties. From time to time, they must appear before God on His throne to give an accounting (“sons of God,” Job 1:6; 2:1). Hence, a little study on angels at this point is warranted.

Definition & Examples

Both Hebrew and Greek words translated “angel” mean “messenger.” As such, the word “angel” can refer to different persons or things according to the context in which the word “angel” appears. Frankly, this is largely true with most words; their exact meanings rely heavily on the context in which they are being used, besides whatever inherent meanings they may have. Therefore, the Hebrew word for “angel” is rendered “messenger” in Job 1:14 and “messengers” in 1 Samuel 11:3, and the Greek word for “angel” appears as “messengers” in Luke 9:52. In none of those references was a member of the heavenly, angelic host intended, but in each instance “ordinary messengers” was meant. In other Old Testament passages, the word “messenger” is applied to prophets (Haggai 1:13; Malachi 3:1) and priests (Malachi 2:7). The word “angel” appears in Revelation 1:20 to refer to ministers of the churches of Asia. *McClintock and Strong* cites perceived examples of “impersonal agents” of pestilence, winds and plagues through the use of Hebrew word for “angels” translated “messenger” or “messengers.” The “**messenger** of Satan,” the apostle Paul’s description of his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7), likewise comes from the Greek word for “angel” (*angelos*).

While the word “angel” in both testaments of the Bible characteristically refers to the heavenly, angelic host, sometimes to human messengers and perhaps to intangible devices (e.g., pestilence, winds, plagues, etc.), the word “angel” occasionally applies in Scripture also to Deity (Genesis 22:11; Exodus 3:2, 6, 14).

Origin & Nature

Angels are created beings, whose creation predates the creation of humanity (Colossians 1:16; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 148:2, 5). “Job 38:7 may imply, in the phrase “sons of God,” that the angels were created before the ‘foundation of the earth’” (Pollard 12).

They are spirit beings, but angels do not have flesh and blood. Though angels are not eternal, they are immortal (i.e., they shall never die, Luke 20:36). Mankind is a dual creature – flesh and spirit being, and we, too, were created and are immortal. “[T]he fact that angels were created, teaches that they are not eternal! Though they will never die, they had a beginning” (Stacy 5). Though our human bodies will die, the spirits within us will not die either.

“Angels are also invisible to the naked eye” (Stover 201). Whenever angels manifested themselves on earth, they always appeared as adult men. Except when they were incognito (camouflaged as though they were earthlings), in addition to human form, they radiated white brightness (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Matthew 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). When they were meant to be seen, one could not overlook an angel. We know that we will not see an obvious angel this side of the grave since Bible miracles through which they were

sometimes made visible have ceased. “One of the most vivid descriptions of an angel is given in Daniel 10:5-6” (Stacy 7). “I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude” (Daniel 10:5-6 NKJV).

Incidentally, aside from cherubim and seraph angels, biblical descriptions of *ordinary angels* fail to reveal if they, too, have wings, and if so how many. They can fly, but wings are not specified (Revelation 14:6).

Angels occupy an existence below the Godhead (1 Peter 3:22; Hebrews 1:4, 6) and above humans (Hebrews 2:6-9). However, righteous men will one day judge fallen angels (1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Peter 2:4).

In what sense will men judge angels? Matthew 12:41 has the answer. This verse says, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with the men of this generation and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold a greater than Jonah is here.” The Ninevites will condemn many of the Jews, who lived in Jesus’ day. They did much with little. They repented at the preaching of Jonah. The Jews in Jesus’ day did little with much. The Jews failed to believe the very Son of God, who was in their midst in the robe of human flesh! ...Angels sinned though they had the marvellous privilege of being in the immediate presence of God! Many Christians will remain faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10), who have never known the strength and encouragement of being in the immediate presence of God. In other words, the example of God’s people will condemn angels. (Stacy 6)

Angels are superior to mankind in physical strength (2 Thessalonians 1:7; 2 Peter 2:11) and knowledge. For instance, angels were responsible for protecting Daniel from a den of lions (Daniel 6:22) as well as protecting Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:28).

There are legions of angels in that host of superhuman beings (Matthew 26:53). There are too many angels for mortals to count (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11). Angels do not marry, and by implication, then, they do not procreate (Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:35-36). “Since angels never marry, they do not reproduce. ...Thus, the number of angels will always remain the same” (Stacy 7).

Angels have freewill; they are not robotic any more than are we. Hence, some angels, of whom Satan is chief, exercised that volition to rebel against God (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). The balance of the angels who remain loyal to God choose not to sin. “The moral perfection of angels is shown by such phrases as ‘holy angels’ (Luke 9:26); ‘the elect angels’ (2 Timothy 5:21)” (*McClintock and Strong*).

Angel Organization

Herein I am borrowing the phrase “Angel Organization” from Brian Jones in his little book, *Our Fascination with Angels* (14). He made an interesting comparison between the noticeable organization of both the home and the church with the administrations of angels. The church sports a hierarchal arrangement descending from Jesus Christ as Head, to the elders of a congregation, and from there to the church’s deacons, teachers, preachers and the balance of the members. The home again has Jesus Christ as head over the husband, who is head over the wife and parents who are over children. “With all of this divine organization, should we be surprised that angelic beings also share an organizational system? ...angels too comprise a developed structure” (Jones 15).

Ephesians 1:21, Colossians 1:16 and 1 Peter 3:22 may represent good angel rankings, designated as *Principalities*, *Powers*, *Dominions* and *Thrones*. John Stacy in his book, *Citizens of Eternity*, noted that some think that the “elders” in heaven are also a class of angels (18-19). Further, Ephesians 6:12 may represent to us “the hierarchy of evil angelic beings” (Jones 18).

Cherubim

The singular for “cherubim” is “cherub.” The singular form appears 30 times in the Old Testament, and the plural appears another 65 times. Genesis 3:24 first introduces cherubim as they were placed in the Garden of Eden after the fall of mankind to prevent Adam and Eve from reentering paradise and having access to the Tree of Life. Later, cherubim adorned the curtains of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26:1). The Ark of the Covenant was fashioned with two cherubim figures overlaid with gold resting on its top. These were winged creatures with man’s hands under its wings. It was also full of eyes and had four different faces: a cherub’s, a man’s, a lion’s and an eagle’s (Ezekiel 10:1-22). A synonym for “cherubim” is “living creatures” (Ezekiel 10:15); Ezekiel 1:5-10 describes “living creatures” there as possessing four wings, hands, feet appearing like a calf’s foot, a burnished brass sheen and four faces (man, lion, ox and eagle). They could run like a bolt of lightning (Ezekiel 1:15).

Seraphim

Seraphim are only mentioned by name twice, both times in the same passage (Isaiah 6:2, 6). This creature has six wings and one face. It inhabits the throne room of God.

Archangels

Michael is the only archangel named in the Bible (Jude 9; cf. Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Revelation 12:7), but evidently, he is not the only archangel (Daniel 10:13). An unspecified archangel will accompany our Lord at His Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

Gabriel

Gabriel is the only other angel whose name appears in Scripture, and the precise order of angels to which he belongs is not revealed. He is mentioned four times (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26). The description of an angel noticed already was that of Gabriel (Daniel 10:5-6).

Other Angels

There may be other classes of angels about which we know very little. For instance, some Bible students think the “elders” around the heavenly throne (Revelation 4:4) represent a class of angels, while some also believe that “the angel of his presence” (Isaiah 63:9) is still another classification of angels.

The Angel of the Lord (Jehovah ASV)

“The Angel of the Lord” (“of Jehovah” ASV) is a specifically worded phrase that appears in nearly 60 instances. This special designation differs in application from what we customarily think of as “angels.” In other words, “the Angel of the Lord” is no ordinary angel. That is because “[m]any of these passages have the angel of Jehovah saying or doing things that only God could do, or that only one with God’s authority could do” (Aebi 82). Consider a sampling of these passages, as well as other references with similar import that do not use the same phrase.

Hagar fled from Sarai in **Genesis 16**, but “the Angel of the Lord” intercepted her, comforted her and sent her back to Sarai and Abram. “The Angel of the Lord,” “the Lord” (“Jehovah” ASV) and “God” are used interchangeably (7-14). Inspired Moses, human penman of the Book of Genesis, validated the relationship of those designations through his recording it as such.

Genesis 18 opens with Abraham receiving a visit from “the Lord” (“Jehovah”) as one of the “three men” to whom the patriarch extended hospitality. The other two are identified as “angels” (Genesis 19:1). As Abraham and the three men traveled along, “the Lord” (“Jehovah”) and the two angels, Jehovah and Abraham bartered over the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:17-33). Compare with this

narration the words of Jesus in **John 8:56-58**, for there our Lord identified Himself as having interacted with Abraham. Store this information away while we consider additional passages that either use the phrase “the Angel of the Lord” or refer to similar circumstances without using those certain words.

Genesis 22:1-19 chronicles the account of the willingness of Abraham to obey God by sacrificing his son Isaac. That context shows that “the Angel of the Lord” and “God” are references to the same person (11-12). Further, in **Genesis 31:11-13**, “the Angel of the Lord” told Jacob that He was God.

At the call of Moses to be the deliverer of the Israelites from Egypt, “the Angel of the Lord” spoke to him from out of a burning bush (**Exodus 3:1-15**). The context also uses the terms “Lord” or “Jehovah,” “God” and the “I Am” interchangeably with “the Angel of the Lord.”

Numbers 22:22-38 use these words and phrase interchangeably: “Lord” or “Jehovah,” “Angel of the Lord” and “God.” This was the episode of Balaam, his donkey and the Angel of the Lord. In **Judges 6**, “the Angel of the Lord” and “Lord” (“Jehovah”) are used interchangeably for each other, and “Angel of the Lord” received worship from Gideon. In **Judges 13**, “the Angel of the Lord” is identified as “God,” and He was worshipped by the parents of Samson. Since angels do not receive worship, and only members of the Godhead may be worshipped, “the Angel of the Lord” must refer not to an ordinary angel, but instead to a member of the Godhead (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).

Who is “the Angel of the Lord” (“Jehovah”)? From considerations of the interchangeability of “Jehovah,” “the angel of the Lord” (“Jehovah”) and “God,” as well as receiving worship, “the angel of the Lord” must refer to one of the three members of the Godhead. Two New Testament passages help us to determine which member of the Godhead is “the angel of the Lord.” During His ministry and while lamenting over Jerusalem, Jesus Christ claimed to have personally interacted with the nation of Israel anciently (**Matthew 23:37**). Then, the apostle Paul wrote by inspiration that it was Jesus Christ who accompanied and ministered to the Israelites at the time of their exodus from Egypt and subsequent wilderness wandering (**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**; cf. **John 8:56-58**). “Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: ‘I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, I will never break My covenant with you’” (**Judges 2:1**). Hence, “the Angel of the Lord” or “Jehovah” was the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. “The Spirit and the Father are mentioned several times in both Testaments. However, it would seem that Christ is absent in the Old Testament except by way of prophecy. But from these passages we see that Christ was not dormant in the Old Testament. He was a theophany of God in the form of the angel of the Lord” (Jones 48).

The Ministry of Angels

Today, “[a]ngels operate in the realm theology calls ‘providence’” (Hodge 13). The workings of God’s providence are hidden from humankind except where God has specifically revealed and confirmed instances of it (e.g., Joseph sold into Egypt, Genesis 50:20). Therefore, one cannot know the full scope of the ministry of angels in the Christian Era since miraculously confirmed revelation from God has been completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Jude 3). However, historically, angels have had a wide range of interaction with mankind as God’s messengers.

Angels punished cities (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19:13), nations (e.g., Egypt, Exodus 12:23; Israelites, 2 Samuel 24:15-16), armies (Assyrian, 2 Kings 19:35) and a king (Herod, Acts 12:23). God rules in or among nations (Daniel 2:21; 5:21); part of how God continues to do that today may include the activity of angels in matters of God’s providence.

Angels also played a role in delivering the Old Testament Law. “[W]ho have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). “What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:19). “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him” (Hebrews 2:2-3).

Angels sometimes encouraged or emboldened the children of God. Angels encouraged Mary (Luke 1:26-38), women at the tomb (Matthew 28:5-7) and the apostle Paul (Acts 27:24) (Stacy 35).

“In the conversion of the Ethiopian, an angel brought him (the prospect) and the preacher together. ...An angel also played a role in the conversion of Cornelius” (Stacy 25-26). Angels have always expressed an interest in human salvation (1 Peter 1:10-12), and they remain keenly interested in the salvation of souls, rejoicing when souls repent of sin (Luke 15:10). Angels may yet play a part in the providential, behind the scenes, not obvious, facilitating of bringing prospects and teachers of God’s Word together – providing opportunity for conversion.

There is a ministry of angels in which they work at the bidding of God especially on behalf of humanity. “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). “They minister to the saints, though unquestionably in an unseen, unfelt, and invisible way (Hebrews 1:14). They appear in the assembly of the saints, though again in a way entirely imperceptible (1 Corinthians 11:10, noting context)” (Pollard 12).

It is possible that sometimes they may yet appear in human form as they have from time to time throughout history (Genesis 18-19). “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Hebrews 13:2). Unlike one of the tasks that God previously further assigned them, “...they do not appear personally today with messages. If they did they would be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9)” (Pollard 12).

There certainly remains a ministry of angels in which I am personally very much interested. Angels await the passing from this life of each godly soul so they can personally escort and carry us to spiritual paradise. “Angels” plural appear in Luke 16:22; I am looking forward to at least two of God’s heavenly messengers awaiting me to facilitate my navigation through “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). The ungodly have not such angelic escort; Luke 16:22 simply says “the rich man also died.”

Angels will attend the Second Coming of our Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7). In addition, a part of the ministry of angels that has not commenced just yet pertains to the aftermath of the Second Coming. “Angels shall reap, gather, sever, and burn. ...Mt. 13:39 ...Mt. 13:41-42...” (Stacy 30). The angelic host will participate in the Judgment of humanity, regarding separations and assignments according to their sentencing by Jesus Christ.

Angels are worshipping God now, and they will always be worshipping God (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; Hebrews 1:6). One day, the righteous will do the same along with them throughout eternity. Angels also stand at the gates of heaven (Revelation 21:12).

“Many Christians believe that since the cross, angels just sit around and do nothing. How untrue! Let us thank God for what angels have done and are doing today. Surely, when we consider the actions of angels, we should have renewed sense of awareness of the greatness and goodness of God” (Stacy 36). God is watching out for us, and part of the way He accomplishes that is through the angelic host (Hebrews 1:14). Jacob’s dreamy vision of angels ascending and descending a ladder between earth and heaven (Genesis 28:12) is a good symbol of frenzied activity for us to remember the benevolent ministry of angels toward righteous souls.

Were the angels to have no more ministry than what we have noticed, that would be enough. I am weary just contemplating some of what angels have done and what they continue to do.

Guardian Angels

The Bible does not use the term “guardian angels.” Matthew 18:10 and some other verses are misconstrued in an attempt to support the doctrine of personal, individual *angelic bodyguards* of a sort. In actuality, Matthew 18:10 in its context refers to the general ministry of angels toward humans.

In using the phrase “their angels,” Jesus implies that angels are charged with the welfare of Christians. In this case, He refers to little ones who believe in Christ, presumably new or vulnerable Christians, comparable in their trust to little children (cf. vv. 1-5). He does not use the term “guardian angels” nor does He say there is a one-to-one assignment of an angel for each person or that an angel appears in human form to rescue that person from

danger or to deliver him or her from distress... There is an angelic ministry, and there is some means by which it is carried out. ...methods by which God effects His providential care of Christians. (Parker 16).

Furthermore, “[t]his passage says nothing about these angels doing anything upon the earth, rather it speaks of their looking upon the face of God in heaven” (West 17).

If mankind has *guardian angels*, at least one personally assigned to each innocent child and godly soul, they *aren't doing a very good job* of protecting their charges from disease or infirmity, accident or injury, bodily harm and death, etc. “If the purpose of a guardian angel is to preserve life, why do so many die prematurely? If the purpose of guardian angels is to keep us from sin, then why is it that so many Christians become unfaithful?” (Frizzell 7). “From what does the guardian angel if such there be, protect? Not temptation, not suffering, not agony, not pain, not sorrow, not death. Any view in conflict with known and demonstrable facts cannot be true” (Woods 18).

Dennis Gullede observed that some noteworthy brethren in the recent past subscribed to the notion of guardian angels, including B.W. Johnson, H. Leo Boles and J.W. McGarvey. However, contemporary brethren almost universally concur that guardian angels are not warranted from study of the Scriptures. Still, some brethren yet suspect that we may have guardian angels (Stacy 29).

“The same arguments for objecting to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit would also apply with equal force in this case” to guardian angels (Gullede 4).

The doctrine of “guardian angels” as currently taught involves many of the same errors and misconceptions of the theory now popular, with some among us of a direct, immediate and independent operation of the Holy Spirit – apart from the Word of truth. It supports, indeed argues, the premise that there is personal, independent direction from God, exercised upon his people today through mediums other than the inspired, infallible and all-sufficient word of God. Common to both views is the theory that there is implantation of thoughts, impressions and leading upon the heart, bypassing all revealed religion, and that this motivation is achieved by direct impact of heavenly beings – in the case of the theory under review, by angels, and in the other, by direct immediate introduction of influences into the heart by the Holy Spirit. These views, both false, originated in denominational theology – not the Bible. (Woods 19)

Summary

Brother John Parker provided an excellent synopsis of angels in an article appearing in the *Gospel Advocate* magazine some years back.

1. They are supernatural, below God and above man (Psalm 8:4-5). **2.** They are created by God (Psalm 148:2-5). **3.** They are spirits, although they have temporarily assumed bodily form (Hebrews 1:14; cf. Genesis 18-19). **4.** They are vast in number (Revelation 5:11). **5.** They are ordered by rank (Colossians 1:16; Jude 9). **6.** Some fell from their original pure state (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). **7.** They attend the presence of God (Revelation 5:11-12). **8.** They help God's people (Hebrews 1:14). **9.** In the past, they have directly communicated and interpreted God's will to men (cf. Judges 13:3-21; Acts 8:26; 12:7-11). **10.** Sometimes they have performed fearful acts in executing God's will (cf. 2 Kings 19:35; Acts 12:23; Matthew 13:41). **11.** Angels were particularly prominent during Christ's ministry (cf. Luke 1:26-30; 2:1-14; Matthew 4:11; 28:2-6; John 20:11-12). (15)

Angels participated in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ on at least these occasions: an angel informed Joseph about the coming Messiah through his betrothed Mary (Matthew 1:18-24); angel Gabriel explained what was about to unfold to Mary (Luke 1:26-38); an angel steered the wise men home a different way to avoid the murderous King Herod (Matthew 2:13-20); angels ministered to Jesus Christ following His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13); an angel strengthened our Lord at Gethsemane (Luke

22:43); angels attended the resurrection of Christ (Matthew 28:5-7; John 20:12-13); two angels were present at the Ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:10); and angels will accompany our Lord at His Second Coming (Matthew 25:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7) (Myers 17). Though these citations pertain to our Lord, our Lord's ministry pertained to our salvation. Hence, by ministering to Jesus Christ, angels were performing their ministry to us at the same time (Hebrews 1:14).

Doubtless, we would like to know more about angels than what is revealed. In addition, we would like more clarity on what does appear in Scripture about angels. However, we will have to be content with the portrait of angelic beings siphoned from scattered biblical texts that mention them, often in a passing way (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Works Cited

- Aebi, Charles J. "Angel of the Lord." *Studies from the Book of Zechariah*. Moundsville: West Virginia School of Preaching, 2002.
- Frizzell, Terry. "Do We Have Guardian Angels?" *The Sower*. Oct 2000, 7.
- Gulledge, Dennis. "Do We Have Guardian Angels?" *First Century Christianity*. Jan 1996, 4-5.
- Hodge, Charles. "Misconceptions about Angels." *Gospel Advocate*. Aug 1997, 12-13.
- Jones, Brian W. *Our Fascination with Angels*. Parkersburg: Brian Jones, 1997.
- McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*. CD-ROM. Seattle: BibleSoft, 2000.
- Myers, Edward P. "Jesus and His Angels." *Gospel Advocate*. Aug 1997, 17.
- Parker, John. "Angels: Ministering Spirits." *Gospel Advocate*. Aug 1997, 15-16.
- Pollard, Neal. "I See Angels." *World Evangelist*. Jul 2001, 12.
- Stacy, John. *Citizens of Eternity*. Rutherford: Stacy Publications, 1979.
- Stover, Doyle. "On Angels Wings." *Christian Bible Teacher*. Sep 2001, 196, 201.
- West, D. Gene. "What Is the Role of Angels Today?" *Upon the Rock*. Dec 2000, 14-17.
- Woods, Guy N. "Guardian Angels." *Firm Foundation*. Sep 1991, 18-19.

Chapter 8: Sin

Just what does the word “sin” mean? The Greek word for the noun “sin” is “*hamartia*,” which means, “a missing of the mark.” Another noun related to it, “*hamartema*” means “an act of disobedience to divine law” (*Vine’s*). The verb “*hamartano*” means “to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize)” (*Biblesoft’s*). According to Wuest, “*hamartia*” “was used in the Greek classics of a spearman missing the target at which he aimed the spear. ... In the n.t., it speaks of sin as the act of a person failing to obey the Word of God, failing to measure up in his life to the will of God.” Robertson illustrates sin as “missing the mark as with an arrow.” The *New Bible Dictionary* notes, “The principal NT term [for “sin”] is *hamartia* (and cognates)... In classical Gk. it is used for missing a target or taking a wrong road. It is the general NT term for sin as concrete wrongdoing, the violation of God’s law (Jn. 8:46; Jas. 1:15; 1 Jn. 1:8).” The Greek Dictionary defines “*hamartia*” as “a. to be without a share in; b. to miss the mark; c. to err, be mistaken; d. to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour, to do or go wrong; e. to wander from the law of God, violate God’s law, sin.” Notice the inspired New Testament definition of sin in 1 John 3:4. “Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and **sin is lawlessness**” (NKJV) or “...**sin is the transgression of the law**” (KJV). Sin is the violation of God-given instructions or law – for everyone now living, found in the New Testament. Further, “all unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death” (1 John 5:17 NKJV).

Origin

Satan is the originator of sin, and he was not alone. “For if God did not spare **the angels who sinned**, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4 NKJV). “And the **angels** who did not keep their proper domain, but **left their own abode**, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels**’” (Matthew 25:41).

Satan introduced sin into the world as he persuaded Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 3; cf. Revelation 12:9). Eve was the first human sinner (1 Timothy 2:14), and Adam followed his wife into sin. “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Cure for Sin

The blood of animal sacrifices is incapable to removing sins. “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). However, the blood of animal sacrifices under Patriarchy and Judaism did three things: (1) emphasized the seriousness of sin, (2) presented concept of the need for a sacrificial redemption, and (3) made it clear that nothing on earth was a suitable sacrifice for the removal of sin. Animal sacrifices prepared for the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ to remove sins or redeem fallen man. “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12).

The blood of Jesus Christ is the only cure for sin! Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The saved are “justified” by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Christians commemorate the shed blood of Jesus Christ each time they observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-27). Human redemption is available through the blood of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Revelation 5:9). People from all ethnicities have been brought together in the church through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). The saved have made peace with God through the blood of Jesus (Colossians 1:20). Human consciences are purged by the blood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:14). Christians have boldness to enter into the throne room of God “by the blood of Jesus” (Hebrews 10:19). Jesus Christ sanctifies the saved through His blood (Hebrews 13:12). Fellowship between Christians is made possible through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). Sinners have been washed from their sins by the blood of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:5; 7:14).

There are two, intricately tied together, approaches whereby the blood of Christ is accessible today. Mankind needs access to the blood of Christ in order to achieve the forgiveness of sins or redemption. One's personal faith by way of the system of faith, the Gospel, is part of the equation. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through **faith in his blood**, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:25 KJV).

Secondly as a result of that faith, one obeys the Author of salvation – Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:8-9), including obeying the command to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Baptism simulates the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and through baptism, one is placed into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3-5), wherein He shed His blood (John 19:34). "Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death**? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:3-5 NKJV). Colossians 2:12 also teaches that by baptism one is placed into the death of Christ.

Faith and baptism together provide access to the blood of Jesus Christ, which results in human redemption. Compare that with the statement of our Lord in Mark 16:16, "He who *believes and is baptized* will be saved..." (Mark 16:16).

Wages of Sin

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The **penalty** for passing from this life as an impenitent sinner or having not obeyed the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17) before Jesus Christ's Second Coming is eternal punishment in a devil's hell (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Matthew 25:41).

In this life while walking in the darkness of sin (John 8:12; 1 John 1:6), sinners are separated from God. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity" (Isaiah 59:1-3). Likewise, lost souls in eternity will be separated from God forever (2 Thessalonians 1:9). The wages of sin are too terrible to imagine!

Who Is a Sinner?

Initially, every soul who comes to know the difference between biblically right and wrong becomes accountable for his or her sins. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, prior to that time, babies, young children and even adults whose minds are still and ever childlike are innocent – God does not attribute the guilt of sin to them. No one inherits sin (Ezekiel 18:20), and young children are suitable examples of innocence to characterize the inhabitants of heaven (Matthew 18:2-3). Yet, usually a child matures until "he is of age" (John 9:20-23). "...Until a person has a concept of God, and is able to have a concept of what it means to sin against that God, Jehovah God does not hold him accountable for sin" (Brown).

Therefore, everyone who "is of age" or is accountable to God is a sinner until he or she obeys the Gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Peter 4:17). "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Anyone who has not been baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 41; Mark 16:16) remains a sinner – is not saved, and is **not** added to the church by the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47). In addition, any child of God who commits sins for which he or she does not repent is a sinner – lost (1 John 1:9). Every Christian who fails to walk in the light as Jesus Christ is in the light is a sinner (1 John 1:7).

Non-Christians and erring Christians are sinners. “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

Works Cited

- Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary.*
Brown, T. Pierce. “Age of Accountability.” *Gospel Gazette Online*. Aug 2005. 13
<<http://www.gospelgazette.com/gazette/2005/aug/page13.htm>>.
- Greek Dictionary*. 2001: 2.
- Milne, B. A. with J.M. “Sin.” Ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. *New Bible dictionary* 1996: 1105.
- Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. CD-ROM. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933.
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. CD-ROM. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.
- Wuest, Kenneth S. *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*. CD-ROM. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

