

Sound Doctrine

J.C. Choate

World Evangelism Publications

Winona, Mississippi

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Cover Design and Layout:
Betty Burton Choate

First Printing, India, 1978
Second Printing, Singapore, 1985
Third Printing, Winona, 2007
Fourth Printing, Winona, 2017

Order from:

World Evangelism Publications

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Winona, MS 38967

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www.WorldEvangelism.org

www.gospelgazette.com

Dedication

To those brethren in India — Sunny David, Francis David, Joshua Gootam, P.R. Swamy, S. Rajanayagam, P.K. Varghese, B. Arjunan, and Philemon Rajah — with whom we have worked to spread the Gospel since 1968. We thank them for their faithful service as co-workers with God, with us, and with our support base in the US, as they have spread the message of **Sound Doctrine** through radio, TV, literature, and their unceasing personal labor in Gospel meetings and private studies. May God bless us all with a glorious reunion in that new heaven and new earth!

Betty Burton Choate

September 1, 2017

Introduction

Time and time again the Apostle Paul speaks to Timothy and others about sound things. One of these things was “sound doctrine”. But what is sound doctrine? It is sound teaching, or that which is faithful to the book, God’s word. We would think it only natural that those who would be followers of Christ would put forth every effort to be faithful to Him and to His will, especially in proclaiming it to others.

This, then, is the idea behind this book. It is an effort to present a true and sound message from the Bible. It is an attempt to convey to you, the reader, that which God wants you to know. It affirms the truth and condemns error. It exalts God’s way but downgrades man-made doctrines.

You are invited to read and study this material along with the Bible. If any part of it conflicts with the Lord’s word, then it should be rejected as unsound. Yet, no effort has been spared to emphasize the teaching of our Lord and the necessity of obeying it.

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P. O. Box 72
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June 26, 2007

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Lesson 1

The Law of God

Law is defined as “a rule of conduct or action established by custom or laid down and enforced by a governing authority; the whole body of such rules; the control brought about by enforcing rules.” In the Bible “the law” is often used to refer to the law of Moses (John 1:17). The New Testament is said to be the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). But regardless of what law is under consideration, law itself originated with God, and all subsequent laws, even the secular laws of various villages, cities, and countries around the world, are generally based on God’s law.

From the beginning, it was necessary for God to give man some rules by which he should be governed. God imposed rules and regulations and stipulated consequences for failing to abide by them. With the passing of time and with the growth of the human race, God’s laws for man increased in number. These laws were for man’s own good, dealing both with his moral relationship with his fellowman and with his spiritual relationship with God.

The Patriarchal Law

In the Old Testament, two major laws are revealed. The first was known as the Patriarchal Law. A patriarch was the father, or head of a family or household. With this particular arrangement, God spoke to the patriarchs, and in turn, they spoke to their family members concerning God’s will for them. Some of the well-known patriarchs were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This law had its beginning with Adam and continued for approximately 2500 years, up to the time that the written law was given to Moses. The Hebrew writer *referred to that first type of law when he said, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...”* (Hebrews 1:1).

The Law of Moses

The second law spoken of in the Old Testament is the Law of Moses, or the Mosaic Law. This law was the result of God speaking to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 20, and giving him the “Ten Commandments” as well as many other laws pertaining to man’s moral, physical, and spiritual welfare. It was a written law, the first

commandments being written on tablets of stone, and then the additional laws penned in book form, as well as being written upon the hearts of the people. It was directed only to the household of Israel, to the Jews, God's chosen people. It was a law of works with physical penalties for disobedience. Given originally to Moses, it extended through the time of the death of Christ, which means that it was in force for about 1500 years.

John said of that law, "*For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*" (John 1:17). Christ said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled*" (Matthew 5:17,18). And so it was fulfilled, as Christ said, "*These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me*" (Luke 24:44). You might also want to read 2 Corinthians 3:3, Colossians 2:14, and Galatians 5:4.

The Law of Christ

In the New Testament we read of yet another law, which makes the third and final law found in God's book, the Bible. This law is the Law of Christ. It was given by God through Christ and the apostles and others as they were directed by the Holy Spirit to write it down, and thus it has come down to us in written form.

This law came into force with the death of Christ and will remain binding until He comes again. It was given to all people everywhere when Christ said, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). Referencing again some of the verses we have already referred to, the Hebrew writer, after talking about how God had spoken in the beginning to the fathers by the prophets, went on to say, "*...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 1:2). God said at the transfiguration of Christ, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*" (Matthew 17:5). In John 1:17 the writer declared that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. In James 1:25 he says that this is the perfect law of liberty — it is complete; nothing is lacking.

This is to say, therefore, that we today are not living under the Patriarchal Law, because that law was given to those who lived during the first 2500 years of man's existence. Since we were not there, it was not given to us and it has not been brought over to our time. Neither are we living under the Law of Moses, so the Law of Moses is not binding on us, either. It was binding only on those Israelites (not on Gentiles) who lived from the time of Moses up to the death of Christ, but since we were not there at that time (and since most of us are Gentiles) it did not include us. We cannot go back to that period, and neither are we permitted to bring that law over to this age, so that law is not binding on us and we are not required by God to keep it.

That leaves us with only one law remaining, and that is the Law of Christ as set forth in the New Testament. That law came into force at **the death of Christ** and will be binding until **He comes again**. Since we are living in the time between those two great events, the law of Christ is binding on you and me and on every human being alive today. To be aware of what is expected of us, we need to study the New Testament and make every effort to abide by it. This law is primarily spiritual, but it also serves as a moral and physical law in the sense that when we obey God's spiritual law we will likewise be pure, morally and physically. This also will affect our relationships both with God and our fellowman.

All of God's laws were binding (1) on the people to whom they were given, (2) at the time they were given, and (3) for the period they covered. They were given to protect, benefit, and save mankind. Those who have kept His statutes have been blessed, but those who have broken them have been made to pay the penalty. How much better off man would be if he would learn the importance of staying within the framework of God's law rather than transgressing it. Furthermore, how sad it is that men, in general, have made it a practice to change God's laws but, in doing so, they have rejected God Himself. Actually, His commands are not to be tampered with. There are many warnings along this line. For instance, read Revelation 22:18,19 where the Lord warns that we must not add to His word or subtract from it.

Civil Laws

But there is one other set of laws we want to notice. These are generally thought to be the laws of men, civil laws made by a country to govern its people, but actually most of these have been copied from

God's laws. For example, God has always said that man should not kill, steal, bear false witness, commit adultery, etc. What do the laws of men say? The same. Why? Because these are basic *truths* that are stated as *laws* and must be enforced if man is to survive. Even in those countries where some other religion dominates and controls the people, still it is God's moral law that governs them. This may be denied, but it is true nevertheless. God created man in His image, embedding in his conscience the eternal moral truths that have permeated civilizations in the form of "laws". Those laws, secularly, have been handed down from generation to generation, from country to country. In this sense, God rules throughout the world through His laws of conscience.

How is man to look upon the law of the land? Just as he is expected to respect and obey God's spiritual laws, he must respect and obey the laws of man, that is, if they are in keeping with God's will. On this subject, Paul wrote, *"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 judgement 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).

Peter wrote, *"Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bond-servants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king"* (1 Peter 2:13-17). Paul said, *"Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work"* (Titus 3:1).

What about the laws where you live? How should the Christian react to them? He should obey the laws of his country. He should be a good, law-abiding citizen. He should be an example for others. He should observe the speed limits in driving and stop at red lights even when others do not. He should pay his taxes, and obey all other laws that are in harmony with God's will. Law is necessary, and it is also necessary that it be enforced. Christians should never give any trouble and never have to be fined or have to go to jail — unless situations arise in which one is persecuted simply because He is a Christian. In such a case, we would pray that we would be strong enough to die for our Lord, rather than deny Him.

The law of the country is for our good and for the good of others. What would happen if there were no laws? We would all be frightened, and our very lives would be in danger. So we should thank God for the laws, for those who strive to enforce them, and we should pray for our rulers and help them in every way possible.

But above all, God's divine law is for our good and the good of the world. The Lord asks us to repent, to turn away from all evil things, and to obey Him. Then, as Christians, we are to live pure, holy, and godly lives. Not all of the good citizens of this country have obeyed God to be saved from their sins, but you can be sure that all who have obeyed God are good citizens.

What is your attitude toward the laws of God and the laws of the land? Are you keeping them? Are you a good citizen of both the Lord's kingdom and that of your country? They go together.

Lesson 2

Forgiveness

Someone has said that the greatest word in the English language is the word “forgiveness”. There is nothing that we need more. How could we live without it?

Forgiveness is needed because of sin, and there is sin because of the transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Many, however, are not aware of their sin because sin itself is very deceitful (Hebrews 3:13). It often slips into an individual’s life unnoticed. Gradually it gains control until one becomes hardened to it and engages in questionable and ungodly practices without any regret whatsoever. Sin is progressive. The old saying that one lie leads to another is true, and bears out the fact that sin is ever leading one on and on, to the point of final destruction. This is true not just with one human, but with all, since all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Then, finally, sin brings death (Romans 6:23).

There is only one way to overcome sin, and this is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). He was sent by God for this purpose (John 3:16), and for this reason Christ died for the sins of the world (Romans 5:8). This being true, only Christ has a legitimate right to issue the terms for forgiveness. Man is the sinner and is in no position to negotiate what he will do or what he will not do. His only hope is to submit to the terms of pardon and to thank the Lord that there is still time and opportunity to obtain forgiveness.

The Terms for Forgiveness

The terms for the forgiveness of sins are set forth in the Scriptures. The specific requirements have been spelled out and examples have been given to show how obedience works. Look at these commands:

Hear and believe Christ (Matthew 17:5).

Repent of your sins (Luke 13:3).

Confess your faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32).

Be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16).

For the examples, turn to the book of Acts, in particular, to Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 9, Acts 16. As you do this, keep in mind that what man says is not the same as what the Lord says. **Christ** is the Saviour,

not the preacher, priest, or any other human being. If you want forgiveness, you must comply with what Jesus has asked you to do. Otherwise, you will be lost (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).

The Beauty of Forgiveness Is Seen in These Ways:

1. When we obey the Lord and we are forgiven, we may think of **our sins as having been sent far away**. In Leviticus 16 we read where Aaron took two goats. One, he sacrificed for the sins of Israel, the other he sent far away into the wilderness to be left there. This goat was called a “scapegoat”, on which, symbolically, all of Israel’s sins were placed and sent away so that the people might be pure once more. In our obedience to the Lord, our sins are removed from us and sent far away and we are forever rid of them. Isn’t that a beautiful thought? Wouldn’t you like to rid yourself of all of your sins?

2. Our sins have been forgiven in the sense that **Christ has taken the weight of them from us**. Peter said, “...*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). I have seen both men and women, as well as children, carry tremendously heavy loads on their head or shoulders. I have often thought that if I had to carry such a load, how wonderful it would be if someone walked up to me and offered to take it and assume the responsibility himself. In a very real way we are weighed down with sin. The burden is extremely heavy. It causes pain and heartache. Some are not aware that the Lord can take that load from them, and having no one else to turn to, they have gone mad and some in desperation have taken their own life. But it is wonderful that Jesus can come to us and lift that heavy weight of sin and take it away forever. Do you remember how He said that if we would come to Him He would give us rest, that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30)? Truly, it is.

3. Through the forgiveness of our sins, **the debts we owe are cancelled out**. Jesus, in the prayer of example, taught His disciples to pray, “*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Then in Matthew 18:27-32 we have the story of the servant who had many debts, and begging for mercy, his lord was willing to cancel them. But then the story goes on to tell us that the man went to a fellow servant who owed him only a small amount, but he demanded that he be paid. When the servant could not pay, the man had him thrown into prison. When his lord heard about this, he sent

for the servant and asked him why he had dealt so harshly with his fellow servant when his master had had mercy on him? He was then cast into prison to be punished for his wicked deeds. Our Lord has cancelled out all of the debts that were against us and made it possible for us to go free. Isn't that wonderful? That being so, we should also be merciful and forgiving toward those around us.

4. We have forgiveness **because of the grace of God, not because of our own greatness.** That just means that we have no power by which we can save ourselves. We can never be good enough or do enough good deeds to merit or earn salvation. Even after we have done all the Lord requires of us, it will still take the grace of God to save us. Listen to Paul: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Peter said that if the *"righteous scarcely be saved, wherein shall the sinner and ungodly appear"* (1 Peter 4:18)? The Lord is coming again to take vengeance on them that *"know not God and obey not the gospel"* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Thank God for His grace and mercy, even though we do not deserve to be saved, and even though we could never do enough to be saved on our own. Still, by the grace of God, we are saved and have the hope of eternal life.

5. Finally, to have forgiveness means that **we are cleansed, washed, and that we are new creatures.** Through our obedience to the Lord, we died to our sins, we were buried with Him in baptism, and then we were raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-6). Saul was told to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Christ tells us that we must be born again, or become new creatures, to enter into His kingdom, the church (John 3:3-5). Thus, when we are forgiven, old things have passed away, and behold all things are become new (2 Corinthians 5:17). Isn't it wonderful that with forgiveness we can begin our lives over?

Do you have the forgiveness of your sins? Some feel that they are good enough, all on their own, but this could never be. Others feel that their sins are of such a nature that the Lord would never forgive them, but this is also a mistaken idea. If you want forgiveness, you can have it. Yes, you can have all of your sins forgiven and be forever taken away from you. How? By obeying Christ. Isn't that simple? He asks so little but gives so much in return. Try Him and come to know the joy of forgiveness. It will truly give you a new lease on life.

Lesson 3

The Love that We Need Today

We hear a lot about love today. We are told that we should love our brother. It is said that we should love one another instead of opposing our fellowman. This is true. But those who preach love often end up in rioting and fights with those who do not agree with them. In spite of all that is said about love, there seems to be less of it demonstrated than ever before.

So many of those who constantly preach love think only in terms of physical or carnal love. Their minds are preoccupied with fleshly pleasures, and they have concluded that this kind of emphasis is the solution to the problems of the world today. But this is not true. Free love, or fleshly love, adds to the problem instead of solving it. We are reminded of the Apostle John's statement when he said, *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"* (1 John 2:15-17).

God's Definition of Love

in Contrast to the Definition of the World

What is love? It is affection, attraction, friendship, and a concern for another person. It may be physical under the proper circumstances, but we are thinking more in terms of brotherly love at this time. This is the love that we should have for one another. Love should be the basis for all of our actions and relationships. For a better definition read 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul tells what love is, what it will do, and what it will not do.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails ..." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

The world does need love, in ever-increasing quantities. This

love needs to be pure, genuine, and sincere. It should not stop with the man and woman relationship or with one's own immediate family. Rather, it should include our friends, neighbors, country, and the world. Jesus has even said that we should love our enemies. Listen to Him: "*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*" (Matthew 5:44).

We should understand, though, that love should not lead us to compromise the truth or to cover our eyes to the sins that are around us. Love will, however, cause us to be more patient, understanding, and forgiving in dealing with our brother. It will encourage us to go to him, instead of waiting for him to come to us for help. This is the kind of love the world needs — not just the kind that is *talked about*, but the kind that is *practiced*. This is what will change the world for the better and will do more ultimate good than all the laws and armies in existence. Love is not a sign of weakness, but of strength.

The love that is under consideration here is founded in God and in Jesus Christ, His Son. As a result, we are brought to the point of obeying His teaching and practicing His will in our lives. The love that we have for Him leads us to love our neighbor and all others in this world (Matthew 22:36-39). Because we love Him, we love one another also.

Lesson 4

The Grace of God

We are often reminded by our religious neighbors that we are saved by the grace of God. They leave the impression that we in the church of Christ do not believe in the grace of God, since we teach the importance of obedience in relation to salvation. However, this is not true. Actually, we believe in both factors, and we want to explain our beliefs.

First of all, grace means compassion, favor, kindness, love, mercy, etc. It was God who *“so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”* to provide salvation for a lost and dying world (John 3:16,17). Man, being a sinner, could not save himself (Romans 3:23). This is where grace comes in. God provided salvation. But in providing salvation, He made that gift conditional: if man wanted to be saved, he would have to comply with certain terms and obey specific commands. God has always worked on this basis. But in requiring something of man, would not this take grace out of the picture? Not at all, since man could never do enough to earn his salvation.

Let us notice a passage of scripture that brings out this truth very clearly. Paul says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Most people who read these words see only **the grace that saves** and **the works that cannot merit salvation**. But let’s take a closer look. On the one hand, Paul is emphasizing the grace of God that brings salvation, *but only as it is received through faith*. God’s part is described as grace, favor, mercy. That is, He has provided salvation. But what about man? Just because God has made it possible for man to be saved does not mean that man *will* be saved. He may reject the grace of God. But on the other hand, he may accept that grace. How can he do this? Through faith. This, then, is man’s part.

But what is involved in faith? Obedience. It is only logical that if one has enough faith to do what the Lord has asked him to do, he will be saved through the grace and mercy that have been given to him. Read such verses as Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, and other passages that call on the sinner to obey the Lord. Ananias asked Saul, *“... why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”* (Acts 22:16).’

Secondly, Paul says that man is not saved by works. What is he speaking about here? Is he speaking of the commands that one must obey to become a Christian? If so, then that would take away faith, repentance, and the confession of faith in Christ. If it is talking about the works or obedience of the Christian, then that would mean that nothing would be expected of a person, that everything would depend on the Lord, and consequently, it would demand that God save everyone. But if you will read the context, you will discover that he is speaking of **the works of the law of Moses**. Under the law, everything depended on works. John wrote, *“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”* (John 1:17). No, we are not saved by the works of the law, but we are saved by the grace of God through Jesus Christ, as we respond to His conditions of pardon. If you will continue to read on past Ephesians 2:8,9, and read verse 10, you will note that he says, *“For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*

In Titus 3:4-7 Paul says, *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”* Now these verses are saying practically the same thing as we saw in Ephesians 2:8,9. That is, God gave His Son, Jesus, that man might be saved, and it is through that mercy — not the works of our own righteousness — that we are saved, provided we accept that salvation through obeying His commands. Notice carefully that he says that we are saved by God’s mercy, **by the washing of regeneration** and renewing of the Holy Spirit. *“Washing of regeneration”* has reference to baptism and the change that takes place as one submits to it and is made a new creature in Christ by the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Read Acts 2:38 and Acts 3:19: *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (2:38). *“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”* (3:19).

In conclusion, understand that if one is saved, he is saved by the grace of God. This does not mean that one can be saved *without obey-*

ing the Lord. To the contrary, one must accept the salvation that Christ has offered by believing in Him and then doing what He has asked. He must go on to repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32), and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). This is what Jesus said that the individual must do. Thus, when man complies with His law, the Lord saves him by His grace. No, the individual does not, and cannot, save himself. It is the Lord who saves him as he obeys the conditions that bring pardon.

But even after one has obeyed the gospel of Christ, and spends all of his life in service to his Savior, obeying and working as hard as he can to please the Lord and to remain faithful to Him — even then, if he is eternally saved, **it will still be by the grace of God.** Man could never do enough in this life to earn salvation, to pay the atonement price for all the sins of his lifetime. Even after he has done all that he has been asked to do, man is still a sinful being and is dependent on the grace of God to save him in the end.

Lesson 5

Can One "Pray Through" to Salvation?

Recently I was discussing a Bible subject with a woman, when, suddenly, she began to tell about a time when she said she prayed for another woman and, as a result, that person was saved on the spot. In telling this story she used the expression, "praying through". I questioned her about this. I asked specifically for an example in the New Testament where it teaches that any individual ever "prayed through" to salvation. Her only response was that "it teaches that all the way through there." Then I reminded her that Jesus said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). **Hearing these words, she shouted, "I don't care what Jesus said!"** Then, shamed by her wild statement, she tried to apologize, explaining that she had just become angry. This may have been true, but it pretty well sums up the position of those who teach such a doctrine — they don't care what Jesus said. If they did care, then surely they would never take the position that an individual can do something to be saved that the scriptures do not teach.

It is popular all over the world to teach that, if one wants to be saved, all he has to do is to simply bow his head wherever he is, and whatever condition he is in, and ask the Lord to forgive him of his sins. In response, Jesus will save him on the spot. This sounds good on the surface, and hundreds of thousands accept it as being the truth. The sad part about it, though, is that the Lord doesn't teach this, and there is no example in the New Testament of anyone being saved in this manner. In fact, the expression "praying through" is nowhere used in the New Testament.

In the second place, prayer is never commanded of the alien sinner. Rather, prayer is the privilege of the Christian, the child of God. As a sinner, one is not a child of God. By default, he is therefore a child of the devil. The Lord has directed the sinner to comply with certain conditions, to obey some specific commands in order to be forgiven and to become a member of the family of God. Prayer is not one of these commands. But after one becomes a Christian, a member of the church, the situation changes. It is at this point that one comes into covenant relationship with God and is, therefore, in a position to pray to Him any

time he chooses. Not only so, but should he sin or drift into unfaithfulness, prayer plays a very important role in his return to God. It is then that the individual is instructed to repent of his sins, confess his faults, and to pray to God that he might be forgiven. Please consider the case of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:

And when Simon (who had been baptized) saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity."

Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Read also James 5:16: *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*

And 1 John 1:9: *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

To the alien sinner, the Lord demands that certain commands be obeyed if one wants to be saved. If you will read the various cases of conversion in the book of Acts, you will observe that they were never told to pray, but instead they were all taught the Gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord) and then were encouraged to believe that truth, to repent of their sins, to acknowledge their Lord, and to be buried in the waters of baptism to be saved. There were no exceptions to this. Please, for your soul's sake, take the time to read in particular Acts 2 and 3. Then study Acts 8, 16, and 22; Mark 16:15,16, Romans 6:3,4, Galatians 3:26,27, and 1 Peter 3:9. Do you read in any of these verses where Christ or any of the apostles or gospel preachers ever commanded or suggested that these people should "pray through", or that they should simply believe that the Lord would save them? Of course not! Instead, they were all taught the same doctrine, and no one was ever saved apart from obedience to the commands of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism.

Now if this is what the Lord required of people in those days, do we think for a minute that we can be saved by doing any less? Surely if people weren't saved then by "praying through" or by repeating "the sinner's prayer", we cannot be saved today in this manner. We must conclude, then, that the doctrine of "praying through" is man's invention and is not the teaching of the Lord.

But why would such a man-made doctrine be taught? Simply because someone was not willing to follow the Scriptures and, as a result, began to teach his own will.

But why would listeners be deceived by such a doctrine? That is simply because, believe it or not, most people do not read and study their Bible to see what it teaches. Instead, they place their faith in man, and when the preacher says that they can be saved this way, they believe it and accept it.

Are you saved? You may think you are, but in reality, you may be lost. For sure, you have not been saved, and you cannot be saved, by "praying through". There is no such thing taught in God's word. If you want to be saved, you must learn and comply with the Lord's teaching. Read and study for yourself. Then, after you are convinced of what you should do, do it! If you will, I am sure that you will come to believe in the Lord, that you will turn away from your sins, that you will want to confess Christ as the Son of God, and then be immersed (baptized) for the remission of your sins. This is the only safe course you can take, because this is the Lord's way. We pray that you will obey the truth — and then you can pray all you want to! But just now, it is up to you to obey the Lord so that you might become a member of the His family, the church that belongs to Christ, and that you might enter into a relationship with God that will give you the right to call upon His name in prayer.

Lesson 6

How Is Your Hearing?

You might conclude that this question is dealing with one's physical hearing, but you would be wrong. Rather, I am asking this question to lay stress on the importance of *what* one hears. Do you realize how necessary it is for you to hear the right thing? Just think about this: Since what you hear will more than likely determine what you believe, it means that if you are to *believe* the truth, you must *hear* the truth. On the other hand, if you hear a lie you will, in most probability, believe a lie. It is just that simple.

For the most part, we are what we see, hear, understand, and accept. And it is just as easy for us to believe a lie as it is to believe the truth, if we accept that which we hear as fact and do not investigate its genuineness.

Why are there so many conflicting doctrines accepted in the name of religion? Why do so many people feel that one church is as good as another? Why are so many religious names and titles worn instead of the name of Christ? Why is there so much division? All of these questions can be answered with the same words. Simply because the majority of people have been taught these things as truth, and they have accepted them as truth without ever investigating their soundness. In other words, they are what they believe, and they believe it simply because they were taught it.

If we want to be right in religion, we must be sure that we hear the truth instead of error, that we put our trust in God rather than in man. This means that we must read and study our Bible and be sure that we know exactly what the Lord would have us to do, to be certain that we believe it and comply with it accordingly. True faith comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). And salvation comes from obeying the commands of Christ (Hebrews 5:8,9; Mark 16:16).

There is one truth, and that truth makes us free (John 17:17; 8:32). Furthermore, all who come to hear the truth, if they will accept it, will believe that same truth. Further, if they all obey that same truth, they will all be the same thing, religiously. Those who are otherwise are what they are because they have believed and obeyed error.

There is also a great responsibility placed on us to *teach* the pure word of God, realizing again that those who hear us may believe what we teach. Remember, if they are taught the truth they may believe and obey the truth, but if they are taught error, then they may believe and obey error. This is why Jesus not only commanded us to teach, but also told us exactly what to teach (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; 2 Timothy 4:2).

It just stands to reason that the more truth we can give to the world, more of the world will believe it. But what about you as an individual? Have you considered closely what you are being taught? Do you give any real thought to what you hear? Let me beg of you to listen carefully, to study deeply, to investigate, to compare, to question, and to be sure that what you believe is the truth and nothing but the truth of God's word. Truth can stand the test of close scrutiny. Examine what you believe, comparing it with the Scriptures, and choose truth over error, even if you find that what you had formerly accepted was error. The admission of being wrong in the past is difficult, but only when you accept truth can you be saved. Yes, what you hear can and will determine your final destiny. Take heed how you hear!

Lesson 7

"The Lord's Prayer"

In Matthew 6:5-15, Christ taught various lessons on prayer. The setting is the Sermon on the Mount with the multitudes gathered and, in particular, the disciples. In the course of His sermon, the Lord gave an example of prayer. We especially want to give some attention to this since it is generally known as "The Lord's Prayer".

First of all, Christ began by teaching the disciples how *not* to pray. He said, "*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). "Hypocrites" here has reference to those who act, imitate, and put on. In other words, they are not sincere. They merely want to show off and be seen by men. Because this is all they are interested in, Jesus says that this will be the only reward they will receive. We have seen this type many times. They love to get out on the lawn, or in any public place, and go through their prayers and religious acts. Well, Jesus said not to be like that. He says that we should not pray to be seen and heard by men.

In Matthew 6:6 the Lord tells us how we should pray. He says, "*But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*" Here He is showing that you don't have to pray in public to be heard by God. Rather, if you really want God to hear you, then slip off some place where you can be alone and pray. He says that the Father is in secret, that is, He is a Spirit and not visible, and He will reward the individual openly or where all will know that he has been blessed by God.

Continuing on, the Lord gives another contrast. He warns, "*And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him*" (Matthew 6:7,8). The heathen here would be the unbelievers. They prayed also, but used much repetition in their prayers. Christ explains that, in praying to God, it is not necessary to keep repeating the prayer, or the various requests, since the Father already knows the need before it is asked. Of course, it is not wrong to

make a request of God, and He even expects it. But the Lord is not going to hear the prayer merely because it is repeated over and over again. Therefore, Christ warns the disciples not to pray like the heathen.

Now the Lord comes to the point where He wishes to give His disciples an example of how to pray. Please note that He was not saying here that this was *His* prayer. Neither was He saying necessarily that this should be the disciples' prayer. And finally, it cannot be our prayer today, as we will see. But before going on, let us read the prayer itself: "*In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen*" (Matthew 6:9-13).

We all know that many churches today use this prayer in their various worship services and meetings. But how do they use it? The congregation usually joins in and repeats the prayer together, word for word. Therefore, it has become a tradition for them to pray in this way. After following the pattern for a time, it becomes meaningless and only vain words. It violates the Lord's own instruction — not to use vain repetitions.

Also, Christ said that His disciples should pray *for the coming of the kingdom*. At that time it had not come, and therefore, it was altogether in order that they should pray for it. But shortly after that, the kingdom did come (Matthew 16:16-19; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Hebrews 12:28), and it has been here ever since. Because of that, we cannot scripturally pray for the coming of the kingdom today. We might pray for the *advancement* of the Lord's kingdom or the church, but certainly not that it should *come*.

And finally, this prayer is not offered in the name of Christ. At that time, Christ had not yet died on the cross to become man's Saviour, Mediator, and Advocate. But He is all of that now, and even more, and our every prayer should be spoken in His name. These are some of the reasons why we cannot scripturally pray this prayer today.

It is interesting to note that Christ mentioned the various things, at that time, that should be brought out in a prayer, thus teaching the disciples the kind of prayer they should pray. The same ingredients, except for two or three things, should be found in our present-day prayers.

Please notice:

1. He taught them to pray "*Our Father*". It is thus directed to God the Father, who is in heaven. "*Hallowed be your name*" showing reverence.
2. He taught them to pray for the kingdom. As pointed out, it had not come at that time, and it was only right that they should pray for it then.
3. He taught them to pray that the Lord's will be done on earth as in heaven. Rather than to want to have their way, they should want God's will to be done.
4. He taught them to pray for their daily needs. This included food and the necessities of life, thus showing their dependence on God even for material things.
5. He taught them to pray for their spiritual needs. This included asking for the forgiveness of their sins, but only as they were willing to forgive those who had done them wrong.
6. He taught them to pray for guidance. Within this was the idea of being delivered from temptation.
7. He taught them to pray that all might belong to God both now and forevermore.

This was a short prayer but very much to the point. But if this cannot be our prayer, word for word, then for what should we pray? That is a good question.

A good prayer today would also have these basic points within it. The only differences would be that instead of praying that the kingdom might come, we would be praying for the growth of the kingdom. And finally, we would close it by praying in the name of Christ. But again, keep in mind that even with these minor changes to scripturally suit our present-day situation, the Lord would not have us to learn a certain prayer and say it over and over again, but rather that we should pray our own prayers, according to the burden of our own hearts and our own individual needs.

In bringing to a close these remarks on the subject of prayer, Jesus said, "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (Matthew 6:14,15). What is He saying here? Simply this: How can we expect God to forgive us of our sins when we refuse to forgive our fellowman of his sins against us? If we want to be forgiven, therefore, we must first have a forgiving heart toward those who have done us wrong. Then, and only then, do we have the spirit of Christ. And only then can we ask for forgiveness.

Lesson 8

Forgiveness of Sins

Man is a sinner (Romans 3:23). He is without God and hope. Should he die in this state, he would be lost for all eternity. This is a horrible thought, but is true, nevertheless.

Because man is a sinner, and he is very conscious of his sins, he is constantly looking for a way to atone for them, to receive forgiveness. This problem is universal, but people try to solve it in different ways. Some offer animal sacrifices or seek to punish themselves physically to atone for their sins. Others engage in good works or isolate themselves in places of lonely abodes in an attempt to find peace for their souls. Some of those who believe in Christ turn to “faith only”, “praying through”, and other man-made doctrines, hoping to obtain salvation. But none of these beliefs and practices, based on error, will cleanse man of sin.

God has shown His love for us to the extent of giving His Son so that one and all might be saved (John 3:16,17; Romans 5:8). Christ Himself was willing to die, and if He was willing to do this for man, then it is only right to conclude that He alone has the authority to say what conditions must be met if man is to be saved. What are those conditions? Listen to the scriptures:

1. One must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. *“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).
2. He must repent of his sins. *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).
3. He must confess Christ as the Son of God. *“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).
4. Finally, he must comply with the command of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”*

(Mark 16:16). *“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; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).*

The Lord tells us in His word that when we comply with these commands there is salvation for us, but not until then. Thus, through obedience to His teaching we obtain the remission of our sins. The Lord saves us, and therefore we are forever forgiven of all of our past sins.

Sin is destructive. It can torment, cause endless heartaches, and bring final destruction. But isn't it wonderful that we can have our sins forgiven, blotted out, and forever taken away? We have a Saviour and His name is Jesus. He can be your Saviour and my Saviour in reality if only we will look to Him in faith and obey His will.

Have your sins been forgiven? If not, you are lost and will be eternally lost unless you turn to Jesus who is able to save you. If you will turn to Him in loving obedience, He can, and will, save you and make you His. Then, with peace in your soul and relief from your past sins, you can follow Him home to that upper and better kingdom.

Lesson 9

The New Pharisees and Sadducees

Christ lived and died under the law of Moses. He said that He had not come to destroy that law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18). He, therefore, kept it perfectly, as no other human could or can do. But in the days when our Lord walked the earth, the followers of the law of Moses had become divided into various sects. Two of the most popular were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the conservatives, believing in a resurrection and angels. The Sadducees were the modernists, or liberals, who denied these truths. Jesus was neither.

The Pharisees and Sadducees had corrupted the law to the point that it amounted to little more than a series of customs and traditions. They had mixed the teachings of men with the teachings of God so that the Lord's will was hardly discernable any more. As a result, Christ did not ignore them, compromise with them, or endorse them. Instead, He condemned them for the things they did and for what they taught.

Let us read, now, of some of the experiences that He had with these people and some of His statements to them: *“And as He spoke, a certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. But woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the market places. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them”* (Luke 11:37-44).

Reading on, *“Then Jesus said to them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees”* (Matthew 16:6). In

Matthew 23 beginning with verse 13, Jesus says, “*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves*” (Matthew 23:13-15).

Reading further, He says, “*Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*” (Matthew 23:24-33).

Because of all this, Jesus said to the disciples, “*For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:20).

Although the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others represented different groups, and therefore, ordinarily opposed one another, when it came time to oppose Jesus, they joined forces. We read, “*Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven*” (Matthew 16:1). On another occasion, “*Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him*” (Mark 3:6). “*But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a*

question, testing Him, and saying, Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" (Matthew 22:34-36).

Eventually, through their persistence, and with the help of one of the Lord's disciples, they succeeded in taking custody of Jesus and bringing Him before the High Priest for trial (Matthew 26:56). Later we read, "*When morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor*" (Matthew 27:1,2). Afterwards, Jesus was given a false trial, was crucified, and buried. Death could not hold Him captive, but after His resurrection, the chief priests — religious leaders of the Jews — bribed the guards, who were watching His tomb, to say that His disciples had come and stolen His body away while they slept (Matthew 28:12,13). Keep in mind: it was these religious groups, and their banding together to oppose Jesus, that led to His betrayal and ultimately to His death.

We read all of this in the Scriptures, and we think how sad it was, but surely that could never happen today. But it is happening. We have a new breed of Pharisees and Sadducees on our hands, and the body of the Lord is suffering once more — Christ is being crucified afresh. Who are these modern-day Pharisees and Sadducees? They are the denominational churches and leaders all around us. They represent those who have replaced the teachings of Christ with the teachings of men, all the while claiming to be followers of Christ. They have polluted, adulterated, corrupted, stagnated, and divided Christianity, thus making a mockery of that for which Christ died. They go their separate ways, even oppose one another most of the time, but they quickly unite to oppose the Lord's church and His way.

You would be surprised to know how much the denominational churches know about the church of Christ and how much they resent it. They claim that one church is as good as another until it comes to Christ's church. They will say it doesn't matter what church you are a member of, except when the church of Christ is under consideration. They look upon it as a threat to them, and therefore, they are constantly warning their people against it.

Not long ago one of the young men of the church here was told that he should be very careful about associating with the church of Christ. He asked, "Why?" They told him, "*Because those people are so exclusive; they pull away from all others and think they are the only ones that are right and that only their church will go to heaven.*"

They were trying to prejudice his thinking. No attempt was made to encourage him to teach the members of the church, or study with them, or investigate to see if their understanding of the Scriptures might be right! Of course, he explained to that person that he thought that it was a strange warning, because he had been with the church for two years and he had never noticed the members to be like that.

I was talking recently to a printer about a tract, and he explained to me that those who owned this particular press were opposed to this tract being printed because it contained material that they did not accept. I explained to him that if they would show me in the Bible where it was not the truth, then I would write another tract to denounce what I had said in this particular tract. I pointed out, however, that I would not do this unless they would present the evidence from the Bible. To date there has been no evidence given to me.

All of the religious groups may differ on many things, but there is one thing on which they agree and will unite: they are opposed to the church of Christ. But why? Are we teaching things not taught in the Bible? Do we wear an unscriptural name? Can there be more than one church? If a person obeys God, will the Lord not add him to His church? Is there anything wrong in following the Bible only?

Read back through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and see how many times Christ was confronted by the Pharisees and Sadducees, and observe what He had to say about them. Then, also, read in Acts 9 how Paul persecuted the church, but in so doing he was in reality persecuting Christ. I would be very careful if I were a part of any denominational group before opposing the Lord's church, lest I be found opposing Christ, Himself.

Would you please forget about what men say, even religious men, and investigate the church of Christ? Visit with us, talk to us, study with us, go to the Bible to see if we are not the church that you read about there. This is all that we ask you to do. Then, if you find that we are not the one true church, come and tell us about it, and show us in the Scriptures where we are wrong. If you will do that, we will count you as our friend, because in all sincerity we do want to be right and to obey the Lord. However, if you find that we are genuine, that we are teaching only God's Word, that we are the church of Christ as set forth in the Scriptures, then we invite you to become a member of that church. Even then, the decision is yours to make.

Lesson 10

You Can't Argue with God's Word

So many people want only the portion of God's word that suits their belief, practice, or situation. This leads them to accept part of it and reject the rest. They try to explain, argue, and reason it away. This is an abuse and misuse of holy writ.

We should want the truth and *all the truth* in a verse of scripture. We should not stop there, however, but go on to accept the truth in every other verse. We should want to know all of the Lord's will for us. We should want to obey the whole truth and teach it to others. Willful ignorance or rejection of any part of God's word will not help us or anyone else. Partial truth is not enough.

There are those who teach that all one must do to be saved is to believe. Verses like John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 16:31 are used to support this. In view of what other verses teach, there might be some argument as to whether this is all that God requires, but there can be no argument about the necessity of belief or faith itself. We know that these verses definitely teach that one must believe. But these are not the only verses of scripture to be considered when it comes to the salvation of the soul. Perhaps those who use these verses to teach "faith only" have isolated them. Maybe they have misunderstood and limited the meaning of faith.

Christ tells us that one must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Paul said that God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). There are other verses that teach and emphasize the need for repentance. One might conclude that the most important thing that one must do to be saved is to repent of his sins. At the same time, one might argue that there is more to salvation than this. Regardless, there is one point on which there can be no argument and that is that God requires the sinner to repent of his sins.

There are several verses that stress the necessity of baptism (Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3). Does this mean that "baptism only" saves? Is not faith necessary? What about repentance? These questions may be brought up and discussed, but there can be no doubt about the necessity of baptism, if one is going to accept all of the truth of God's will.

Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost that they should repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Though nothing is said about faith, the question that was asked about salvation shows clearly that they believed already. But regardless of which points are left out, the question is: What is stated? *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins ...”* There can be no discussion on this point. All we can do is accept it.

Whether we are dealing with the plan of salvation or some other subject, we ought to approach our study of the Bible with the attitude that we are going to accept all the truth in every verse and that we are going to accept every command in every statement.

Obviously the Lord has not given all the truth in one verse, or even in a number of verses. Neither has He given all the commands of the gospel in one verse. We cannot stop with one verse or two on any subject, but we must go on to read and study all of God’s word and harmonize it. We must accept all the truth in any given verse and then go on to the next verse. By so doing, we will be able to see all that the Lord requires of us. Only by believing and obeying the whole truth can we be saved. There can be no argument about this.

Certainly, we should never find ourselves in a situation where we are forced to argue with God’s word. Neither should we ever put ourselves in a position where we have to reject any truth in order to stay with some belief we have already accepted. If we do, we will lose every time — and, finally, that decision to reject portions of God’s word will cause our souls to be lost eternally. What a tragic price to pay for human pride or stubbornness, or whatever attitude might cause us to close our minds to truths that we don’t want to accept!

It is vital that we remember the words of our Lord: *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak”* (John 12:48-50).

Even our Lord did not have the temerity to change God’s message. Surely no human would dare to do such a thing.

Lesson 11

Which Church Is Right?

There are many churches in the world, but the Bible teaches that God recognizes only one: “*And he is the head of **THE body, THE church***” (Colossians 1:18) “*There is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*” (Ephesians 4:4-6). Therefore, only one can be right. Which one is that?

1. The one that Christ built. “*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).
2. The one that had its beginning in Jerusalem. “*... and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, **beginning at Jerusalem***” (Luke 24:47).
3. The one that was established in A.D. 33 (**Acts 2**).
4. The one that wears the name of Christ. “*Greet one another with a holy kiss. **The churches of Christ greet you***” (Romans 16:16). “*Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually*” (1 Corinthians 12:27). “*And He put all things under His 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).
5. The one over which Christ rules as head. “*And **He is the head of the body, the church**, who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence*” (Colossians 1:18).
6. The one that Christ purchased with His own blood. “*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **THE church of God which He purchased with His own blood***” (Acts 20:28).
7. The one for which Christ died. “*Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved THE church** and gave Himself for her*” (Ephesians 5:25).

8. The one of which Christ is the Saviour. *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also **Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body**”* (Ephesians 5:23).
9. The one which is built on Christ. *“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). *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”* (1 Corinthians 3:11).
10. The one whose members are called Christians. *“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”* (Acts 11:26). *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for **there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**”* (Acts 4:12).
11. The one that is called His spiritual body. *“And He put all things under His 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).
12. The one body. *“There is **one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling”* (Ephesians 4:4).
13. The one to which the saved people are added. *“Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord **added to THE church daily those who were being saved**”* (Acts 2:47).
14. The one for which Christ is returning. *“That **He might present her to Himself a glorious church**, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27).

This church, which we read about in the New Testament, is a distinctive group of people, wearing Christ’s name, worshiping according to the New Testament pattern, living and teaching and working just as is taught concerning that same church and that same group of people in the first century. There is no “umbrella” that can cover all of the denominational churches, with their many contradictory doctrines, and their many names, ways of worship, and directions for salvation. Don’t let Satan deceive you by saying that “one church is as good as another”, or “you don’t have to be a member of any church to be saved”, or that none of these restrictive statements about the church of Christ really matter. God says in His word that they determine whether or not your soul and mine will be saved eternally.

Lesson 12

Bible Baptism

The Bible is the only authoritative book that tells the truth about baptism. Therefore, to know the truth on this subject, we must go to God's inspired word. Please note these facts:

1. There is one baptism. *"...one Lord, one faith, one baptism"* (Ephesians 4:5). This fact was written in A.D. 64. There had been other baptisms, but by this time there was only one.
2. It is a burial. *"...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). *"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"* (Romans 6:3,4). Coming from the Greek word, "baptizo", it always means a burial, an immersion; but never sprinkling or pouring.
3. It is a burial in water. *"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?"* (Acts 8:36).
4. It is a command of 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). *"And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"* (Acts 10:48).
5. It must be done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19).
6. It 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).

7. It is for the 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; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38).
8. It washes away sin. *“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).
9. It puts one into Christ. *“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”* (Romans 6:3,4). *“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”* (Galatians 3:26,27).
10. It puts one into the church. *“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).

Note: “Baptism only” does not save. Baptism saves only when one has enough faith to believe the Lord (Hebrews 11:6), to repent of his sins (Acts 17:30), to confess Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32), and to be baptized in obedience to the Lord (Acts 10:48; Hebrews 5:8,9).

Lesson 13

Acceptable Worship

If all people who claim to believe the Bible worshiped as the Bible teaches, all would worship alike. While the Bible speaks of ignorant worship (Acts 17:23), and vain worship (Matthew 15:9), it also speaks of true worship, that which is directed toward God in truth — with understanding, according to His teaching (John 4:24). Christians are to assemble each first day of the week to 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”* (Acts 20:7). These are the acts of worship set forth in God’s word:

1. Christians are to assemble to study the scriptures. *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me”* (John 5:39). *“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). *“...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).
2. Christians are to pray. *“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42).
3. Christians are to sing in worship (without mechanical music). *“Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* (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). There are eight references in the New Testament to singing in praise to God in the assembly. None of these authorize the addition of a mechanical instrument.
4. Christians are to partake of the Lord’s Supper. *“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave*

it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28). “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” (Acts 20:7).

5. Christians are to give of their means. *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also. On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

*“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **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. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:25).*

As the Hebrews writer warned, the Lord’s people are not to forsake the assembly, where true Christians are gathered. They are to meet each first day of the week (Sunday) to engage in all of these acts of worship. Not one is to be left off, and nothing is to be added. Only in this way can God be truly worshiped.

Lesson 14

The Influence of Christianity

Have you ever stopped to think about how much Christianity has influenced the world? This applies to those areas where the people believe in Christ and also to those areas where they do not. Even when a very low percentage of a country professes Christianity, the whole country has been influenced by it in every walk of life.

The morality of the people, such as is found in the laws of marriage, honesty in dealing with one another, refraining from murder, etc., all go back to Christianity and the Bible. Even the secular laws of the country, taking Sunday off each week, the calendar that is used, dating everything from the death of Christ, and Christian influence in language, art, and literature show the tremendous weight that Christ has had upon all nations of the world. While many may not be aware of these things, nevertheless, the influence is definitely there.

Where would the whole world be if there had been no Christianity? What would happen to all of us if all signs of the religion of Christ were completely wiped out at this time? It would be a very frightening thing to experience.

As bad as the world may be today, it is as good as it is because Christ came into it. Man has never been the same since His arrival almost two thousand years ago. Although He had no armies, fought no wars, exercised no secular power, still He came, and He conquered. No other person has changed the world as Christ did.

Christianity today is a testimony to the fact not only that Christ lived, but that He continues to live. All the people of the world are affected in one way or another by the life of Christ, and therefore, are blessed to that extent. This is true in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of people do not accept Him as the Son of God. Now imagine, if you can, what it would mean if the greater majority of the people believed in Him.

Universal belief in Christ, and the acceptance of Christianity, would do away with wars, since hatred and envy would be replaced with love and respect for each other. It would do away with lying, stealing, and killing. It would bring an end to immorality and every

kindred sin. This is not to say that everyone would be perfect, and therefore living sinless lives, but it would indeed change all people and would influence the world for good.

Even denominational “Christianity” has had its moral impact upon man, but if all people could come to accept pure Christianity, think of what that would do for the world today! With the teachings of Christ being fully applied to the problems and ills of a troubled and divided world, the result would be a new society, the likes of which man has never known. It would unite people around the globe. All would be brothers and sisters, concerned about the needs of each other. Hunger could be removed from every land. All men would work to help their fellowmen. There would be more sharing. Each one would be benefited.

Religiously, all would worship the same God, look to the same Saviour, Jesus Christ, and be guided by the same book, the Bible. All would be members of the same church, wear the same name, and teach the same gospel. Therefore, forgiveness of sins could be enjoyed by all, and each one would have the hope of eternal life.

Of course, we are talking about an ideal situation and of what it would be like if all the world would truly accept Christ and Christianity. Even though this might be possible, it is highly unlikely. That, however, doesn't mean that you cannot become a believer in Christ and allow Him to be a force in your life for good. If you will learn of Him, come to believe in Him, and obey Him, He will save you and bless your life. Then, as a Christian, as you live for Him and serve Him, He will not only bless you but He can work through you to bless many others.

You are encouraged to read and study the Bible, to learn of Christ and His will for you. See for yourself what difference this can make in your life.

Lesson 15

Love of the Truth

There are those who can be easily taught the truth. They have no difficulty at all in recognizing God's will. They will acknowledge it once it is presented to them. There are no excuses, arguments, or attempts made to escape the force of it. It is there for them to see, it is plain and clear, and it is logical. That being the case, they are ready to obey it. But why do they so easily respond? Are they insincere? Do they have ulterior motives? Would this be an indication of their ignorance of the scriptures? To the contrary. It would be the reverse. We are talking about people who happen to *love the truth*, and that makes all the difference in the world.

What a pleasure it is to come across someone who is looking for the truth and who can see it once it is presented to him. Why shouldn't all have that desire? Why shouldn't all love the truth? Whether in economics, science, or religion, it is only the truth that counts in the end. A lie will not help one even though it is sincerely believed. Rather, it is the truth that the intelligent and honest person seeks after, and in the Bible we have the truth of God's word. Those who turn to it with respect and love can come to know God's will. They will be united with other truth-lovers because the truth will not confuse, mislead, divide, or send those who accept it in different directions. Rather, it will bring them together, unite them, and make it possible for them to agree and to work together as one.

It is sad to say, but not all people love the truth, especially when it comes to religious matters. That is why we see them going off after man-made teachings, all kinds of errors and practices, believing and teaching everything imaginable. Surely, if they would stop and think, they would realize that this cannot be right. But alas, they are convinced that this is the way they should go, and they are happy in what they are doing.

These same people are not willing to sit down to study the Bible. As a matter of fact, they teach things that are in direct contradiction to God's word. They rely on their feelings, argue that one church is as good as another, and appeal to prejudice to justify themselves. Their minds are closed to the truth, and it is very difficult to reach them and almost impossible to get them to accept the simple truth

when it is shown to them. What is the problem? **They do not love the truth.** They are lost, and as long as they insist on following this course, there is little that can be done to stop them from reaching their final destination of eternal destruction.

These people may zealously work for their cause and they may tell you that they love the truth, but they do not. How can we know this? Inasmuch as they refuse to study the Bible with an open mind. One who loves the truth and is trying to obey it and follow it has nothing to hide. He does not fear to be questioned. He never turns down an opportunity to study, even with someone he disagrees with because sincere study will not hurt anybody. Those who do not love the truth are afraid of investigation. They are afraid that what they learn will not be in agreement with what they have already accepted.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian brethren, *“Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Did you hear what Paul said? He said that there would be many who would go off into error because **they do not love the truth.** He

also said that, because of their lack of love for the truth, God would allow them to be deceived. Even beyond that, He would send them a *strong delusion* so that they would believe the lie and be damned.

Why would God do this? Because He is dealing with people who do not love the truth. They don't want the truth. They are interested in power, in signs and wonders. Never mind if Satan is responsible for these "powers and signs", still they want them. They have itching ears, ears that are constantly wanting to hear something new and different.

Again Paul says, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables*" (2 Timothy 4:3,4).

Speaking of the people of His day, Christ said, "*And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them*" (Matthew 13:14,15). John wrote concerning another group of people in the days of Jesus, "*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*" (John 12:42,43).

In the foregoing, we read of the people of the first century. But what do we have today? Basically the same thing. We have people who have itching ears, who are looking for something strange and different, searching for a miracle, ears that are dull of hearing, having a love for the praises of men rather than a love for God and the truth that will save them.

You know that this description is true. Look around you. What do you see? People who are following any and every thing religiously. Furthermore, if some new person or teaching comes along, regardless of how foreign it is to the teaching of God's word, there will be a large number of people who will go after it. But why? Because they are not interested in the truth — they do not love the truth.

It is a dangerous thing to play around with God's word. It is dangerous to follow the teachings of men. God gave us His word so that

we might have the truth and that, by believing it and obeying it, we might be saved. There is nothing that can take its place. There is no substitute. Paul said “woe” be unto us if we accept another gospel (Galatians 1:7-9).

If we love God and His will, then this whole matter can be cleared up, as far as our salvation is concerned. Because if we love God, we will obey His teaching, and thereby, be saved. If everyone would do the same, then we would all be united. The all-important question for you and me is, **do we love the truth?** That question can be easily answered by one and all as we sincerely compare our actions with God’s word.

Lesson 16

Can One Be Saved Without Being a Member of the Church?

If so, why are there so many prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the coming of the kingdom, which is identified in the New Testament as the church? *“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...”* (Daniel 2:44).

If so, why was John the Baptist’s message, *“Repent for the kingdom (the church) is near at hand”* (Matthew 3:2)?

If so, why was it that ... *“Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’* (Mark 1:14,15)”

If so, why did Jesus say to the apostles, in response to Peter’s confession that, *‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’* ... *‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 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. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* (Matthew 16:16-19)”

If so why did Christ build the church, die for it, love it, promise to return for it? *“ I will build My church...”* (Matthew 16:18); *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...”* (Ephesians 5:23); *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”* (Acts 20:28); *“... that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing...”* (Ephesians 5:27); *“... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:3).

If so, why is Christ the Saviour of it, adds the saved to it, and serves as its head? *“Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body”* (Ephesians 5:23) *“He is the head of the*

body, the church ...” (Colossians 1:18); **“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”** (Acts 2:47).

If so, why does the Bible talk so much about the church? Check: Matthew 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:47; 5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22,26; 12:1,5; 13:1; 14:23,27; 15:3,4,22; 18:22; 20:17,18; Romans 16:1,5; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 10:32; 11:18,22; 12:28; 14:4,5,12,19, 23,28,35; 16:19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; Ephesians 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23,24,25,27,29,32; Philippians 3:6; 4:15; Colossians 1:18,24; 4:15,16; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:5,15; 5:16; Philemon 1:2; Hebrews 12:23; James 5:14; 3 John 1:6,9,10; Revelation 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14. Many other Scriptures speak of the church as “the kingdom”, the “body”, the “bride”, and the “family”.

If so, why does the Lord honor it by allowing it to wear His name? **“... 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). **“... let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:10-12). **“Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?”** (James 2:7). **“The churches of Christ greet you”** (Romans 16:16).

If so, why are we baptized into that one body — church — by the Holy Spirit? **“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”** (1 Corinthians 12:13).

If so, why did God put Christ over the church? **“... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... 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 1:17,22).

If so, why is that analogy made, of Christ being the head, and the church being His body? None of us would be stupid enough to say that the head of a thing is of no importance to its body; neither would we ever say that the body of a thing is of no importance to its head. When God painted that word picture for us, He knew that we would have no excuse for misunderstanding His message. **The church, the body of Christ, is the most important thing in this world!**

Lesson 17

A Home Church

The Lord's church, as set forth in the Scriptures, is simply made up of the called out, those who have been saved by Christ. Wherever there is a group of Christians, large or small, who meet together on a regular basis for worship and work, this becomes the local congregation in that place.

It is interesting to note that, throughout the New Testament, no mention is ever made of the church meeting in its own building. We read of many congregations in many different locations, but the nearest thing we see concerning a regular meeting place is the few references that speak of the church in various houses or homes. For instance, Paul writes to the brethren at Rome, "*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the first fruits of Achaia to Christ*" (Romans 16:3-5). To the Corinthian Christians he says, "*The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house*" (1 Corinthians 16:9). Paul speaks to Philemon thus: "*Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Philemon 1-3).

Why do Paul and the other New Testament writers never speak of the church owning its own property or buildings? Does this mean that the local congregations were without such facilities? Not necessarily, but in all probability they did not have meeting houses such as we are familiar with today. This was no doubt true because the church was still young and its members were few and scattered. Also, the Christians were poor and they experienced a great deal of persecution. All of these things added up to the fact that it was not wise or maybe even possible for them to have their own designated meeting houses.

We know that the church met for worship on a regular basis (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) and Christians were commanded not to for-

sake the assembling of themselves together as some were doing (Hebrews 10:25). Paul talked to the Corinthian Christians about coming together in the church; that is, Christians gathering as the church. Where they met, we do not know. He reminds them that they had houses to eat their regular meals in, and therefore, when they met in one place to partake of the Lord's supper, this was for the purpose of remembering Christ, not turning it into a regular meal (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).

On one occasion we read of Paul going out of the city of Philippi on the Sabbath, and there on the river side, he found people engaged in prayer. He met Lydia, who was worshipping, and when he taught her and her household, they obeyed the Lord (Acts 16:12-15). Later Paul and Silas were imprisoned, and after they were released by a miracle, they taught the jailer and his household the truth and converted them (Acts 16:16-34).

In Acts 17 Paul preached on Mars Hill in the city of Athens. In Acts 18 he preached in various synagogues where he converted some of the Jews who met there for worship. We read of Paul meeting with the elders of the church in Jerusalem, but no indication is given as to where they met, unless it was in the home of James (Acts 21:18). On his way to Rome, Paul found brethren at Puteoli and spent seven days with them (Acts 28:13,14). Staying that long, he surely worshiped. But where did they worship? Again, it must have been in the home of one of the members. We can, therefore, conclude that preaching was done wherever people were to be found, and that the church met in the various homes of its members.

Surely, it would not be wrong for the church in a given location to decide to purchase property and to construct its own meeting house. But neither is it necessary for the church to do this, and in many places around the world it may be in the interest of the local brethren not to build a meeting house. The church today, as in the past, has many possibilities when it comes to a place to meet. It may worship in a hall, a school building, under a tent, under a shade tree, in a home or in dozens of other places. The most ideal place for it to meet is in the homes of its members. This may sound strange in our present age, but it is especially true in most countries of the world where the church is young and small.

There are many advantages to the church meeting in the home, though some may resent the idea, especially since most people are

accustomed to large meeting houses. In a home, there is a personal, friendly, close atmosphere. It is an ideal place to encourage all of the male members to take public part. Though the facilities are small, personal friends of the members may be persuaded to attend when they might not go to a traditional meeting house. The contribution might not be as large, but neither would there be the expense of a meeting house. With the passing of time and growth, the decision can be made as to whether the congregation will continue to meet in the home, or divide up into different home congregations according to the distance involved, or meet in a hall, or perhaps even to think in terms of making arrangements for constructing a meeting house. But it is not necessary for the local church to have a meeting house of its own until it is able to purchase a building without outside help.

By worshipping in the home, the brethren can meet in the area where the members live. This will save transportation expenses, as well as other inconveniences. As the work grows and spreads, other such home churches can begin in other areas. This will make it possible for all members to worship and work together on a regular basis. Close fellowship and cooperation can be encouraged so as to enable the church as a whole to do more work.

If the local congregation is to meet in the home of one of its members, in which house will that be? This depends on the members involved, the ones who would invite the other members to use their home, the size of the house, its location, etc. This does not mean, however, that the church becomes the church of the member in whose home it meets. If for any reason that family should need to be away some time, then the members meeting there could easily shift the assemblies temporarily to the home of another member. The church is not a home or house any more than the home or the house is the church. The church simply meets in a particular place, but the church itself belongs to Christ who is the Saviour and Head of it.

What greater honor could one have than for the Lord's people to meet in his home? This would be an added blessing, along with all of the others that come to one as a Christian and as a part of Christ's church.

Lesson 18

No Respector of Persons

We are living in a troubled world with many problems confronting us. A good number of these are a result of man's inability to live in peace and harmony with others. He is divided by nationality, race, color, religion, etc. Instead of trying to remove those barriers, he continues to emphasize them. This only lends itself to more competition, distrust, and hate.

The sad thing about all of this is the fact that man doesn't have to be so divided. The Apostle Paul tells us that God, "... *has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth ...*" (Acts 17:26). What does this mean to you, me, and the world? It means that we are no better than anyone else, and no one is any better than we are. Regardless of race, color, and other so-called differences, all men are basically the same, physically. Therefore, we are all equal. Color, language, social status, and thousands of other things, do not make one man inherently any better than any other.

Another apostle of the Lord said, "*Of a truth I perceive that **God is no respecter of persons:** But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*" (Acts 10:34,35, KJV). *The New King James Version* words the passage this way: "*In truth I perceive that **God shows no partiality.** But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" These were the words of Peter as they were spoken by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They represent God's feelings toward man. As we continue to study this matter, we find that it is not God who has divided man, but rather man has divided himself. Furthermore, it is man who perpetuates these feelings of strife and division.

The Bible further teaches that "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*" (John 3:16). Speaking of his responsibility, and the power of the gospel, Paul wrote, "*I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from*

faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:14-17). Then, speaking to those who obeyed the gospel, he said, *"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). Therefore, Christians do not engage themselves in race distinctions. They do not segregate into different groups, based on color or nationality. They do not exalt themselves above others. Instead, they are to love one another and all men everywhere. They are to be one in Christ. They are to work together for the good of all.

Pure New Testament Christianity will do away with the caste system and with racial barriers. It will restore man's self respect. It will give all men something to live for, to work for, and finally, to die for. It will elevate humanity in general and will change any country for the better.

You are urged to look into this matter for yourself. Remember, God is no respecter of persons, so why should man be? Let us learn to live with one another, respect each other, work together, and worship as one. When we reach that point, we can say that the world has finally changed for the better.

Lesson 19

The Power of the Word of God

God has spoken in every age (Hebrews 1:1,2). He has spoken through His Son (John 1:1,2; Matthew 17:5). His word has been preserved and revealed to us through the holy scriptures, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16,17). That word is powerful (Hebrews 4:12). When we believe it and obey it, it works in our lives to the saving of our souls (Romans 1:16,17).

Do you remember back in the beginning, *“Then God said, Let there be light; and there was light”* (Genesis 1:3)? The record continues with God speaking one thing after another into existence. His word was full of power.

Jesus came to speak for God. That is why He is called the Word (John 1:1). He said on one occasion, *“My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him”* (John 7:16-18).

Christ spoke as one having authority (Matthew 7:29). His critics could not answer Him. The truth always prevailed, and Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). He spoke and the blind saw, the dumb spoke, the deaf heard, the lame walked, bodies were healed, and the dead arose from the grave. He spoke and the sea was calmed, the devils fled, the water was turned into wine, and the multitudes were fed. The Lord’s word never failed to produce powerful results.

The things that Jesus has said and done have been written so that we might believe and that by believing we might have life through His name (John 20:30,31). As we hear Christ, through reading and studying His word (Matthew 17:5; 2 Timothy 2:15), faith is produced (Romans 10:17), and through our obedience to it, we are saved (Mark 16:15,16). Peter explains it like this: *“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 1:22,23).

We are told that the word is perfect, converting the soul (Psalm 19:7). It is full of life. When it enters one, it produces faith, and as that faith grows and develops and produces action, it ends in the saving of one's soul. James said that the "*gospel is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16). Finally, Christ said that unless one does the will of God he cannot go to heaven (Matthew 7:21).

Do you want power in your life? Then read and study God's word, believe it, obey it, and you will have more power in your life than you ever knew existed. That doesn't mean that God will release power in you that cannot be controlled or that will bring about your ultimate destruction, or that it is miraculous in nature. It does mean, though, that God's word will work in your life to the saving of your soul, and as you allow it to lead you, it will bless you and help you to prepare for eternity in heaven. As it works in your life, it will help you to remain humble, courageous, and faithful to the Lord, as you develop in the image of your Father and your Brother. "*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 3:18). The mirror into which we look is the word of God, and as we see God revealing Himself through that word, we are able to emulate what we see and to grow in His likeness.

"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). Studying closely that "perfect law of liberty" will give you strength, zeal, and determination. It will bring every physical and spiritual blessing you need in this life. And, in the end, it will judge you (John 12:48).

It is so sad that the majority of people go to the wrong place for this power. It cannot be found in man or in his teachings. Rather the power is in God and His word. God works through His word in our lives as we allow it to enter us through faith and obedience. It saves and gives the hope of eternal life. What power could be greater than this?

Lesson 20

The Theory of Evolution

How was the world created? Where did man come from? What is the source of life? These questions have been asked again and again. Some think they know the answers. They point to the theory of evolution.

Most of our schools, colleges, and universities teach this theory as fact. Our museums resort to the evolutionary teachings as an explanation for life and the development of all species. Science books are full of these assumptions.

Is the theory of evolution true? Can it be that man came from lower forms of life, such as the amoeba and the monkey? If so, why aren't these animals gradually developing into higher stages of life now? If the theory of evolution is correct, why is man not progressing beyond his present state? Or is man at the highest point that can be developed? These are some good questions that all would do well to ponder.

The truth is that a theory is but an opinion of some man. It is not a fact. To teach a theory as a fact is to be deceitful. The theory of evolution is taught as a fact, but it has never been proven. Those who teach it should be honest and make it clear that this is only what some men think, but that others reject it as being false.

If evolution was a proven fact then it would no longer be a theory but it would be the truth, and therefore, should be taught. But until this has been proven — which we believe cannot be done — then we had better be careful lest we be led to believe something that is not true. Furthermore, we must be on guard as to what our children read and are taught on this subject. Often times, older people are left to believe what they will, but their children are quietly indoctrinated in those things that are contrary to all the truths their parents stand for. We cannot allow this to happen to our children.

The theory of evolution is designed to destroy the concept of God and the supernatural creation of all things. But really, the only possible conclusion that we can reach when we think of the world is that it was divinely and miraculously created by a higher power, by God.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork”* (Psalm 19:1). These statements tell us of God and His creation. They offer the answers to our questions concerning life and the existence of the world and all things therein. Accepting these statements by faith requires much less faith than the acceptance of the unscientific theories of evolution.

One is not expressing his ignorance to acknowledge his faith in God. Rather, he is showing his wisdom in doing so. It is only logical to conclude that a creation presupposes a creator. Our faith is grounded on the many proofs and evidences of creation, whereas even those who accept evolution must admit that it is only a theory, one that they accept by faith.

Lesson 21

Where Is the Power in Preaching?

Christ said, “*Go ... and preach*” (Mark 16:15). Paul wrote, “... *preach the word ...*” (2 Timothy 4:2). We, therefore, have our orders, and we must comply with them. This is as true today as it was in the first century.

Preaching is one of the major ways that the Lord has ordained through which His message is to be conveyed to man. Whether done in the pulpit or in some other public manner, the work is still preaching. This involves man personally speaking by word of mouth, in communicating the word of God.

There are some who think that preaching is losing its power. For instance, they point to gospel meetings, which at one time drew great crowds but now attract very little attention. Preaching on all other occasions, likewise, seems to be on the decline. Does this mean that the time will come when preaching will no longer be needed or used? Not if Christianity is to survive.

There are many reasons why preaching does not get the attention that it once did. There is the lack of time devoted to worship, lack of interest in spiritual matters, but perhaps the basic problem is that too much emphasis has been placed on the messenger instead of the message.

Behind the preaching is the preacher, and he is the one who has been schooled, polished, and catapulted to the pulpit. He has been well dressed, taught how to properly pronounce every word, has learned by experience how to time his remarks to a bare minimum, and he prepares a variety of lessons so that they will hold the interest of his audience. He must have a pleasant disposition, be friendly at all times with everyone, never be negative, and always be entertaining. Paradoxically, all of this effort to “sell” preaching is the reason that many have lost interest in preaching.

While the preacher is very important, and there are many things that he can do to help get the message across to his audience, the fact

remains that the real power of preaching is in the message. Paul says that it pleases God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (Romans 1:16). Christ tells us that the truth is what makes us free (John 8:32). Peter says that we are purified by obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22).

Beautiful and flowery oratory is not enough. Sermons that illustrate only the speaker's education make the wrong kind of impression. Preachers who say a lot but never say anything are wasting their time. Instead, the preaching that is needed, that is powerful, and that will get results, is just good, simple, scriptural teaching of God's word. Those truths may have been stated over and over, but the soul craves that food. Nothing else can take its place. Nothing else can really satisfy.

We would be a lot better off if we quit trying to update our preaching and decide that we are going to preach the message that man needs. This doesn't mean that we can't study, learn, and prepare ourselves, but our emphasis should be taken off the preacher and put back on the message as God intended. Our sermons should be according to the scriptures, based on the needs of the people, instead of trying to entertain them by tickling their ears. Don't worry — if we'll preach the word, we will find that it still holds unlimited power.

Lesson 22

Are You a Member of the Church of Christ?

If not, could I talk to you a little about it? I am wondering why you are not a member. Perhaps you are a member of some other church? If so, whose church could it be? Surely, it cannot compare favorably with Christ's church.

Did Christ establish your church? Where? When? Is it built on Him? Did He die for it? Is He the savior of it? Is He the head of it? Does it wear His name? Can you read about it in the Bible?

I am not questioning you to embarrass you or to pressure you. Rather, I want you to think seriously about these matters and realize that if you are in a church that was not built by Christ, a church that does not wear the Lord's name, then it could not possibly be the one true church of the Bible.

Maybe you have been told that one church is as good as another, that the church is not important, and that it doesn't matter what church you belong to. If so, you have been given false information. Surely the Lord would not establish something that was not important; He would not die for that which is worthless; He would not shed His blood to save the church if a person could be saved in any other way.

The Bible teaches that there is one church and that it is the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18). Those who obey the Lord are saved (Mark 16:16) and are added to His church (Acts 2:47). That is why He is said to be the savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). Furthermore, it is called the church of Christ for the simple reason that it belongs to Him (Acts 20:28).

I would sincerely like to encourage you to go to your own Bible and investigate these matters for yourself. I believe that, if you will do so, you will discover the truth about the church, and you will want to become a member of it. Whatever you do, don't hold on to a man-made church, which represents denominationalism and division. Settle for nothing less than the one original, genuine church of the Bible. Only then can you be sure that you are a member of Christ's church.

If you are not a member of any church, then before you become entangled with some religious group, I would like to introduce you to the church

of Christ. It might be, however, that your thinking has already been influenced in a particular direction, even though you have not officially accepted it by joining some church. If you will not allow prejudice to hinder you and if you will keep an open mind, then it is possible for you to learn the truth about the church. To do this, you must forget what you have heard about different churches and go to the Bible and begin to read and study for yourself to see what it says on this subject. Sure, you can do this, if you want to. God has given you a good mind with the ability to read and study and to think for yourself. He has also given you His word, and He has said the same to you as He has said to me and to every other human being in all of this world.

Now, as you read, you will discover that the scriptures speak of one church. As you further investigate that church, you will discover that this is Christ's church. You will also learn what to do to be a member of it, and it is my prayer that you will then want to become a member. Remember, you cannot obey God without becoming a part of His church, because when you obey the Lord, He saves you and adds you to the church, His body. If you are not a member of it, you are not saved, because if you were saved, He would have added you to it. Does that make sense to you? Again, I invite you to investigate and find out for yourself. You have nothing to lose, and you might gain everything by doing it.

If you are a member of Christ's church, you know as well as I do what it means to have the joy of saying that you are a Christian only, that you are a member of the one true body of Christ. You know that you are not in a denomination, that you are not wearing the name of some man, you are not following doctrines and commandments of man, but that you are free from all of that. As such, you have truth, you have salvation, and you have hope. It is difficult to understand how anyone could settle for less.

If you are a member of the church of Christ, are you a faithful member? If not, then you are not any better off than the person who is not a Christian. As a matter of fact, you are in worse shape because you know the truth and have obeyed it, but you have now departed from it. In doing so, you are hurting the cause of Christ and will no doubt cause souls to be lost. Let me plead with you to repent of your sins, confess your faults, and ask the Lord to forgive you. At the same time, decide that you are going to go to work as a Christian so that, when the Lord comes again, you'll be prepared to meet Him.

Lesson 23

Introducing the Bible

The word Bible comes from the Greek word “biblia”, which means “the books”. It has been called the book of books because it is composed of many books (Revelation 20:12).

The Bible is divided into two major sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word “testament” means will, covenant, or law. God made a covenant with His people through Moses, but later made a new one (2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 8:13; 9:16,17; 10:9).

The Old Testament consists of 39 books and the New Testament has 27, making a total of 66 books in the Bible.

The Old Testament books are divided into five sections:

- ◆ **Law (5):** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy;
- ◆ **History (12):** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther;
- ◆ **Poetry (5):** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon;
- ◆ **Major Prophets (5):** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel;
- ◆ **Minor Prophets (12):** Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The New Testament is divided into four sections:

- ◆ **Biography (4):** Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;
- ◆ **History (1):** Acts;
- ◆ **Letters (21):** Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude;
- ◆ **Prophecy (1):** Revelation.

The Bible covers three major periods of time:

(1) **The Patriarchal Age:** from Adam to Moses, covering twenty-five hundred years, when God spoke to the patriarchs or fathers and they in turn spoke to the families.

(2) **The Mosaic Age or Jewish Period:** from Moses to the death of Christ; it lasted for fifteen hundred years; God spoke through the law; it ceased to exist as a law when Christ died on the cross (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 24:44).

(3) **The Christian Age or Dispensation;** it began with the death of Christ and will continue until Christ comes again. It has already been in existence for almost two thousand years and it is the last period of time. In this age, God speaks to man through Christ and His word (Matthew 17:5; John 20:30,31; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

It is said that the Patriarchal Dispensation represented the Starlight Age in which only a little light was given. The Mosaic period represented the Moonlight Age in which more light was given. Finally, the Christian Period is represented by the Sunlight Age in which full light is given through Jesus Christ.

The Bible was penned by about forty men over a period of 1600 years, from 1500 B.C. to 100 A.D. Inspired by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote, these were men of all professions, living under all types of circumstances in different parts of the world, and over a span of hundreds of years. Most of them never knew each other, and few had access to any of the writings of the others, yet, the Bible tells one complete story of the human race and how God dealt with it.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew while the New Testament was written in Greek and Aramaic. The authors wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 2:13).

The Bible contains God's word (Hebrews 1:1,2), and it is not to be added to, subtracted from, or substituted for (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18,19; Galatians 1:7-9).

God not only had the power to give it but also the power to preserve it (1 Peter 1:25; Matthew 24:35).

Eventually, all of mankind will be judged by the Lord's word (John 12:48).

The Bible tells us how the world came into existence and all things therein (Genesis 1,2). It also gives the story of man, and this story is supported by history, archaeology, and science.

It tells us of man and woman being created in the image of God, that is, with a soul that will never die (Genesis 1:26,27; Matthew 10:28).

This book tells us about the fall of man and how death entered the world (Genesis 3).

The scriptures tell the story of Moses, how he delivered the children of Israel from the land of bondage, and how the law was given to him (Exodus 20).

It tells of the coming of Christ and of His birth to the virgin Mary (Matthew 1).

It tells us of the life of Christ, of His apostles, and of His death on the cross (read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

The Bible speaks of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and of His return to the Father in heaven (Acts 1).

It gives the story of the beginning of the church and of how to be a member of it (Acts 2).

The Bible tells us how one can be saved from past sins: **hear** the gospel (Romans 10:17), **believe** it (Romans 10:10), and **repent** of all sins (Acts 17:30), **confess Christ** as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32,33), and **be baptized for the remission of sins** (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

It explains how to worship God: meet on **the first day of the week** (Acts 20:7), pray (Acts 2:42), **study** (2 Timothy 2:15), **sing** (Ephesians 5:19), **partake of the Lord's Supper** (Matthew 26:26-28), and **give of one's means** (1 Corinthians 16:1,2).

The Lord's word explains how to live the Christian life (2 Peter 1:5-11; Revelation 22:14).

Finally, it tells what will happen in the future. It is appointed unto man to die (Hebrews 9:27). Christ will come again (John 14:1-3), the judgment will take place (2 Corinthians 5:10), the righteous will go to heaven and the wicked will go to hell for all eternity (Matthew 25:46).

Do you believe the Bible? Will you obey its teachings? Only those who do so will be blessed now and forevermore (Revelation 14:13).

Lesson 24

New Testament Unity

The world is divided religiously. There is Catholicism, Protestantism, denominationalism, community churches, sects, bodies, etc. All of these are supposedly trying to serve the same Lord. At the same time, all of these recognize that there is something wrong. As a result, an effort is being put forth to bring about unity. There are conferences, meetings, and seminars among the leaders of religious groups to try to find some common ground on which to build unity. Although it is commendable to know that these people are at last waking up to the need for unity, it can never be had until these groups lay down their creed books, peculiar beliefs, names, doctrines, and practices, and return to the Bible to do only what it teaches. Once this is done there can be true unity.

God hates division and confusion. This is clearly set forth in the scriptures. For instance, some divisions came about in a congregation of the Lord's church in Corinth, and Paul condemned it immediately. Notice the reading: *"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul', or 'I am of Apollos', or 'I am of Cephas', or 'I am of Christ'. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect"* (1 Corinthians 1:10-17).

In the foregoing, you will note Paul's plea for unity. In dealing with the division itself, he simply asked three questions to show the absurdity of their position. First, he asked, *"Is Christ divided?"* They knew He was not. The second question, *"Was Paul crucified for*

you?" Again, they knew that the Lord had been crucified for them. And finally, he asked "*Were you baptized in the name of Paul?*" No, they had not been baptized in any man's name but had been baptized in the name of Christ. Therefore, the conclusion was that they should all be one in Christ. How simple!

Paul continued to show that, since there was this problem at Corinth, under the circumstances he was happy that he had personally baptized only a few lest they should say that he had come to baptize, not to preach the Gospel. In other words, his purpose in his work was the preaching of the Gospel. Naturally, as a result, people were baptized, some by his hands but most by others. Paul was not teaching against baptism. If so, he would have baptized no one. But due to the circumstances, he was happy that in this case he had baptized only a few.

In Romans 16:17,18 Paul said, "*Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*" The apostle said that those who cause divisions should be marked and that they should be avoided. Why? Because they served not the Lord Jesus Christ, but with fair speeches they were deceiving the hearts of the simple. On the other hand, he did not say they should be commended, praised, or even tolerated. There are many other verses that convey the same message. How we need to realize that not all who claim to teach the Bible are teaching it as it is! Many of them are deceived, and they deceive others because they fail to take heed.

Christ prayed for unity, which means oneness, completeness, wholeness. Listen to Him: "*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*" (John 17:20,21). Here Christ was praying for the apostles, but also for all of those who would come to believe in Him through their preaching. Then He said concerning all of them, "*...that they all may be one*". To what extent? He explained, "*even as I and the Father are one.*" That is real unity.

Going back to Paul's writings, a foundation is given for unity

when he said, *“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all”* (Ephesians 4:1-6). There are how many of each one? Just one. How many is one? One only.

Yes, there are many congregations, worldwide, of that one church, but they are called by the same name — the name of Christ — and they teach and practice the same Gospel. On the other hand, some in the religious world would like to think that all who profess belief in Christ live under one huge spiritual umbrella that covers the many denominational groups. But we know from Paul’s warning that we are to *“... note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them,”* that not everybody can find shelter under the umbrella. When different and opposing doctrines are being taught, God condemns the division.

My friends, God has given us one book, the Bible. When we all read it, and believe it, and obey its teachings, then we will all obey the same teachings, be added to the same church, wear the same name, worship alike, and preach the same thing. The Bible will not divide us, but will unite us. Christ has not prayed that we be divided, but that we all be one in Him. When we do God’s will, we will be united — but not until then.

Lesson 25

The First Day of the Week

There are several days in each week. On which one of these is the Christian to worship God? Has any particular day been set aside as the day of worship? What does the Bible teach?

As we all know, the Jewish day of worship under the Law of Moses was the Sabbath Day. In other religions, the Muslims point to Friday, the Buddhists have their Poya Day, etc. But what about the Christian? Does it matter on what day he worships?

There are those among us who tell us that the old Sabbath Day of the Jewish law is still binding. But please note that it was given originally to the Jews only — never to the Gentiles (Exodus 20:1-17) — a part of a different law from that under which we live (John 1:17), and it was fulfilled and taken out of the way (Matthew 5:17-19). Christ kept the Sabbath Day, but He lived and died under the Law of Moses. It should be remembered that not one time did Christ ever command anyone to keep it. The apostles not only never commanded it, but never kept the Sabbath Day after the resurrection of Christ. Paul entered the synagogues on the Sabbath Day time and time again, but never to worship. Then why did he go? To teach the word of God. You will observe in reading the book of Acts that once the Jews discovered his real purpose for being there, he was no longer welcome.

There are those who say that the day of worship was changed by the Catholic church. The Catholics also claim to have given us the Bible. Both are untrue. The Bible does not teach or show that those who lived under the law of Christ ever observed the Sabbath Day. The history of the early church, as recorded by the church fathers of the first and second centuries, does not teach this either.

Once we are able to rightly divide the word (2 Timothy 2:15) and see the distinction between the law of Moses and the law of Christ, we will understand that with the abolition of the law of Moses, and consequently of the Sabbath Day (2 Corinthians 3:6-16), the law of Christ was ushered in, along with a new day of worship, the first day of the week. Read Acts 15:23-29 to see that the Gentile Christians were freed by the Holy Spirit from keeping the Sabbath, or any of the law given by Moses.

Now let me point out a few things about the first day of the week before you jump to many unscriptural conclusions. First of all, the first day of the week is not the Christian “Sabbath”, neither is it a rest day, or a day that is to be “observed” or “kept”. Then what is it? It is simply the day that the Lord has set aside on which Christians are to assemble to worship. In no other way does it resemble the Old Testament Sabbath.

What does the Scripture say about the first day of the week? Please note:

1. **Christ arose from the grave on the first day of the week** (Matthew 28:1-7). At least twice He met with His disciples on the first day of the week after His resurrection (John 20:1,19,26).
2. **The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, which was the first day of the week** (Acts 2:1-4). How do we know? Because Pentecost always came on the first day of the week.
3. **The gospel was preached for the first time after the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week** (Acts 2).
4. **The church was established on the first day of the week** (Acts 2:38-47).
5. **The disciples met on the first day of the week to break bread**, *“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”* (Acts 20:7). If the Sabbath Day was the day of worship then why did Paul tarry a number of extra days, even by-passing the “Sabbath”, to worship with the disciples on the first day of the week? Surely you know.
6. **Christians were commanded to “lay by in store” on the first day of the week.** *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also; on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come”* (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). That this was a public assembly during which the collection was taken is clear, for the purpose of Paul’s instructions was

to alleviate the necessity of a gathering of the funds when he came. If the contributions had been kept at home, a gathering at his arrival would have been necessary. Now if the day of worship had been the Sabbath, why would Paul have the Christians to gather again on the first day of the week just to “lay by in store”? Do those of you who cling to the Sabbath Day follow Paul’s instruction here? If not, why not?

7. **Christians are not to forsake the assembly as they see the day approaching** (Hebrews 10:25). This, again, would be the first day of the week. John called it the Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10). It is the day of worship, putting the Lord first instead of last (Matthew 6:33).

Those who try to hold on to the old law need to read and study Romans 7:1-7; 2 Corinthians 3; Ephesians 2; Colossians 2; and Hebrews 7-10. May we realize that we are not under the law given by Moses but under Christ. Let us, therefore, worship on the day that His law sets forth. The Lord will accept no less.

Lesson 26

Salvation by Faith

The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is by faith. That is, the lost sinner is saved by faith. Another way of putting it, we are justified by faith. Paul said, *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law”* (Romans 3:28). The law, to which he was referring, was the law of Moses, according to the context. Continuing, he said, *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). We could go on with dozens of other similar verses. So we cannot deny that salvation is by faith.

While we cannot deny that salvation is by faith, neither can we teach that salvation is by faith *only*. The great majority of the people in the religious world read the little word “only” into the verses that deal with salvation by faith and make it appear as though one is saved by faith only. This is not true. Salvation is not by faith only. James supports this when he said, *“You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only”* (James 2:24).

If one is not saved by faith only, then what do the scriptures mean when they speak of salvation by faith? The point is, faith includes much more than a mental acceptance that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Faith includes acting upon God’s word, doing the will of the Lord, serving the Lord, keeping His commandments, working for Him in obedience. This does not take a thing away from faith and it certainly does not eliminate the grace of God. Rather, God extends salvation to us, and we must reach up to accept it in faith and obedience. After we have done all that the Lord requires us to do to be saved, our salvation is still by faith and by the grace of God.

Let us see how it works. For instance, take John 3:16 where Christ said, *“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.”* Just as soon as this is quoted someone is ready to say, “But the Lord said that whosoever believed in Him should not perish but would have everlasting life.” That is right. But He didn’t say, “Whosoever believes *only*.” Instead, we should ask, “Believes *what?*” It is obvious that the promise concerns “*whosoever believed*

in Jesus.” Now the question is this: Do you believe in Jesus? You say that you do. Then do you believe in Him to the extent that you will do what He says? If so, you will obey Him. If you do not believe in Him enough to obey His teaching, you do not really believe in Him.

Now John 3:36: “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*” First, observe that he does not use the expression, “believes *only*”. Then note that in the last part of the verse he tells what will happen to those who do not believe. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible renders it like this: “*He who does not obey the Son*” shall not see life. In other words, he that believes or obeys the Son has everlasting life, but those who do not believe or do not obey will not see life.

Turning to Romans, Paul says, “*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). In the very next verse he says that both belief and confession are *unto* salvation, or **going in the direction** of it — not that one *already* has it. If one so confesses and so believes, will he not do what the Lord has commanded?

Let’s notice an example in Acts 8:36-39. Here, Philip preached Christ to the eunuch. “*Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.*” What did the eunuch do? He confessed Christ and believed with all his heart, showing his **belief** by **obeying** the Lord. Therefore, he was saved.

In Acts 16:31 the jailer was told, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.*” Many stop here, but this is a mistake. Who was the jailer? He was an unbeliever. So, first of all, he needed to believe. To make it possible for him to believe, Paul and Silas preached the word of God to him and to his household. After faith was produced (Romans 10:17), he washed their stripes, showing **repentance**, and then was **baptized**, he and his household, straightway.

Remember also all of the many verses that deal with the specific commands. For instance, Christ said, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* (Mark 16:16). Peter told a group of believers, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:38). Now, does the Lord tell people one time that they can be saved by faith only, and then the next time tell them that there are certain commands they must obey? Certainly not. The point is, if one believes the Lord or has genuine faith in Him, *his faith will move him to obey the commands of the Lord*. That is, he will prove, show, or demonstrate his faith. Read Hebrews 11 to see how the people of God down through history showed their faith. Surely God will accept no less today.

In closing this brief study, the question is: How much faith do you have? Remember, the Lord asked this question: *“But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?”* (Luke 6:46). If you are upholding the doctrine of “faith only”, the Lord might well ask you the same question. Don’t isolate a few verses of scripture, misread them, and try to uphold an unscriptural doctrine. Believe in the Lord and do what He says, and then you will be saved by faith — but only then.

Lesson 27

Why Do People Do What They Do in the Name of Religion?

I have seen people cut their backs and beat their chests to bloody pulps in the name of religion. I have seen others offer animal sacrifices, go through all kinds of rituals and practices, and worship and reverence the cow, all for the sake of their religion. I have also seen Catholic and Protestant groups oppose each other while allowing the rest of the world to pass by without notice. But why do these people do such things even for religious purposes? Because that is all they have ever known. This is what they have been taught. Most of them are honest and sincere, and they do so with the belief that they *must* do these things.

It is not enough to be religious. Many were religious in Jesus' day, but they did the things that they did to be seen and heard by men, instead of doing them because they were the right things to do (Matthew 6). Others do what they do because of ignorance of a better way (Acts 17). There are also those who follow the teachings of men, rather than the teachings of God (Matthew 7:21-23;15:9). Some are religious for material gain. These people are described as hirelings (John 10:12,13). It doesn't matter what they are asked to do, just so long as they are getting paid for it.

Regardless of how honest and sincere one may be in religion, the fact still remains that there are many things done in the name of it that are ignorant, ridiculous, wasteful, harmful, and sinful. What one and all must strive for in religion is *the truth*. There is one truth, and it does not contradict itself. Moreover, it is possible to know it and to act on it (John 17:17; 8:32). When this happens, all will be living, working, and worshipping together as one. The results will be sensible, logical, helpful to man, and God will be honored.

How may we know the truth and have the truth? We must begin with the premise that there is a Creator. This is logical and conclusive from what we see all about us. If there is a creator, we must realize that He is One and that He alone is God. But if there is a Creator, and if He is God, then how would He have us to acknowledge Him?

Does He have a will? Has He spoken? How has He revealed His desires to humanity? What has He said? What are we to do about it?

The next logical step would be for us to seek to *know* His will. But there are many books that are said to be from God. How may we know which one is His? Compare them if you will, and see if they will settle that problem without too much difficulty! For instance, which tells about God, the creation, gives the history of man, tells both the good and bad sides of humanity, explains how man can be saved, and what will happen to him after death — and all without the corruptions of myths? There are many other questions, but I think everyone would admit that as a result of such an investigation, the book that would come out on top would be the Bible itself, the world's best-selling publication every year, for the many hundreds of years since it was first printed.

Don't listen to man on religion, but investigate for yourself. You have a good mind, and you are intelligent. You can also understand, reason and reach your own conclusions. Study for yourself. Search the Scriptures and see what they teach. If you do listen to others, compare what they teach with the teaching of the Bible. If you will do that, honestly, you should be able to see whether or not they are teaching the truth.

God is One, and the religion of God is one. Likewise, He has one book and one will. When man begins to accept the truth of its pages, he will cease to do many of the things that he is presently doing, and he will begin to do that which is sensible, logical, and right. The truth will make one free (John 8:32). It will save when obeyed (1 Peter 1:22,23; Mark 16:16), and it will give hope of everlasting life to the faithful (Revelation 2:10).

Remember that you don't have to be blind in your religious beliefs and practices. You don't have to be strange and different. You don't have to do a lot of the things that are done today in the name of religion. In spite of that, you can still be religious, but more importantly, you can be right in your religion. We ask you to think on these things and to check up on them to see if they are the truth. If you have already accepted it, then help us to take the same truth to others. We want to do only what God wants us to do in religion, and only then will we be right.

When we do God's will, we will be different from the rest of the

world, but not in a fanatical, senseless, and foolish manner. Rather, we will be different from others by the way we live, by how we worship, and by what we teach. We will live good, moral lives, be honest in our dealings with others, and always speak the truth. We will worship God humbly, reverently, and intelligently.

Ours will not be a strange and foolish life but, rather, simple and logical. Our teaching will always be based on God's word, which is the truth, and it will be possible for all to understand it and follow it with pride, and with the confidence that it is the one and only way to God (John 14:6).

At the same time, there will be no need to be ashamed or to have to offer an apology for anything said or done. The reason for it all will be clear and understandable to every responsible being, and especially to those who have enough interest to investigate these matters in Scripture for themselves.

Lesson 28

Casting Out Devils

In recent times we have heard a great deal about Satan worshippers on the one hand and about people casting out devils on the other. A best-selling book has been written on exorcism, and a popular motion picture has been produced from it. All of this has caused new questions to arise concerning the devil and his dealings with man. We know, according to the Bible, that the devil had the power to possess people in the days of Christ and the apostles, and likewise they had the power to cast out evil spirits. But what about now? Does the devil have the power to possess people today? If so, can he be cast out? If so, who can cast him out?

Interestingly enough, the Bible puts forth no effort whatsoever to tell of Satan's origin, his power, and details of how he works. Neither does the Scripture try to convince us of his existence. Instead, we must rely on statements made here and there about him. We are told that God made all things in heaven and earth, and that means that He originally created the being who became Satan. In the beginning, he was not evil, but by leading a revolt against the faithful angels, he and his associates were cast out of heaven. After the creation of man, Satan lost no time in appearing to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. He came as a serpent and was successful in deceiving them and thereby bringing sin into the world. His presence has been very much felt among men ever since.

The Bible speaks of Satan as Beelzebub, the devil, demon, serpent, the evil one, evil spirit, unclean spirit, etc. He is a spirit and may even be spoken of in plurality. In Mark 5:1-13 we read where Jesus had an encounter with a man who lived in the tombs and an evil spirit dwelt in him. When Jesus asked this devil what his name was, he replied, "*My name is Legion: for we are many.*" James explained that faith without works was dead because even *the devils* believe and tremble (James 2:19). We speak of the devil in referring to Satan, but he has many evil spirit beings that are associated with him, and for this reason, we may speak of the devil or devils and still be correct.

It seems that in the days of Christ and the apostles, God allowed the devil to have special powers and freedom. That

is, God allowed him to enter people and to actually possess them or to control them. In such cases, those who were possessed were helpless against the evil spirits. The devil dwelt in them, directed them, spoke through them, and tormented them. But what was the purpose of this? Evidently, God allowed the devil this special power and freedom to possess man in order that Christ and the apostles might cast Satan out, proving to everyone that God is more powerful than Satan. Also, it proved that God was working through Christ and the apostles, and therefore, they were not impostors or false teachers. Thus, it would seem that Satan's special powers were limited to this period only, for these special purposes.

Satan had the power in those days to possess people in a special and overwhelming way. A good example of this is found in Mark 5:1-13. Another example is found in Matthew 9:32, in the case of the dumb man who had an evil spirit. Further, we read of Jesus and the apostles going throughout the villages preaching and giving glad tidings: "...and a certain woman who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities — Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons..." (Luke 8:2). When Philip went down to Samaria to preach the gospel, the record says, "*And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed*" (Acts 8:6,7). You will note that not only did Christ and the apostles have power to cast out evil spirits, but also those who had received the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit, such as Philip.. There were many cases of demon possession, and the Lord and His disciples were able to cast them all out.

Various explanations have been offered to suggest that the devil himself never actually possessed anyone. Some have said that those who were thought to have devils in them were guided by sinful angels. This is not in keeping with specific statements made about them and their whereabouts. We read in Jude 6, "*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.*" Peter wrote, "*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).

Others have thought that these demons were the spirits of the wicked dead. But recall how the rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus back to the land of the living to warn his five brothers not to come to such a place. In response to this request, Abraham reminded the rich man that they had Moses and the Prophets, since they were living under the law of Moses, and that if they would not listen to them, neither would they listen to one raised from the dead. He continued by saying, *“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us”* (Luke 16:26).

Then there are those who believe that they did not actually have evil spirits but that they had some disease or were insane, and that this sickness was responsible for their actions. It would appear that some diseases were associated with evil spirits, but not always. If you will go back and re-read all the cases concerning those who had evil spirits, you will note that the Lord made a distinction between diseases and evil spirits. If they were the same, no such distinction would have been made. And so, in spite of the various explanations given, it would seem that none of them really answer the question: What possessed the people if there were no evil spirits? All of the scriptures point to the fact that there were indeed evil spirits who possessed people of that day.

Of course, not everyone was possessed by demons but those who were, as far as we know, came into contact with those who were able to miraculously cast them out. There are a number of cases given, but let us observe the one in Matthew 12:22-30: *“Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’ Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, ‘This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.’ But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He*

who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad'."

Here we have the Lord being accused of casting out devils by the power of Satan himself. In other words, Christ was said to be working for the devil. The Lord shows the inconsistency of this by asking the question, "*Can Satan cast out Satan?*" Obviously he cannot or would not. Jesus goes on to show that a kingdom, even Satan's kingdom, divided against itself can not stand.

Christ not only cast out evil spirits, but He commanded the apostles to do likewise. In giving the limited commission, He said to them, "*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give*" (Matthew 10:8). In giving the great commission, He said, "*And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*" (Mark 16:17,18).

You will notice in these statements that the Lord made a distinction between casting out devils and healing the sick, cleansing people, and other miraculous deeds. Furthermore, although all accountable people were influenced by Satan, not all were possessed by him. This means that those who did have evil spirits in them were a small minority, and God gave His Son, the apostles, and those on whom they laid their hands, the power to cast them out.

Not all people had the gift of God that would enable them to cast these demons out. We have an example of this in Acts 19:13-17: "*Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.' Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."*

This reminds me of denominational people today who claim to have the power to cast out devils. If devils did possess people now as some did then, and one of these denominational people tried to cast them out, then no doubt they would say, "*Jesus I know, Gospel*

preachers I know, but who in the world are you?" Then these spirits would no doubt turn on such people and run them off. As a matter of fact, if devils literally possessed people today and denominational people tried to cast them out, such people would be the first to be shocked if they got any response from the spirits whatsoever, and they would probably run for their lives.

The question now arises, does Satan possess people today? I think from what has already been said that it is clear that he does not. Of course, many would say that he does. They can supposedly give examples of such cases. But it is easy to be deceived in such matters, especially when one does not clearly understand what the Scriptures teach on the subject. For instance, I personally know of a case in which a young man had epilepsy and occasionally went into convulsions and fits, and his parents thought he had an evil spirit in him. Naturally, he did not.

Another time there was a young girl who had a swollen stomach and she was in torment. The parents, relatives, and friends thought that she had an evil spirit, but through medical treatment it was found that she was literally being eaten up by worms.

Back in 1970, I was called to the home of a person I knew in New Delhi, and he told me that he was possessed by a devil and asked me to pray for him and to cast the devil out. I had to explain what the Bible taught on the subject. At his insistent requests for prayer, I prayed that he might take medicine and food so that he might regain his strength and health. I also prayed that he might have the opportunity to read and study the truth on the matter so that he would not continue to be deceived on the subject. The devil was in him all right, not through possession against his will, but he himself was allowing the devil to come into his life and to influence him to go in the wrong direction.

Again, I have heard many stories in which devils were cast out of people, but on enquiring to find out who cast them out, I was always told that it was some denominational preacher. But I know that denominational preachers are false teachers, people who are in error. Therefore, my question would be the same one the Lord asked His critics when they accused Him of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, "*Can Satan cast out Satan?*" Since he cannot, then I know that even if people were possessed by demons today, denominational preachers and such like could not cast them out.

Many people talk about the demon of alcohol, the demon of tobacco, the demon of disease, the demon of sin, etc. In the Bible we would learn that these are the results of natural physical disorders or the tools of Satan to bring about sin. But these cannot be classified as demons or evil spirits in the sense that the Bible talks about devils.

You can see that many people are ignorant of Satan and how he works. The misunderstanding and false teachings on these matters are even greater among those around the world who are backward, illiterate and are generally ignorant. Being in darkness, religiously and secularly, and full of superstitions and fears, it is easy for people to be misled in these matters.

Although the devil does not possess people against their will today as he did in the days of Christ and the apostles, we don't want to leave the impression that the devil does not enter people to use them to accomplish his purposes. We must understand that there is a difference in demon possession, where Satan so controls one that he cannot help himself, and where the individual allows or even invites Satan to come into his thoughts, his actions, and his very life for evil. In the case of demon possession, the individual could not by himself rid himself of such an evil spirit, but only through a miraculous act could he be cast out. But an individual today not only can permit Satan to enter his life, but he can also expel him from his life if he chooses to do so. This is the difference.

No, Satan cannot come into you and control your life unless you allow him to do so. It would be fearful indeed if the Bible taught that Satan could possess people today as he once did. In that case, how could we escape him, and how could we rid ourselves of him, since neither Christ nor any of His apostles is in the world to defend us against such possession? But we can be thankful that we can decide who will live in our lives, whether it be Christ or Satan. If we are wise, we will decide in favor of Christ. As long as He is in us and we are in Him, Satan cannot touch us.

Lesson 29

Confession of Faults

One of the most difficult things in the world for one to do is to say, "I have sinned". In reading through the Bible, you will note that very few had the courage to make such a statement. Not only so, but from that day to this, mankind has not changed on this point. And yet, man is a sinner and literally can always honestly say, "I have sinned". This is true not only of the non-Christian but of the Christian as well.

After obeying God to become a Christian, one must be faithful to the Lord. That does not mean that a person will live a perfect life and never make any mistakes, but it does mean that one can make every effort to be as true to his calling as possible. In doing so, he is able to walk in the light as He is in the light and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses him from all sins (1 John 1:7). But not all remain faithful. Many fall by the wayside. They turn back. They err. They sin. Although still children of God, they are *erring* children. In this state, they are lost, and at the same time, they do the Lord's cause a great deal of harm by their bad example. What needs to be done in this case? What can be done?

Those who are unwilling to repent, so as to enable them to return to their first love, should be dealt with in a scriptural way by withdrawing fellowship from them (1 Corinthians 5; Matthew 18:15-17). Those who are willing to return to the Lord should be encouraged to do so. As a matter of fact, every effort should be made to bring them back. In order for the erring to return, however, they must comply with the conditions that are stated in the Scriptures.

It is wonderful to know that whenever a person sins, there are provisions made by which he can be restored. The Bible does not teach that "once saved always saved" and neither does it teach that once one departs from the Lord, he must forever remain lost. To say that it is impossible for one to sin and then be forgiven does not mean that the Lord is encouraging sin, but rather it suggests that God has left man in the position of being a free moral agent, with the ability to decide whether he will obey God or not, and whether he will remain faithful or not. It also leaves man in a position where it is possible for him to

repent and return to the Lord after he has gone back into sin. Just knowing that this is true makes one thank God all the more for His longsuffering, grace, and mercy. Read the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Of course, the Lord does not want anyone to go back into sin, and there is no assurance, once one does, that he will ever make it back to the place of safety. Therefore, for one to backslide, to err, and to continue in the practice of sin means that he has fallen away from God. He is lost and he will remain lost as long as he is in that state.

For one to return to the Lord, and therefore to safety, there are certain things he must do. First of all, he must genuinely **repent** of all of his sins. We not only have the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15) that illustrates this, but we also have the story of Simon the sorcerer who obeyed God and then sinned by trying to buy the gift of God with money. Peter told him in no uncertain terms, “*Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. **Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.** For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.*’ Then Simon answered and said, ‘*Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.*’” (Acts 8:20-24). That is, one must repent, turn away, or quit doing those things that are sinful and wrong.

Next, he must **confess his faults**. As mentioned earlier, we see in the case of Simon the sorcerer that he acknowledged his sin. James wrote, “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” (James 5:16). One must be willing to confess his sins or to acknowledge them. That does not necessarily mean that he must name them one by one or go into great detail. But he knows what he has done, and those to whom he is confessing know what he has done, so when he says, “I have sinned and I need forgiveness”, that should be enough. To say, “*If I have sinned*” or other such expressions is not enough. One either *has sinned* or he *hasn't sinned*. If he is going to confess his faults, then he should confess them honestly.

Finally, **prayer** should be engaged in for the purpose of asking God's forgiveness. This is brought out in the case of Simon, in James

5:16, and in other verses. Only by doing this can an erring Christian return to the status of being a faithful Christian. Once this is done, he should be forgiven by the church and accepted back into full fellowship.

Now let's go one step further and consider how public all of this should be. First, if one has sinned before God and no one knows about it but himself and God, then he should take it to God and settle it right there. In this case, no one else needs to be involved. Second, if a person has committed a sin against another individual, and only he, the wronged person, and God know of the sin, then the matter should be settled in that degree of privacy. Finally, if one has sinned publicly, that is, where a number of people, and even the community, know about it, then it should be taken before the church so that one and all may know that he is correcting his life. One must, therefore, consider his sin as it relates to others and take the necessary steps for the matter to be cleared up.

If you are an erring Christian, will you return to the Lord while you still have the opportunity? This is in your best interest as well as in the best interest of the church as a whole. There are those who are praying that you will. Above all, the Lord invites and pleads for you to come home.

Lesson 30

Is Christianity a Foreign Religion?

Sometimes we hear it said that Christianity is a foreign religion — that it is from the West. Others have said that it is the white man's religion. Of course, those who make such statements are obviously the enemies of Christianity. They suppose that people are ignorant of where Christianity came from, and who it was intended for. They are willing to use this kind of propaganda to stir up emotions and feelings that will poison and prejudice the minds of some against the religion of Christ.

Those who know the truth on these matters know that Christ Himself was born in the city of Bethlehem near Jerusalem (Matthew 1 and 2), in the Middle East. It was the teachings of Christ, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, and then the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem that resulted in approximately 3,000 people obeying the Lord and being added to the church on the first day of its existence. That made it possible for the religion of Christ — Christianity — to have its beginning and to spread from that beginning point. During these past two thousand years, Christianity has gone to all parts of the earth, through teaching and good works only, and it is accepted on that basis.

Christianity has never belonged exclusively to one area or to any particular group of people. It concerns all, and is for all. If it is predominant in the western part of the world, it is because people there have heard the word of the Lord, believed it, obeyed it, and are Christians because of it. Most of what we see there, however, is not the pure form of Christianity, as is shown in the New Testament. It is splintered into many groups that have blended the teachings of men with the teachings of Christ, creating many "churches" with divisive doctrines and names. This is not pleasing to the Lord at all (Romans 16:17,18). What He wants is for one and all to accept His will, and by doing so, to be Christians and Christians only (1 Peter 4:16). There are some in the West who are attempting to do just that.

Whether Christianity is found in Asia, Africa, the islands of the

seas, or any other place in the world, it is there because some people in these places believe that Christianity is what they need in order to change their lives, to discipline themselves, and to prepare themselves for the next life. Since Christianity began in the Middle East, that means the Christians of that area in the beginning took the message to the West. With the passing of time, and with the people of the East drifting away from the religion of Christ, the believers of the West began to bring it back to the East. So those who have it take it to those who are without it. That is the way it has always been, and no doubt this practice will continue.

The Lord intended for all people everywhere to have the opportunity to be Christians. He commanded the apostles, *“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”* (Matthew 28:19,20). Again, He said, *“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). Christianity is for all people, as long as time shall continue. It must be taught and taught again, throughout time and throughout the world. This sharing of the Gospel is the responsibility of all who have come to know the truth.

We have the New Testament in written form, and Christ Himself described it as the seed (Luke 8:11). That means that as the seed is spread by word of mouth or through literature, those who receive it and obey it will become Christians. Wherever the Bible may be found, it is possible for the local people to read and study and obey its teachings on their own and without any outside help. If there are those who want to do that, who has a right to say they shouldn't or that they can't? Religion that is forced on a people is worthless. Unless one has the freedom to decide what he will be religiously, he has no freedom at all. If he wants to reject and deny Christianity, that is his business. But if he wants to accept the religion of Christ, he should be allowed the right to do so. That is real freedom.

Pure Christianity has no earthly head and neither does it have an earthly headquarters. Rather, Christ is its head (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23), and He is in heaven. *“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). *“Then*

Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.'" (Acts 10:34,35). *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). Speaking of the Lord, Paul says, *"Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). Christianity has universal appeal because it deals with personal needs.

No one can exclusively claim Christ and His religion. Neither should anyone feel that Christianity is a Western religion or an Eastern religion. Rather, it is international, and worldwide, for all people everywhere. On the other hand, all may consider it local and personal, meeting their needs, while at the same time giving them the responsibility of taking it to others.

Do not be afraid of true Christianity or oppose it. It will not hurt you, your country, or anyone else. It is not interested in politics, land, or in using force, that is, if it is the true religion of Christ. Judge it not by those who bear it, but by its teachings and what it can do for you and for others who accept it. Before passing final judgment on it, at least be honest enough to investigate it, in the writings of the New Testament, in order to see what it is all about. If you will, surely you will want to become a Christian.

Lesson 31

The Power of the Gospel

The apostle Paul wrote the Romans, “*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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith*” (Romans 1:16,17). Much is said in these two verses of scripture. Let’s take a look at them and see what they mean.

What is the Gospel? Whatever it is, Paul is saying that he is not ashamed of it, and the reason he is not ashamed of it is because it is the power of God unto salvation. That is, the Gospel has the power to save. Not only that, but through it the righteousness of God is revealed from the beginning to the end. So if we can discover what the Gospel is, we may determine wherein the power of God is located.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 Paul said, “*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.*” Paul says that the gospel is simply the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He told the Corinthians that he had received it, had preached it to them, and those who had received it had been saved by it.

But how can the **death, burial, and resurrection** of Christ save anyone? In other words, how can we so apply these *facts* to our lives that we can be saved by them? First, we must realize that these are facts that must be *believed*. In the second place, the same writer, the apostle Paul, speaks of the Romans having obeyed a *form* of that doctrine.

In the first part of Romans 6, Paul shows how they had **died** to their sins, had been **buried** in the waters of baptism, and how they had **come forth** from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. That is, Christ had died, been buried, and then resurrected, and through their obedience they had pictured a form of Christ’s death, burial and

resurrection. *“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness”* (Romans 6:17,18). Notice carefully now: they were the **servants of sin** but now they are the **servants of righteousness**. What made the difference? They had obeyed from the heart that *form of doctrine* that was delivered to them.

It was not the doctrine they had obeyed, but a form of it. The doctrine was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and those were facts that they were to believe. But they obeyed a form of that doctrine, something that would picture the doctrine in their obedience. It was a likeness, something they could obey. By obeying the gospel, they died to their sins, were buried in the water — baptism — and then they came up out of the water to a new life. They symbolically pictured the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection in their obedience.

Paul tells us that the Lord is coming back to *“take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel”* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Also Peter declares, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”* (1 Peter 4:17). How can one obey the Gospel? Simple! The Gospel not only contains facts, but it also has commands. Christ Himself said, *“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).

Peter and the apostles preached the Gospel on the day of Pentecost. After the facts of the Gospel had been proclaimed and faith had been produced in the hearts of the hearers, they asked, *“Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 2:37,38). As a result of this, about three thousand were obedient to the Gospel and were added to the church (Acts 2:41,47).

Paul defined the Gospel as good news or glad tidings (Romans 10:15). When you know what the Gospel is and what it can do, it is understandable why it is called good news. And to be sure that all the world has this good news, the Lord commanded that it be taken to every creature under heaven (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:18).

So the Gospel is *the power* of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. God works through the Gospel to save the lost. There is nothing else to match it. One may turn to whatever he wills, but he will find no power for the salvation of his soul, except in the Gospel of Christ.

But we must remember this: even though the power is there, contained in the message from God, yet in order for it to transform a soul, the hearer must believe it and obey its commands. Only then will its power be transmitted to his own soul, bringing salvation and the hope of eternal life.

Yes, the power of God is in His Gospel! There is no greater power today in all the world.

Lesson 32

Where Are the Miracles?

A few weeks ago, a radio preacher was being advertised for some meetings. It was said that he was anointed of God and would be conducting miracle healing services. Although I was in the area during that time, I heard of no miracles being performed. No one was talking about the wondrous things the man had claimed he would be doing, and neither did the newspaper carry any news of such happenings. I did not even hear anyone say anything about these meetings. Had it not been for the advertisement I saw, I never would have known anything about the event. Don't you know that, if there had been just **one** biblical miracle during this meeting, everyone in town would have known about it? Everyone would have been talking about it! But this was not the case. Therefore I know, and all other honest people know, that no miracles took place.

Later, I saw some hand bills pasted to various walls, advertising a miracle healing campaign. By that time, those meetings had already come and gone, but I heard no one talking about any miracles that had occurred during that time. Had there been any miracles, everyone in town would have been excited about the things that had happened. But friends, this was not the case, and once more, we must conclude that no miracles were performed.

At one time there was talk of the Pentecostal Church, the Assemblies of God, and various ones conducting Charisma (Pentecostal) Services. It was said that the people should come, expecting a miracle. I talked to a young lady who was of the Pentecostal persuasion, and she said that the Lord had appeared to a Pastor Paul and revealed to him a plan for unity. She also knew a preacher, whom I had known in years gone-by, and she said that God was working through him. But I happen to know that in the past he was of the Assemblies of God and had contacted me saying that he was interested in obeying the Lord to be added to His church. He supposedly did that, but once he discovered that we were not willing to put him on a monthly salary, he suddenly lost interest and returned to the Assemblies of God. He had quite a reputation for a number of things, but some people actually think he is a servant of God and is able to perform miracles. How ridiculous!

We are reminded how easy it is for human beings to be deceived and led into false teaching. So many are not only willing to be misled but even *want* to be deceived. Please consider seriously the things in this study, in the light of what the Bible teaches.

It is interesting to see how different it was in the days of Christ and the apostles. They performed miracles, but they did no advertising, sent no one ahead to build up large audiences, asked for no one to come to their meetings believing in miracles or any such thing. The reason for this was because their miracles were not done merely to be popular or even to heal the sick. **They did not preach that the people deserved perfect health and that through their faith they could have it.** Rather, they were dealing with *unbelievers*, and the comparatively few miracles that they did were done to make believers out of the on-lookers and to confirm to them that the message they were preaching was actually from God.

We read concerning the apostles, *“And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs”* (Mark 16:20). The Hebrew writer says, *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 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, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?”* (Hebrews 2:1-4).

The New Testament had not been given at that time, and so the signs, wonders, and miracles were done to confirm the apostles' message or to prove to the people that they were indeed preaching the word of God.

But what about today? We have the New Testament now. Has it been confirmed? Most certainly. Therefore, there is no purpose for miracles now. Neither does God appear to anyone today, or speak to anyone, apart from His written and confirmed word. He gave us His Book, it has already been proved to be the message of God, and therefore He speaks to all of us through that word.

If, during these times, God arbitrarily spoke directly to one person but not to all of us, and if He worked miracles through particular

individuals, He would be showing partiality, which would be contrary to the Scriptures: *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34,35).

God speaks to us today through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2; Matthew 17:5), and what Christ has said and done has been written down for us to read. That message completely furnishes us to every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; James 1:25). We are to read and study it to know the truth and to believe it (2 Timothy 2:15; John 17:17; John 8:32; Romans 10:17). It is not to be changed in any way (Revelation 22:18,19). Therefore, those who claim to perform miracles today are impostors, because they have no new message from God to confirm.

Likewise, those who claim that God has spoken to them, separate and apart from the word are false teachers, like Pastor Paul, who said God had spoken directly to him and had given him a special plan for unity. The Lord had already prayed for such unity, and the New Testament has contained the plan for unity since the days of the apostles (John 17; Ephesians 4:1-6). Why, then, would God speak to this man and give him a special plan, a different plan?

The Scriptures also say that by their fruits you shall know them (Matthew 7:16), and this Pastor Paul is just a preacher (not a scriptural pastor, 1 Timothy 3:1-7), who promoted the Pentecostal Church, which is in opposition to the church we read about in the Bible and contrary to God’s plan for unity. This man taught that the Lord had spoken directly to him, which would make the Lord a respecter of persons, and it would also mean that the Bible is not complete. All of this marks him as a false teacher.

Listen to the inspired word of God: *“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

“Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Again, Paul writes, *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:1,2).*

Continuing, he says, *“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; preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:1-4).*

And finally, listen to Christ Himself: *“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:21-23).*

It is easy to be deceived and misled. This is true, not only in the case of miracles, but with many other points of doctrine as well. But if you will observe those who teach that miracles can be performed today, you will find that they also claim to have the baptism of the Holy

Spirit. Yet they are in churches that the Bible knows nothing about, they wear man-made names and titles, and they claim that the Lord speaks directly to them. I urge you to study their message and to see that it is always contrary to the scriptures. This marks them as impostors.

Furthermore, you will discover that there are a number of groups that claim to work miracles by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and yet they condemn and oppose one another. There are even some in almost every denomination who make such claims. The question, therefore, is this: **Would the Holy Spirit guide and direct different ones into different groups to teach different things and to oppose one another?** If so, the Holy Spirit opposes Himself! I think you would have to admit that if such people have a spirit it is definitely not the Holy Spirit from God.

Of course these people would come back and say that we do not believe in the power of God today, since we do not believe in miracles. But this is false. We do believe in God, and we believe in the power of God. But God does not choose to work today through miracles as He did at some times in the past. It is not that He could not do miracles if He chose to do so. He created the first man from the dust of the earth, and He could still create human beings like that if He wanted to, but He doesn't have to do these things to prove that He is God and that He is all-powerful, because He has already proven Himself. He works now through the law of nature to create men and women. He could also heal the sick, restore eye sight, raise the dead, etc., if that was His choice, but there is no purpose for doing so. He works now through His word to teach, to make believers, to save, and to give hope. What would miracles prove? Even when they were used, they were compared to childish things that would cease, and the promise was made that they would be replaced by the things that endure (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). And so they have.

Contrary to the belief of some, there are no miracles being performed today. If so, where? On whom? By whom? What is their purpose?

Lesson 33

Some Who Are Not Christians

Many people claim to be Christians. But not all who make this claim actually are Christians, according to God's word. This may come as a shock to you, but it is true, nevertheless.

Just because one was born into a family where the father and mother claimed to be Christians does not make him a Christian. I realize that in various religions of men, physical birth into a family is sufficient to make one a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Muslim, etc. I must at the same time acknowledge that this may even be the typical thinking with regard to Catholicism. However, this is not the case in pure New Testament Christianity. Physical birth into a Christian family does not make a person a Christian. It is only after he has become a believer in Christ, an obedient follower of His, having being born again through the waters of baptism, that one enters the family of God (John 3:3-5), that one is a Christian.

Just because someone was sprinkled at birth does not make him a Christian. In the first place, baptism is not sprinkling. Biblical baptism is a burial in water (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4; Acts 8). In the second place, the one being baptized must be baptized on the basis that he has *heard* the truth (Romans 10:17), that he has *believed* (Romans 10:10), that he has *repented* of his sins (Luke 13:3), and that he has *confessed* with his mouth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32). Someone else cannot do these things for the individual who is being baptized. And in the third place, children are not responsible to God for their actions until they reach the age of accountability (Matthew 18:1-3). So sprinkling at birth, or at any other time in one's life, is not enough to make one a Christian. One becomes a Christian only by submitting to Christ, but sprinkling is "of man".

Contrary to popular denominational doctrine, just because a person claims to believe that Christ is the Son of God does not mean that he is a Christian. Yes, one *must believe* that Christ is the Son of God in order to become a Christian, but this alone will not make him one. If so, the devils would be Christians, for the scriptures say that they believe and tremble (James 2:19).

In order to be a Christian, one must *believe in Christ* to the extent that he is willing to *obey His teaching* (Hebrew 5:8,9; 1 Peter 2:21) and to be *faithful* to Him (Revelation 2:10).

Just because one is a member of some denominational church does not mean that he is a Christian. There are many churches, and there are many who claim to be Christians because they are members of them. But they are deceived. Christians are made when people follow Christ. One will never become a member of a denominational church as a result of following Christ, because none of them even existed when our Lord was living on the earth, or when He was directing the writing of His message to man!

The Bible makes Christians only (Acts 11:26). The scriptures will not divide us, but will unite us in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:10). So if one is a member of some man-made church, it means that he is not a Christian. Of course, he can offer all kinds of excuses and make all sorts of arguments, but the fact remains that he is not a Christian as the Bible teaches. If he were a Christian, then he wouldn't be in a denominational church but would be a member of the church of Christ (Romans 16:16) and would be a Christian only (Acts 2:47; 1 Peter 4:16). Study the Bible and see for yourself.

Just because one claims to be a Christian does not mean that he is one. A man can make claims for himself in this world, but without proof and evidence to back up his claims, he will be pushed aside as a fake and an imposter. Yet, almost anyone can come along and claim to be a Christian, without any Biblical support for his words. There are those who tend to reason that if a person makes such a claim, he should be so counted. But not so! Unless one can prove by the word of God and by his life that he is a Christian, he is not one, regardless of what he may say (Matthew 7:21-23).

I beg of you to consider your own situation. Are you a Christian? Are you one, according to the teaching of the Bible? Can you prove it? Have you obeyed the Lord? Are you faithful to Him? If you are not, then become a true Christian by believing in the Lord, repenting of your sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God and being baptized for the remission of your sins (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38). Christ will save you, add you to His church, and then you will be just a Christian (Acts 2:47; Acts 11:26). Finally, by being faithful to Him, you can be saved eternally (Romans 6:23; John 14:1-3).

Lesson 34

"Church" History, in Brief

● **What is the church?** “[God]... gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is **His body**” (Ephesians 1:23). The church is the spiritual body of Christ.

● **How many heads does a body have? How many bodies does a head have?** “*There is **one body***” (Ephesians 4:4).

● **What relationship do Christians have with Christ?** *Now ye are the body of Christ, and **members in particular***. (1 Corinthians 12:27).

From these questions and biblical answers, we can see that, just as God has only one begotten Son, the Son has only one body, one church, one bride, one kingdom, one family. Reading the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, you will find only ONE. God’s plan for the church was clear; His plan for birth into the Family was clear; what He desired in worship to Him was written clearly; the kind of fellowship, work, and life He wanted for the church as a whole and for individual Christians was clear. There are no contradictions about these things in His message to us.

● **If God desired oneness in all of these things**, what has happened that there is division, everywhere we look, among those who claim to be believers in Christ? Why are there so many churches, teaching so many different doctrines, called by so many different names?

Satan is the ever-present adversary of God. He tried to thwart the plan for saving man by bringing about the death of Christ. But, to his surprise, that death itself provided the means for salvation!

So what was Satan’s next plan? To work through men, with their pride, their opinions, their divisiveness, their willingness to please self more than God — and the result was division among those who called themselves Christians.

In the first century, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, scolding them for calling themselves after the names of men (1 Corinthians 1). Are there churches today that are named after the men who started them? Do people, in this age, choose to wear the names of humans, religiously, instead of the name of the One who died for us?

There were other divisions in the first century, because of doctrinal differences. Some were members of the Gnostic Church; some were

Marcionites; others became Montanists; the Arianists had other doctrinal differences. It has always been a challenge for humans to put God's will above their own opinions and divisiveness.

There are numerous warnings in the New Testament that an apostasy would come which would take away much of the church (not *all* of it, because the promise had been made by Christ and through prophecy that the church would never be destroyed: Matthew 16:18; Daniel 2:44). In 1 Timothy 4:1-3, Paul listed some of the errors that would be taught: "*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats....*"

Out of these doctrinal errors and the elevation of bishops to authority over *areas* instead of leadership over *individual congregations*, apostasy grew to the point that a new church came into existence: the Roman Catholic Church named its first "Pope" in 606.

In 1054, doctrinal differences between the Roman branch and the Orthodox branch of Catholicism became so strong they divided, and the Greek Orthodox church came into existence.

By the mid-1500s, men in Europe rose up against the corruption and error in Romanism, forming "protestant" churches. These came to be called after their founders or after some distinct doctrine.

Please review the following chart for further information about the denominational groups.

Historically, the Catholic hierarchy branded as heretics those who did not follow their leadership into apostasy, and many were killed because they challenged the teachings of Rome.

Though the number of Christians and churches of Christ throughout the world was in the minority, there have been faithful Christians since the beginning of the church in AD 33.

In the late 1700s, men in Europe and America said, "A *reformation* is not enough. We must go back to the Bible and *restore* among us New Testament Christianity in its purity, to be just what Christians were in the first century, to be members of that one church established by Christ." So, dedicated men read the Scriptures, analyzing the differences between what they were reading and the doctrines taught by the denominations of which they were members. They had the honesty to follow the Bible, to be baptized into the body of Christ, and to begin churches of Christ wherever they lived. We continue to make that same plea.

ORIGIN OF SOME DENOMINATIONS

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Founder</u> | <u>Place</u> | <u>Date</u> |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------|-------------|
| Roman Catholic | Boniface III | Rome | 606 |
| Lutheran Church | Martin Luther | Augsburg, Germany | 1520 |
| Presbyterian Church | John Calvin | Switzerland | 1536 |
| Anglican Church | King Henry VIII | England..... | 1535 |
| Baptist Church | John Smythe | Holland | 1607 |
| Methodist Church | John Wesley | London, England..... | 1729 |
| Evangelical Church | Jacob Albright | Pennsylvania, U.S.A. .. | 1803 |
| Mormon Church | Joseph Smith, Jr. | New York, U.S.A. | 1830 |
| Seventh Day Adventist | Wm. Miller | Massachusetts, U.S.A. | 1830 |
| Jehovah's Witnesses | Charles Russell | Pennsylvania, U.S.A. .. | 1872 |
| Pentecostal Holiness | Group | South Carolina, U.S.A. | 1898 |
| Assembly of God | Group | Arkansas, U.S.A. | 1914 |
| Christian Church | Group | Kansas City, MO., USA | 1906 |
| Anglican Orthodox | James P. Dees | N. Carolina, U.S. A. | 1963 |
| Brethren Church | Peter Becker | Germany | 1708 |
| Church of God | K.H. Burruss | Georgia, U.S.A..... | 1914 |
| Church of the Nazarene | 3 groups joined | U.S.A. | 1919 |
| Church of England | Henry VIII | England..... | 1531 |
| Episcopal Church | American form of the Church of England | | 1789 |
| Mennonites | Menno Simons | Switzerland | 1525 |
| Salvation Army | William Booth | London, England..... | 1878 |
| Christian Science Church | Mary B. Eddy | Massachusetts, U.S.A. | 1879 |
| Armstrongism | H.W. Armstrong | Oregon, U.S.A. | 1934 |
| Community Churches | No central organization; new groups, continually | | |

Thousands of denominational bodies — some of which are listed above — have been established during the years since Jesus began His “family” of people who are called out of the world to wear His name and to be “Christ-like” throughout their lives.

This church, promised by the Lord in Matthew 16:18, was begun on the day of Pentecost, AD 33, after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. On that day, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles. In response, they preached the Gospel to the multitude that had gathered. Three thousand souls were baptized that day, confessing their faith in Christ and repenting of their sins. According to Acts 2:47, “... *the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*”

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------|
| the church of Christ | Jesus Christ | Jerusalem | AD 33 |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------|

Lesson 35

The Great Judgment Day

The Bible teaches that there will be a judgment day. It will be a great day for several reasons.

1. No human being knows when that day will be — it is a day appointed by the Lord. We read in the scripture, *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27).

2. All who have ever lived, or who will ever live, will be there. That is hard to imagine, but nothing is impossible with the Lord. Paul wrote, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10). Again, he said, *“So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12).

3. God will judge all souls through Christ and his word. The Hebrew writer said, *“To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect”* (Hebrews 12:23). Paul explained to the Athenians, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at: but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”* (Acts 17:30,31). Christ said, *“He that rejected me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12: 48).

4. We will be judged by the way we have lived, by our thoughts, and by our words. Christ declared, *“A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified: and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”* (Matthew 12:35-37). Also read Revelation 21:12.

5. The Lord will be no respecter of persons. Concerning God,

we are told, *“For there is no respect of persons with God”* (Romans 2:11). Paul explained to the Colossian brethren, *“But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons”* (Colossians 3:25). At the time of the conversion of Cornelius and his household, the first Gentiles to obey the gospel, the record says, *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34,35).

6. The judgment will be final. Once a person dies, his status before the Lord cannot be changed. His relatives cannot save him by their prayers, or by paying others to pray that he will be saved. There will be no second chance for him. The doctrine of “Purgatory” is an invention of men, and is nowhere taught in the Bible. That is why all of us must prepare *in this life* to meet God, by obeying Him and by being faithful unto death (Mark 16:16; Revelation 2:10).

7. The Lord will send the wicked into everlasting punishment but He will give the righteous life eternal (Matthew 25:46). One is just as long-lasting as the other. In other words, the lost, sinful, ungodly, and unfaithful will be cast into hell, or torment, forever and ever. Is that fair? Would a loving God do that? Don’t blame God. He loved all men and He gave his Son to provide salvation for every soul that has ever lived. If we reject that love, grace, and mercy, then we will have to face the consequences of our actions. On the other hand, those who do obey God and remain faithful to Him will go to heaven to ever dwell with the Lord.

May we be aware of the judgment, of our need to prepare for it, and of the blessings the Lord has promised to give to those who are judged to be righteous.

Lesson 36

The Bible Speaks about Hell

What is hell? This question, along with its answer, should be of interest to everyone. I am saying this on the basis that unless we know what hell is, and put forth every effort possible to avoid going there, we could very easily spend eternity in a devil's hell.

Many think of hell only as a mythical place. Others don't like to hear about it because it frightens them. Even some so-called Christians find fault with those who preach "hell-fire and damnation" for the wicked, as though somehow God would be unjust to have such a place of punishment.

In the religious world, some have attempted to define hell as simply a place where the evil are spiritually annihilated, or instantly destroyed. That is, once they go to hell, their souls are blotted out, and they cease to exist. But this is not true, as we are going to see.

Hell, as set forth in the Bible, is a place that was created for the devil and his angels, but it will also be the place, or state, of eternal punishment for the wicked and ungodly humans after their deaths. It is described as a lake of fire of unbearable punishment, eternal or everlasting.

Hell Is a Real Place

Hell is spoken of in the scriptures as a real place. Christ said, *"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"* (Matthew 10:28). Speaking of a city that had rejected Him, Christ said, *"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades"* (Luke 10:15). Some who were religious, but who were in error, the Lord rebuked by saying, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves"* (Matthew 23:15). That is, those hypocritical religious leaders had taught error, and once people had accepted those false beliefs it would be extremely difficult to lead them to the truth, even though that error would result in their being lost in hell.

Going further in that chapter, Jesus added, *"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"* (Matthew

23:33). Now it is true that the word translated “hell” was sometimes used to refer to death, as in the case of the Lord promising that the gates of hell or Hades — death — would not keep Him from building His church (Matthew 16:18). But in the verses to which we have been referring, the term hell has reference to a place of eternal damnation. We could reference many other such verses, but be assured that the Bible talks about a literal hell, a place where the wicked will be punished forever and forever. In fact, Jesus warned of hell even more than He talked about heaven!

Christ spoke in detail about the wicked and their reward on the day of judgment: *“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). This passage makes it very clear that existence in hell is just as everlasting as the existence of the righteous in heaven. As comforting as the false doctrine of “instant annihilation” might be for the wicked person, it has no support in Scripture.

What Is Hell Like?

Hell is, therefore, a place where the wicked will be punished forever and forever. Paul says that the Lord is coming back to take vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the Gospel, and that they will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Hell is called the second death, which means a place of eternal separation from God. It is said to be a *“lake which burns with fire and brimstone”* (Revelation 21:8). It is described as a place where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30).

Who Will be Sent to Hell?

Speaking of those who are going to hell, John wrote, *“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 2:18). He also says, *“For outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie”* (Revelation 22:15).

Some others who will be sent to hell will be those who do the works of the flesh, the sinful, the ungodly, unbelievers in God and Christ, people who are trying to be saved by their own righteousness, the hypocrites, religious people who are in error — and on and on the

list goes. These are people who are lost and are not prepared to meet God, because they have not obeyed Him.

Do You Want to Go to Hell?

If you are not a Christian — a faithful Christian — and if you don't want to spend eternity in hell, you must repent of your sins and obey God. You don't have to die lost, but to escape certain destruction you must believe in God, repent of your sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of your sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Having done so, the Lord will save you and add you to His church, and then, as a faithful Christian — and a member of the Lord's family — you will be blessed and protected and kept, so that one day you may live with God forever (Ephesians 1:3; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 22:14).

In Conclusion

My prayer is that all those who read these words will obey the Lord while there is time and opportunity. Remember, God's word says, *"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 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 2:1-3).

Lesson 37

The Bible Speaks about Heaven

The Bible teaches that all of us will die, or put off the mortal body at the second coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). We are also told that *“it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). The Apostle Paul declared, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Perhaps the most important question at this point would be, “What happens to one between the time he dies and the judgment?” In other words, during that time, where does one abide? Is he still alive? Is he conscious? Or does he remain in the tomb or the place of the dead in an unconscious state?

In Luke 16:19-31 Christ tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus. He says that both of these men died. The poor man’s soul was taken by angels to Abraham’s bosom or to the place of the righteous dead, which is described as being Paradise. But the rich man’s soul went to a place of torment in flames. Then he cried out to Father Abraham to have mercy on him and to send Lazarus that he might dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue. Abraham reminded the rich man that in his life he had received all of the good things the physical world had to offer but Lazarus’ life had been one of misery and deprivation. He concluded by saying that now Lazarus was comforted while the rich man was tormented.

Abraham explained that it would be impossible, anyway, for Lazarus to come to him since there was a great gulf between the two and that no one could pass over to the other.

The rich man then requested that Abraham send Lazarus to his father’s house to warn his five brothers not to come to that place of torment. Abraham answered that they had Moses and the prophets, and if they would not hear them then they would not listen even though one rose from the dead to warn them. The obvious truth being taught here is that the dead cannot change their place of habitation, nor can they return to earth to make appearances to living humans.

When Do the Resurrection and the Judgment Take Place?

“But,” someone might object, “in Jesus’ account, the rich man was

already in torment and Lazarus was already in paradise. What about a resurrection (John 5:28,29), and the general resurrection and judgment for all?" There is no problem here. In this life, if a murderer is caught, he is kept in prison until his judgment day and the time he is sentenced to pay for his crime. The Scriptures, therefore, teach that when the righteous man or the faithful Christian dies he will go immediately to Paradise or the place of the righteous dead; when the wicked person dies, he will go immediately to torment or to the place of the wicked dead.

But when Christ returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16), *all* will hear His voice and the physical bodies will be resurrected from the grave, to be reunited with the souls that have been in paradise or torment, to be transformed into immortal substance, and to appear before the Lord to be judged and sentenced (Acts 17:31; Matthew 25:31-46). Finally, the record says in the words of Jesus that the wicked or unsaved "*shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal*" (Matthew 25:46).

Is It a Parable?

While some would say that the account of the rich man and Lazarus is only a parable, it is not called such in the Scriptures. Also, in no account which is a parable are people identified by name. Regardless, parable or not, the truth being taught doesn't change. That means, then, that those who die remain conscious of who they are, of what they have done, and of the people they have known in this world.

The souls or spirits go into paradise or torment, according to whether they are saved or lost. On the day of judgment, it would seem that their lives will be made an open book, and that they will be allowed to speak in their defense (Revelation 20:12; Matthew 25:31-46). They will be sentenced by the righteous Judge to an eternal hell with the devil and his angels or to live with the Lord in heaven with all of the saved forever more.

Death and the judgment will be final and one's destination will be eternal. There will be no second chance, and neither will the wicked simply cease to exist. The soul will live on forever, either in heaven or hell.

How Do the Scriptures Describe Heaven?

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glori-

ous liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (Romans 8:20-22).

*“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).*

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea” (Revelation 21:1).

We have today to prepare to meet the Lord and to get our soul ready to live in that new and perfect creation. If we are not prepared, we will hear the Lord say, “*Depart from me...*,” to be lost for all eternity.

Lesson 38

Who Is Jesus Christ?

A few people in the world today might never have heard the name, Jesus Christ. Most have. But many who have heard of Him are confused and do not know who He really is. Millions believe in Him, but millions more do not. *Who is Jesus Christ?*

Jesus Christ existed with God in the beginning. Hebrews 1:3 describes Him as being the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person. John 1:1, calling Him "the Word", says that He was *with God* in the beginning, and that *He was God*. *This means that He is one of the Persons of the Godhead, along with God and the Holy Spirit.* God is described as being eternal, having no beginning and no end, so the same is true of the One who was born in the flesh and called "Jesus Christ" (Isaiah 63:16). He is said to be the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), the beginning [or, the initiator] of the creation of God (Revelation 3:14), the first and the last (Revelation 22:13).

Jesus Christ was the creator of all things. In Genesis 1:1 we read that *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* The Hebrew word for God is the plural form, which includes the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26 God said, *"Let us make man in our image...."* Paul further explained in Colossians 1:16,17, speaking of Jesus Christ, *"All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."*

Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary through the power of God, having no earthly father. His unique birth was prophesied many centuries before by the prophet Isaiah: *"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Immanuel."* In Matthew 1:20,21 it was said, *"... that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."* From these verses we can see that Jesus was born miraculously, that He was more than just a man.

Jesus Christ was the Son of God, having emptied Himself of the rights and powers inherent in the Godhead, He subjected Himself to God as Father, and became a brother to humans by His physical birth (Philippians 2:3-8). He came into the world to save man from his sins. We read in John 3:16,17, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* Christ Himself said, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10).

Jesus Christ performed miracles to prove that He was the Son of God. John wrote concerning His miracles, *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”* (John 20:30,31).

Jesus Christ died on the cross so that all who believe in Him might be saved and have the hope of eternal life. We read the words of the apostle Paul, *“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain ... 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”* (1 Corinthians 1:1-4).

Jesus Christ promised to save the obedient in His family, which he called ‘My church’ (Matthew 16:18). He died for this body of people, and all those who are washed in His blood are saved and added to His church. It is called His body, of which He is the head. It is also described as His bride, wearing His name, the church of Christ. (Romans 16:16 Ephesians 5:23, 25; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 3:15; Acts 4:12). One day He will come back for that saved body of people.

Jesus Christ is the second person in the Godhead (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) (Matthew 28:19,20). There is one God, one Lord (Christ), and one Spirit (the Holy Spirit) ((Ephesians 4:1-6). Christ has all authority in heaven and on the earth (Matthew 28:18). He is presently sitting at the right hand of the Father, reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15). One day He will come again to take His people, the church, to heaven where they will dwell forevermore. *“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Jesus promised, *“Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me. 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 14:1-3).

Do you believe in Christ? He warned in John 8:24, *“...if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”* If we do believe in Him, we will obey Him (Mark 16:16), and will remain faithful to Him until death (Revelation 2:10). Jesus also warned, *“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).