

A
Statement
of
Beliefs

The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc.

(A Non-Profit Organization)

Presents

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of
Beliefs

The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. is a non-Adventist, Sabbath-keeping church committed to "...Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth..." (1 Timothy 2:15). It believes and practices the true doctrines of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Bible by God's prophets, apostles, and other inspired writers. In keeping with the commission given by Jesus Christ to His True Church in Matthew 28:18-20, The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. proclaims "...the gospel of the Kingdom of God..." (Mark 1:14, 15).

This booklet is a statement of the basic beliefs of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, Inc. Its objective is to give an overview of TSDCA doctrines, not to be exhaustive in their explanations. The Scriptural references which are footnoted in each statement are intended for sample reference purposes only – not as a complete listing of the passages which could more fully support each statement. In order to fully appreciate each doctrinal statement, please look up each scriptural reference as you study through this Statement of Beliefs.

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Table of Contents

The Nature of God	1
The God Family	1
God: the Father and the Son	4
The <i>Unity</i> of God	9
The Holy Spirit	11
The Love of God	14
God's Love Toward Mankind	14
Man's Love Toward God	15
Man's Love Toward Mankind	15
The Grace of God	16
The Holy Bible: God's Inspired Word	17
The Inspiration of God's Scriptures	17
The Nature of God's Laws	18
The Righteousness of the Law	20
The Righteousness of Faith	22
The Ten Commandments	22
The Weekly Sabbath	25
God's Annual Holy Days	30
Prophecy and the Prophets	41
The Gospel of the Kingdom	45
The Nature of Mankind	48
God's Original Plan for Mankind	51
God's Definition of Death	53
The Independent Mind	58
The Carnal Mind	60
Sin	61
God's Plan of Salvation	62
Regeneration, Sanctification, and Glorification	64
The Basic Doctrines of Jesus Christ	69
Repentance From Dead Works	69

(Table of Contents Continued)

Faith Toward God	70
Baptisms	71
Water Baptism	72
Spirit Baptism	72
Baptism With Fire	73
Laying on of Hands	75
Blessing	75
Receipt of Holy Spirit	76
Healing	76
Ordination	78
The Resurrections From the Dead	79
Eternal Judgment	81
Spiritual Maturity	82
The Church of God	83
The Rise of <i>False</i> Christianity	83
The Body of Christ	86
The Ministry of God's Church	89
The Christian's Financial Responsibility	93
Toward Family	93
Toward the Needy	94
Toward the Church: Tithes and Offerings	95

The Nature of God

The God Family

God is a family of divine Beings that are composed of self-sustaining spirit.¹ No member of the Godhead depends on any source outside of itself for its existence. It is *underrated, uncreated* existence. The Lord God expressed this to Moses in Exodus 2:14 when He identified Himself as *I AM THAT I AM*. This self-sustaining existence is properly referred to as *eternal life* because it has always existed and will continue to exist into unending eternity. In all of their revelations about themselves, they have not made mankind privy to how such a self-sustaining existence is possible – only that they are willing to share it with mankind.

We are first introduced to this family in Genesis 1:1 with the statement that *God* created the heavens and earth. The English term *God* is translated from the Hebrew term *Elohim*, which is a collective noun – a plurality. What does that mean? It is generally understood that the plural is often used in Hebrew to enlarge and intensify the idea expressed in the singular form. *Elohim* is considered by most biblical scholars to mean “the strongest of the strong, the fullness of divine perfections, and the sum of all the powers of all imaginable gods.” That idea notwithstanding, scripture reveals that *Elohim* is not an *intensification of majesty*. It is a collective noun. A collective noun names a *group* that can act either together or independently (examples: family, team, class, herd, organization, et cetera). Contrary to teachings about *monotheism* (one God) and *Trinitari-*

¹ John 5:26

anism (one God who plays three roles), the Bible reveals that *Elohim* is a family of God-beings that consists of more than one independent Being. However, there is only one *Elohim* family.² Only in that sense is *monotheism* possible in the Bible. Let's understand the Bible's revelation.

While *Elohim* are generally described as being *omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omni-benevolent*, those characteristics are generally misunderstood and misinterpreted. The prefix *omni-* has two basic meanings: (a) universal and (b) unrestricted. *Unrestricted* is the meaning that is most applicable to these characteristics. For instance: *omniscient* does not mean that God knows everything about everything, even before it happens. It means that God has *unrestricted power and authority* to know whatever they choose to know. They are, after all, *learners*. Since that is true, according to scriptural revelation,³ then they do not already know everything about everything. Applying that same logic to the other characteristics, then God should be described more properly as having: (a) unrestricted power and authority to do whatever they want to do (omnipotent); (b) unrestricted power and authority to be wherever they desire to be (omnipresent); and (c) unrestricted power and authority to be charitable toward others (omni-benevolent).

With that in mind, the God Family (*Elohim*) made a decision at some point in time to create heavens and earth, complete with plant and animal life, for the purpose of populating it with *human beings* to be made in their own image and character.⁴ This was a planned decision to actually increase the *Elohim Family*.⁵

There is a distinct difference between the two known members of the *Elohim* family. One has become known as

² John 1:1-3, Philemon 2:5-11

³ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁴ Genesis 1:26-28, Isaiah 45:18, Ephesians 1:4

⁵ John 3:3-8, Romans 8:14-23, Ephesians 1:4-14, Hebrews 2:6-13

the “Father,” and the other has become known as the “Son.” Even though Jesus said “I and the Father are one,”⁶ He was indicating their *unity*, not that they are one and the same Being.⁷ The English term *one* is translated from the Greek term *eis*, which describes a type of *unity*.⁸ Scripture has revealed the difference between the “Father” and the “Son.”

Genesis 2:4 is the first place that the term *Lord God* is used in scripture. The Hebrew term is *Yahweh Elohim*. That name distinguishes *Yahweh Elohim* from the other member of *Elohim*. *Yahweh* is His personal name – like a first name – while *Elohim* is His family name. This *Lord God* is **not** the Father. It is recognized by many that *Yahweh Elohim* is “...the self-existent One who *reveals* Himself...” and that this is distinctly “...the *redemptive* name of Deity.”⁹ This position of being *Lord God* is so unique that His Companion would not be known by that name – nor would any other being in all of creation be known as *Savior* or *Redeemer*.¹⁰

John 1:1-3 describes this divine duo by calling one “the Word” and the other “God.” In the beginning, they were companions; both were “God.” John shows the distinction by revealing that “the Word” was responsible for making all that was made – the creative acts described in Genesis 1.¹¹ The “Father,” apparently, was a more discreet, supporting power in the creation process and the history that followed.

Philippians 2:5-11 reveals that these divine companions were originally *equals*. Because of the plan they had made

⁶ John 10:30

⁷ Read carefully John 17:11, 21, 22.

⁸ See Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17 for two examples.

⁹ *The Scofield Reference Bible*; New York: Oxford University Press; 1945; pp. 6, 7 (emphasis added)

¹⁰ See Acts 4:12.

¹¹ See also Colossians 1:9-17 and Hebrews 1:1-4.

to expand the *Elohim* family, the “Word” – of His own volition – chose to be the “savior” (that is, the Lord God) who would personally guide mankind through the process of ultimately being “born again” by a change from flesh to spirit in order for them to be fully made in the image of *Elohim*.¹² This included the act of coming in the human form and being a sacrifice for any disqualifying act the humans might commit. As a *quid pro quo* (something given for something received), His Companion granted Him unrestricted power and authority to make sure their plan went according to their design.¹³ From that point on, the situation became one where the “Father” was considered to be *greater* than the “Son.”¹⁴

God: The Father and The Son

The difference between the “Father” and the “Son” is apparent in the Old Testament. Typically, the Lord God is called “the God of Israel” in the Old Testament because it was He who “married” Israel. Accounts like Exodus 24 and Deuteronomy 6:4, 5 are descriptive of situations involving the Lord God – not His companion. How do we know this? Read John 1:18 and 6:46. The first scripture is an inspired account by the Apostle John, and the second is a quotation from Jesus Christ Himself. From this we conclude that, until the ministry of Jesus Christ, the “Father” had been a discreet, unseen power working in the background of *Elohim*’s grand, divine plan to reproduce themselves. It was the Word’s mission as the “Son” to *reveal* the “Father” to true believers.¹⁵

¹² Hebrews 2:9-18.

¹³ See also Matthew 28:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:22-28.

¹⁴ John 14:28

¹⁵ Matthew 11:25-27

Daniel 7:9-14 describes the “Father” in the character of *the Ancient of Days* (vv. 9, 13). In this vision given to Daniel, the Lord God (*one like the Son of man*) is described in what later became the specific, exclusive New Testament term for Jesus Christ.¹⁶ So, who is this one who became known as the “Father,” and how did He become the “Father”? What part does He play in Elohim’s plan?

In the New Testament, Ephesians 1:4-14 describes the plan Elohim made before the creation of the orderly universe – before Genesis 1:1. The English term *world* in v. 4 is from the Greek term *kosmos*, which in this instance means “the orderly universe.” The “Father” is described in two ways in v. 4: (a) He is the *God* of Jesus Christ; and (b) He is the *Father* of Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 4:5, 6, Paul points out that there is only *one* Lord and *one* God the Father. From this, we conclude that they are the only members of Elohim.

John 1:14 says that “...the Word [Yahweh Elohim: the Lord God] was ***made*** flesh....” *Made* is translated from the Greek term *ginomai*, which in this case is descriptive of persons or things which change their nature and enter into a new condition. How, exactly, was the Word’s nature changed to allow Him to enter into a *new, fleshly condition*? Paul says in Philippians 2:6, 7 that His *form* (Greek = *morphe*: “the essential form that never changes”) is both *God* and *servant*. Once He became human/flesh, He assumed a state – His *fashion* (KJV; Greek = *schema*: “the form which continually alters”) – that was no more permanent than that which any *fleshly being* can constantly maintain. That is, if He had been left alone to live out His human life, He eventually would have grown old and died of natural causes. Matthew 1:23 demonstrates, however, that His *morphe* is forever *God* and *servant* because, even in the flesh, He was to be known as “...Emmanuel, ***God*** with

¹⁶ Revelation 14:14

us....” There is no indication how the Father caused the Word to be changed into something like a spermatozoon in order to impregnate the young virgin, Mary. Matthew 6:9 and John 17:5 show that this act did not leave heaven without a member of Elohim to control all things with unrestricted power and authority.

With respect to the Word, His entrance into the flesh was done voluntarily,¹⁷ but His Companion *caused* the transition from spirit to flesh to take place – thus making it possible for the Word to become “...the only *begotten* of the Father...” (v. 14). In Hebrews 11:17, Isaac is referred to as having been Abraham’s “...only begotten son...”, but we know that Abraham fathered another son, whom he named Ishmael, with Sarah’s handmaid Hagar.¹⁸ The difference between Ishmael and Isaac lay in the fact that *Isaac* was Abraham’s *only legal heir* with respect to God’s covenant with Abraham.¹⁹ The term means that the “only begotten” is *uniquely precious*.²⁰ Abraham also fathered six other sons with his second wife Keturah.²¹ So, the expression, as it refers to the Word, has as much to do with a *legal status* as it does with His being *uniquely precious* to the Father.²²

Paul describes true Christians as being *children of God*.²³ John does the same thing.²⁴ John quotes Jesus as saying that humans who want entrance into the Kingdom of God must be *born again*.²⁵ Nicodemus’s reply to Jesus indicates that he understood that a *new birth* – not just a spiritual conversion of the mind and heart – was necessary to enter the Kingdom of God (v. 4). In John 3:5, Jesus says that the

¹⁷ Philippians 2:7, 8

¹⁸ Genesis 22:2, 12, 16 and chapter 16

¹⁹ Genesis 17:15-21

²⁰ Matthew 3:17, Philippians 2:9-11, and Colossians 1:13-20

²¹ Genesis 25:1, 2

²² Hebrews 1:1-4

²³ Romans 8:14-19

²⁴ 1 John 3:1, 2

²⁵ John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

human must be *born* of the Spirit (Greek = *gennao* – *begotten*: “converted by the influence of the Holy Spirit”²⁶) in order to do so.²⁷ Every reference in 1 John to being *born* or *begotten of God* is translated from that same Greek word.²⁸ This is descriptive of the converted human receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit in order to make the mental/spiritual changes necessary to be worthy of being changed from flesh to spirit in his own order.²⁹ Therefore, humans do not become sons of God the Father in the same way Jesus Christ became the Son of God the Father. The true Christian is *adopted* (legally placed as sons) by the Father through Jesus Christ.³⁰ So, the *begettal* (*ginomai*) of the Word and the *begettal* (*gennao*) of true Christians make Him the “Father.” This Father/Son relationship between the Word and His Companion was made doubly sure when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and returned to the independent glory He had with the Father “...before the world was....”³¹

Note the revelation given to the Apostle John in John 5:26: “For as the Father has life in Himself [independent, self-existent life], so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself [independent, self-existent life].” This is the independent, self-existent, eternal life given to Jesus Christ when He was resurrected from the death that He suffered in His human form. He was not re-absorbed into a God-blob to be one and the same being as God. He was granted the independent, self-existence He had with the Father before the creation of the orderly universe.³² All references to Je-

²⁶ Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 2:7-16

²⁷ See also Paul’s comment in 1 Corinthians 4:15.

²⁸ 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18

²⁹ See 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23, Ephesians 1:13, 14, and Romans 8:23; 12:1, 2.

³⁰ Ephesians 1:5

³¹ Romans 1:3, 4; John 17:5

³² John 17:5

sus Christ sitting at the right hand of God are indications of His independent, self-existence.³³

One final indication of the separate existence of the Father and the Son is found in Matthew 24:34-36. In His prophecy about His return to establish the Kingdom of God on the earth, Jesus says: “No one knows the day and hour it will occur – no, not even the angels of heaven; only my Father knows when it will occur.” If “God” were a single Being who manifests Himself in three different *characters* (Greek = *hypostases*: “faces”), how would it be possible for the “Father” face to hide this information from the “Son” and “Holy Spirit” faces? Maybe, divine schizophrenia? No. When Jesus has completed His assigned mission, He will subject Himself to the Father again and turn everything back over to Him.³⁴

Thus, the distinction between the Father and the Son is scripturally established. This is far more than the Trinitarian idea that a single God used His mind power to produce something concrete – which is often described by Trinitarians as being much the same as an author who conceives of an idea and writes it out to become a book. This common explanation of the Trinity concept lacks scriptural support. The Word was more than one God’s thought or spoken word. Jesus Christ was more than a fleshly product of that God’s thought. No, the Father and the Son are two distinct, separate Beings in the Elohim family – two separate Beings who said “...Let *us* create man in *our* image...” and “...The man is become as one of *us*....”³⁵ Both statements indicate a plurality of beings, not one that plays three different roles.

³³ Mark 14:62; 16:19, Luke 22:69, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:16-20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:24-29

³⁵ Genesis 1:26; 3:22

The Unity of God

The *unity* of God (Elohim) is plainly revealed in scripture in Jesus' statement in John 10:30: "I and the Father are *one*" (emphasis added). This statement should not be interpreted as saying that He and the Father are one and the same Being – as is the case in *monotheistic Trinitarianism* that is prevalent in mainstream Christian doctrine. As shown above, they are not. The English term *one* is translated from the Greek term *eis*. *Eis* means here that Jesus and the Father are in *unity* – in complete mental and spiritual agreement – with one another as they move toward the fulfillment of their plan to create humans in their own image: their own spirit form and spiritual character. Consider the following examples that express the *unity* meant by *eis*.

Genesis 2:22, 23 express this unity when the union between a man and his wife is described as being "...*one flesh*..."³⁶ It is obvious that the husband and the wife are not one and the same being. Paul uses the same expression in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 to argue that having sexual relations with a prostitute makes a man *one* with her. He obviously does not mean that they become one and the same being. He is speaking of a type of *unity* that takes place in the relationship. Therefore, we must look carefully at the relationship between the Father and the Son in order to see the *unity* between them and to understand more fully that they are not one and the same Being.

Deuteronomy 18:15-22 discusses the narrow requirements placed on God's true prophets. The Lord God gives two warnings – one for the people and one for the prophet: (a) the people are required to listen to the words the prophet speaks in the Lord God's name, and (b) the prophet must speak only what the Lord God has revealed to him. Thus, the Lord God expresses His will that there will be *unity*

³⁶ See also Ephesians 5:22-33.

among Him, His people, and His prophets. In fact, this scripture is a prophecy given to Moses about a special Prophet who was to come in the future.

When Jesus Christ came in the flesh, He was recognized as being that prophesied Prophet.³⁷ John the Baptist denied being that Prophet.³⁸ Let's note how Jesus Christ fulfilled that Prophet's role:

(a) It was His desire to carry out the will of the Father and to finish the Father's work;³⁹

(b) He did not seek to do His own will, but to do the will of the Father;⁴⁰ and

(c) He taught the doctrine given to Him by the Father.⁴¹ Note especially His comments in John 12:49: "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*" (emphases added) and John 14:24: "*The word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me*" (emphases added).

This is what the relationship should be between the true believer and God the Father.⁴² It would be impossible for a single "face" of one, three-faced Being to have an independent will. When Jesus spoke of yielding to the *Father's will* as opposed to *His own will*, He opened the door of

³⁷ John 6:14

³⁸ John 1:21

³⁹ John 4:34

⁴⁰ John 5:17-31; 6:38-40 and Hebrews 10:7

⁴¹ John 7:16-18, 28, 29; 14:10, 24; 17:6-8, 14, 17

⁴² See Isaiah 55:8, 9; Romans 12:1, 2, 1 Corinthians 2:9-16, and Philippians 2:5.

revelation that He and the Father are not one and the same Being.

God (Elohim) is *united* in thought and purpose. Any who desire to become a part of that family must be likewise *united* with them in order to be given the marvelous opportunity to reign and rule with them throughout the coming eternity.

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not a third personage in the Godhead. The Hebrew word for *spirit* (*ruach*) originally meant “wind,” “breath,” and “spirit.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it like this:

The *ruach yahweh* is a term for the historical *creative action* of the one God which, though it defies logical analysis, is always God’s *action*.⁴³

George Eldon Ladd writes:

The *ruach Yahweh* in the Old Testament is not a separate, distinct entity; it is God’s power – the personal activity in God’s will achieving a moral and religious object. God’s *ruach* is the source of all that is alive, of all physical life.⁴⁴

S. MacLean Gilmour writes in *The Interpreter’s Bible* concerning the *Holy Spirit* that filled Jesus Christ:

⁴³ VI, p. 367 (emphasis added)

⁴⁴ *A Theology of the New Testament*, p. 287

In the O.T. the *Spirit* is a sporadic and temporary influx of *divine energy* that enabled certain individuals to see visions, prophesy, or perform remarkable feats of strength.⁴⁵

The Greek equivalent, *pneuma*, connotes an “intangible substance” that possesses great power to create or destroy. It is always associated with *power* or *force*. It, like *ruach*, means breath, blowing, wind, air, and spirit as part of one’s personality, spiritual state, state of mind, and disposition.⁴⁶ In some *limited* applications, it can be used to distinguish spirits as independent beings – but that does not apply to God’s Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:2 speaks of that Spirit in the creation process. As God spoke, the Spirit moved to accomplish what they commanded. This is the thought in Zechariah 4:6 where *Yahweh Sabaoth*⁴⁷ declares that a certain thing will not be accomplished by man’s might or power, but by His Spirit. You must remember that neither the Old nor New Testament contains any concept at all of a *Trinity*. It is widely recognized that 1 John 5:7 is a spurious addition to the original letter. Carefully consider the role of the Holy Spirit in God’s plan for mankind.

Once the individual is properly repentant of his sins, baptized by full immersion, and has hands laid upon him for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, his mind is impregnated with that Spirit by the Father as part of a spiritual begetting.⁴⁸ This partial gift of the Holy Spirit – called an *earnest*⁴⁹ – is given by the Father as His assurance and promise that He will resurrect the true believer from the dead to eternal life

⁴⁵ vol. 8, p. 83 (emphasis added)

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; Galatians 6:1; 1 Peter 3:4

⁴⁷ The Lord of Hosts: *Yahweh Elohim*, who is in charge of all angelic forces

⁴⁸ Acts 2:38; 8:14-17; 19:6; John 3:5; 7:37-39; 2 Timothy 1:6, 7

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:13, 14

at the return of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ If the individual does not have the impregnation of the Holy Spirit, then he is not the begotten child of God.⁵¹ This power of God makes it possible for each begotten child of God to be a partaker of His divine nature and enables him to develop the thoughts and ways of God.⁵²

As the true believer seeks to serve God and to be completely obedient to His expectations of holiness, blamelessness, and love,⁵³ the Holy Spirit will lead him into all of the truth that is contained in God's holy, inspired scriptures – the truth that is vitally essential for salvation.⁵⁴ It will also enable him to develop the fruit of the Holy Spirit discussed in Galatians 5:22, 23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control.

It is possible to lose the gift of the Holy Spirit. The individual can *quench* it,⁵⁵ *grieve* it,⁵⁶ *suppress* it,⁵⁷ and *cast it aside*⁵⁸ – or, by growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, can *cause it to increase*.⁵⁹ Its leadership into God's truth can be neglected, disdained, and ignored. The individual – even after repentance and baptism – can *blaspheme* the Holy Spirit and incur a very serious penalty.⁶⁰ The believer can also abandon the true faith and not be able to return – thus, unable to receive the Holy Spirit again.⁶¹ This is the point of Paul's comment in Hebrews 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

⁵⁰ See also Romans 8:23.

⁵¹ Romans 8:9-11

⁵² Isaiah 55:8, 9; Hebrews 12:10; 2 Peter 1:1-4; 1 John 4:4-8

⁵³ Ephesians 1:4

⁵⁴ John 8:31, 32; 14:16, 17, 26; 16:7-15

⁵⁵ 1 Thessalonians 5:19

⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:30

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, Hebrews 5:12-14

⁵⁸ Hebrews 6:4-8

⁵⁹ 2 Peter 3:18

⁶⁰ Mark 3:28, 29

⁶¹ Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:19-27

The Love of God

Love is best understood as being “affection or benevolence for others that is at least equivalent to the concern one has for himself.” The New Testament concept of the *love of God* is expressed generally in the Greek term *agape*. The Old Testament demonstrates the love of God by revealing that Elohim chose to create mankind in their own image and likeness.⁶² Mankind was given dominion over the earth that had been bountifully furnished with plants and animals (vv. 28-31). The creation of mankind was Elohim’s inauguration of what is to become the *Kingdom of God*. That Kingdom would represent the Family of God, its territory, and its subjects. As Isaiah was inspired to describe it, that Kingdom/Family represents an unending government that will continue to increase in membership, goods and services, wealth, and territory.⁶³

God Toward Mankind: In order to protect mankind from possible disqualification from this Family through unacceptable acts committed due to the misuse of his independent mind, Elohim planned a contingency whereby such acts can be forgiven and the transgressor can be counted as though he never transgressed.⁶⁴ This kind of love is a combination of *grace*, *mercy*, and *justification*.⁶⁵ It is the epitome of love to plan in advance for reconciliation for the *possible* missteps of potential children. This is the heart and core of John 3:16, 17; 10:18; and 15:13. As stated in John 10:18, Jesus Christ had the individual freedom to lay down His life or to simply let the chips fall where they might for those who sin. Because of the great love He and the Father have for mankind, He *chose* – even before the creation of

⁶² Genesis 1:26, 27 (See also 1 John 3:1.)

⁶³ Isaiah 9:7

⁶⁴ Ephesians 1:4-7

⁶⁵ Psalm 103:8-18; Ephesians 2:1-10

the orderly universe – to lay down His life to atone for mankind’s possible sins.⁶⁶

Man Toward God: As stated in Ephesians 1:4, it is God’s will that man should develop the heart in him to be holy and without blame in love. This love is to be expressed along two connected lines: (a) supreme love of God above all things and (b) love of one’s neighbor as one loves himself.⁶⁷ Paul points out in Romans 13:8-10 that the 10 Commandments are God’s guidelines for those two connected lines: (a) Commandments 1-4 demonstrate how man should love God supremely and (b) Commandments 5-10 demonstrate how man should love his neighbor as himself. Yes, it is true that Paul discusses only loving one’s neighbor in these verses, but understanding Matthew 22:37, 38 should lead to the conclusion that loving *God* supremely is also expressed in the 10 Commandments.⁶⁸

Man Toward Man: Finally, if one cannot or will not love his fellow man, then he is incapable of loving God supremely.⁶⁹ The individual must develop the spiritual capacity to apply God’s commandments beyond the *letter* of the law. In fact, he must learn to understand the *spirit* of the commandments.⁷⁰ It is not enough to simply refrain from doing something like committing adultery. The individual must also refrain from engaging in any of the thoughts and attitudes that could reasonably lead to adultery (examples: lusting, fantasizing, flirting, coveting). As Christ put it, those acts are *in and of themselves* adulterous. The same is true for the other five commandments addressing loving one’s neighbor as himself. John was inspired to write the basic maxim that echoes Paul’s thought in Romans 13:8-10: “Whosoever commits sin transgresses the

⁶⁶ Compare John 15:13 to Romans 5:7, 8. (See also 1 John 4:7-21.)

⁶⁷ Matthew 22:37, 38

⁶⁸ See John 14:15, 21-24 and 1 John 4:7-21.

⁶⁹ 1 John 4:20

⁷⁰ Matthew 5:17-48

law [that is, the Commandments]: for sin is the transgression of the law.” James, the brother of Jesus Christ, writes that transgressing one point of the law [that is, the Commandments] is a transgression against the entirety of the law.⁷¹ Thus, we should be able to see how the two aspects of God’s law – His basic standards regulating *holy* behavior – are inextricably connected. It is mankind’s transgression of God’s law that has brought upon him the ultimate death from which he must be saved through Jesus Christ.⁷²

The Grace of God

Throughout scripture, *the grace of God* is an expression used to denote God’s redemptive love to draw men to Him and to preserve them in a covenant relationship with Him.⁷³ It is more than the forgiveness of sins and the mercy that drives that forgiveness. The term *grace* is expressive of a gift that is not deserved, cannot be earned, and cannot be repaid.⁷⁴ To be under God’s grace means to be the continual recipient of God’s divine love, favor, blessing, gracious care, help, goodwill, benefits, gifts, and goodness.⁷⁵ It is extended to the repentant individual only through the life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind.⁷⁶ The Christian is not to abuse, frustrate, or think lightly of God’s grace.⁷⁷ God expects those who have received His grace to extend grace toward others.⁷⁸

⁷¹ James 2:8-12

⁷² Romans 3:23; 6:23

⁷³ Psalm 84:11, Titus 2:11, 12

⁷⁴ Romans 4:4; 11:6, Ephesians 2:4-10

⁷⁵ 1 Peter 4:10

⁷⁶ 2 Peter 3:10, Acts 4:12

⁷⁷ Romans 6:1, 2, 14, 15, Galatians 5:4, Jude 4

⁷⁸ Hebrews 12:14, 15, 28

The Holy Bible: God's Inspired Word

The Inspiration of God's Scriptures

Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 that all scripture is inspired by God for several reasons:

(a) for *establishing the tenets of instruction* to be held in common by a body of believers,

(b) for *correcting faulty ideas, attitudes, and actions* through evidence,

(c) for *testing all theories, theologies, and ethical teachings* for correctness and truth relative to the thoughts and ways of God, and

(d) for *training the believer in righteousness* so he will be spiritually mature and thoroughly capable of doing the works for which God has called him into His truth.⁷⁹

At that time, Paul had only the Old Testament.

Scriptures provide man entrance into the thoughts and ways of God – which are as high above the ordinary hu-

⁷⁹ See also Ephesians 2:10.

man's thoughts and ways as the heavens are above the earth.⁸⁰ In order for God to make this possible, He used specially appointed men to record the appropriate history, theology, and prophecies to guide man into a prescribed pattern of thought and belief – what Jude, another brother of Jesus Christ, refers to as “...the faith once delivered to the saints....”⁸¹ According to both Old and New Testaments, there is but one true faith that is acceptable to God.⁸² Peter says that this inspiration – an influx of God's Holy Spirit – gives us a more sure word of prophecy. This suggests two things: (a) scripture is authenticated by the action of God Himself and (b) it, therefore, needs no further confirmation because it is a faithful witness to the truth of the gospel.⁸³ God's word is timelessly authoritative because it is a timeless witness of God's revelation of His plan, will, and purpose for mankind.

The Nature of God's Law

The majority of mainstream Christianity believes that God's Holy Spirit was given as a *replacement* for His Law. The concept is that the Holy Spirit will lead the believer into knowledge and understanding of God's thoughts and ways that is not possible by following His Law. This is a gross misunderstanding of the nature of God's Law. Paul warns believers about this kind of thinking by saying “...Where there is no law, there is no sin....”⁸⁴ John says that “...sin is the transgression of the Law....”⁸⁵ Jesus said that He did not come to do away with either the Law or the

⁸⁰ Isaiah 55:8, 9

⁸¹ Jude 3

⁸² Deuteronomy 4, Isaiah 8:16, 20, Matthew 4:4; 7:21-23, Ephesians 4:4-6

⁸³ 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 Peter 1:10

⁸⁴ Romans 4:15

⁸⁵ 1 John 3:4

prophets.⁸⁶ So, the true believer must understand the nature of God's Law in order to understand the part it plays in the salvation process.

Deuteronomy 4 provides two pieces of incredible insight into why God gave Israel His Law: (a) He gave it to Israel so that the effects produced by their *obedience* would actually attract the positive attention of other nations (vv. 1-24); and (b) He gave it to Israel in order to *instruct* them so they would *know* that He is God who gives them longevity of life (vv. 31-40; see also 8:1-6). God intended Israel to be the means by which other nations were attracted to God's truth and led to conversion – and...ultimately to salvation.

No one could be convicted as a sinner if there were no laws governing relationships among mankind and between mankind and God. How could Adam and Eve have been convicted of *sin* if God had no law governing their thoughts and deeds?⁸⁷ How could Cain have been convicted of *murdering* Abel if there was no law against such a thing?⁸⁸ Because of man's *wickedness* during about 1600 years after the creation of Adam and Eve, God decided to destroy the world with a flood.⁸⁹ There are numerous other examples in scripture that demonstrate that God has required mankind in general to obey His Law. The Law was not something given for Israel alone.⁹⁰

What is the function of God's Law? There are two basic functions identified in scripture: (a) it defines sin⁹¹ and (b) it serves as a tutor to lead us to Jesus Christ so that we can be justified by faith.⁹² Having been shown by the Law how

⁸⁶ Matthew 5:17-19

⁸⁷ See Genesis 2:15-17; 3:9-22.

⁸⁸ Genesis 4:6-15

⁸⁹ Genesis 6:5-8

⁹⁰ See Genesis 26:5 re: Abraham – who was not an *Israelite* – and Romans 2:11-16.

⁹¹ Romans 7:7-14

⁹² Galatians 3:19-29

to love God supremely and fellowman as oneself, the believer, through the gift of God's Holy Spirit,⁹³ grows in spiritual knowledge and understanding to the point that he does not need the Law *to continue as a tutor*. The Law is not *eliminated*; it becomes part of the believer's heart and mind.⁹⁴ For instance, how much do you need to be reminded of all the rules regulating addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division? Once you learned those rules, you did not need a teacher to continue to instruct you in them. That did not eliminate the teacher; you moved along, and the teacher attended to others who needed the instruction.

Paul says in Romans 7:10 that "...the commandment...was ordained to *life*..." Leviticus 18:5 says that those who walk in God's judgments and ordinances "...shall *live* in them..." What does this mean? If all of mankind kept God's Law perfectly – *only in the letter of the Law* – think of what a better world this might be. Mankind would probably be in much better relationships with God and fellowman. If you were able to add the *spirit* of the Law to the mix, the relationships would be practically perfect. God designed the Law for nothing more than our highest good and highest welfare. The problem is that the Law cannot make you holy or spiritual; it can only point you to what is acceptable and unacceptable to God. The Law *points to the righteousness of God*.

The Righteousness of the Law

Psalm 119:172 says: "My tongue shall speak of your word: *for all your commandments are righteousness*" (see also v. 144; emphases added). *Righteousness* means that one acts in accordance with what is just, honorable, and free from guilt or wrong. In this sense, the Law is the ref-

⁹³ See John 14:15-18; 26; 16:13-15.

⁹⁴ See Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 10:15-17, and Romans 8:1-4.

erence point for God's thoughts and ways. For instance, does God consider it just, honorable, and guiltless – living in holiness, blamelessness, and love – to commit adultery? To lie? To worship idols? To break God's Sabbath? Apparently not.

The *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, in reference to the word *testimonies* in Psalm 119:14, notes that it is a reference to the "...*testimony* of the Ten Words on the tables as a *solemn divine charge*..."⁹⁵ The "*Ten words* on the tables" refers to the Ten Commandments. A "*divine charge*" is the imposition of a particular task or duty – entrusting someone with the responsibility of taking over the care and management of something. If that is true, then it would add great meaning to Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4 where God expresses His will that man should live by every *word* that proceeds out of His mouth. The RSV translates that to say "...*everything* that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Being obedient to God's commandments is *righteousness*. They command that justice, honor, and innocence should accompany holiness and love among mankind. That is God's objective in spelling out how relationships among mankind and between mankind and God are to be framed. That is the point of Micah 6:6-9 (note especially v. 8). The Hebrew term for *word* in Deuteronomy 8:3 (*dabar*), and the Greek term in Matthew 4:4 (*rhema*), carry more than the meaning of the *spoken* word. Both include the meaning that the *purpose* for which the *word* is set forward will be followed.⁹⁶ Such is the substance and evidence of true faith.⁹⁷ Such is the righteousness of God's Law.

⁹⁵ p. 730, word reference #5715 (emphases added)

⁹⁶ See Isaiah 55:10, 11.

⁹⁷ Hebrews 11:1

The Righteousness of Faith

Faith does not *replace* or *annul* the Law of God. On the contrary, faith puts the Law on a firmer foundation and elevates it to a higher spiritual plane.⁹⁸ If you use Psalm 119:172 as your model (“...*All your commandments are righteousness*”; emphases added), then the implication is that the person of true faith will think and act in accordance with what is just, honorable, and free from guilt or wrong (that is, *blamelessness*; see Ephesians 1:4). That is exactly the Lord God’s point in Genesis 26:3-5 when He reminded Abraham’s son, Isaac, why His relationship with Abraham was so successful – and...what He expected, therefore, from Isaac as He passed on His covenant to him. Matthew 22:35-40, John 14:15-21; 15:10, Romans 13:8-10, and 1 John 2:1-6, 29; 3:4-11, 22-24; 5:1-4 all express the concept that *righteousness* must be part and parcel to *faith*.

If *love* is the fulfilling of the Law – that is, the commandments of God – then Romans 5:1-5 demonstrates how obedience to God’s Law *in true faith* enables the believer to *pour forth* toward his fellowman the justice, honor, and blamelessness bound up in the spiritual intent of God’s Law.⁹⁹ It is only through faith in Jesus Christ and the gift of God’s Holy Spirit that this righteousness will manifest itself in a concern for the welfare of others at least equal to concern for oneself. That’s the love that fulfills the Law – the *righteousness* of faith.

The Ten Commandments

Although the Ten Commandments were given as codified law as part of the covenant agreement between the Lord God and Israel (“...[the Lord God] wrote upon the

⁹⁸ Romans 3:31

⁹⁹ See also Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 8:1-4, and 1 John 1:6-10.

tables [that is, stone tablets] the words of the covenant, the ten commandments...”), one should not assume that this was the first time these commandments had been employed by God.¹⁰⁰ Abraham is described as having kept the Lord God’s commandments.¹⁰¹ It is possible to demonstrate how Adam, Eve, and Cain broke specific commandments in the sins they committed. There should be no doubt that God has expressed His explicit will regarding reconciling human thoughts and ways to God’s through the Ten Commandments. All of God’s statutes, laws, ordinances, and judgments have been born out of the Ten Commandments.¹⁰² The Ten Commandments are the Law that is to be instilled in the hearts of the adherents of the New Covenant.¹⁰³

One would have to consider it logical to consider some interesting reasoning revealed in the New Testament. First, Hebrews 8:1-5 shows that the original tabernacle and all of its accoutrement were “...the *example* and *shadow* of heavenly things...” (emphasis added). Second, the Lord God told Moses on Mt. Sinai to “...make all things *according to the pattern* shewed to you in the mount...” (emphases added). In Hebrews 9:1-9, Paul repeats the idea that the original tabernacle was “...*symbolic* for the present age...” (RSV; emphasis added). Notice that among the earthly accoutrement is the ark of the covenant that contained manna, Aaron’s rod, and the *Ten Commandments* (v.4). Revelation 11:19 shows that the *real* ark of the covenant, upon which the *copy* in the tabernacle was based, is in heaven. Now the question: Were the *Ten Commandments* already in existence before Elohim created mankind – and used as the *pattern of law* that the Lord God would show to Moses? If

¹⁰⁰ See Exodus 19:1-5; 20:1-17; and 34:28.

¹⁰¹ Genesis 26:5

¹⁰² See Isaiah 55:8, 9 and Matthew 22:34-40.

¹⁰³ Compare Hebrews 10:15-17 to Jeremiah 31:31-34, Romans 8:1-8, and Galatians 3:24, 25.

so, then we have a basis for believing that the Lord God was justified in dealing with all men, beginning with Adam and Eve, as *transgressors of His Law*.

It is true that there were laws and traditions in Israel's religious practices that were not endorsed by God – even though they were constructed and executed as though they were given by Him.¹⁰⁴ According to Hebrews 9:8-10, there were also various ordinances that were described as *gifts, sacrifices, foods, drinks, various baths* (washings), and ordinances regarding *the care and maintenance of the physical body* that were *temporarily* imposed upon Israel – in this case, the rules and regulations were imposed more specifically upon the priesthood. Once the time for their employment had passed, they were abolished as applicable to God's Church.

There were some that God did not *want* to impose, but did so as part of a disciplinary process.¹⁰⁵ With the resurrection of Jesus Christ, some of those laws, statutes, and ordinances *changed in character*, but were not abolished. This includes the change in the priesthood and tithing, the character of the covenant, and the sacrificial laws.¹⁰⁶ Jesus Christ is now our eternal High Priest, the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant, and the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ replaced the temporary, repeated sacrifice of bulls and goats. The change came as a result of Christ's *fulfillment* of their symbolisms – not by doing away with the laws themselves.

There was no such abolition or change imposed upon the Ten Commandments. They are the heart and core of the covenant relationship between God and His people. Matthew 22:37-40 implies that man's love toward God is expressed in Commandments 1-4 and his love toward his fel-

¹⁰⁴ See Matthew 15:1-9, for example.

¹⁰⁵ Compare Galatians 3:19 to Hebrews 10:5-8, Psalm 40:6-8, and Hosea 6:4-7.

¹⁰⁶ Hebrews 7, Hebrews 8, and Hebrews 9:11 through 10:22

lowman is expressed in Commandments 5-10. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets depend (hang) on the two great commandments – which are expressed in the two divisions of the Ten Commandments. Its specific, figurative meaning is found in John 15:1-10. In fact, He said that He did not come to abolish either the Law (specifically, the Ten Commandments) or the prophets, but to fulfill them – that is, to bring them to their intended purpose.¹⁰⁷ It is plainly obvious that neither all of the purpose of God’s Law nor the content of His prophecies has been fulfilled in total-ity.

The Weekly Sabbath

The origin of the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath was a part of the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3. As Jesus put it in Mark 2:27, 28, the seventh-day Sabbath was created for *man*. This was a correction of the idea that God’s reason for creating man was so that He would have someone to worship Him on the Sabbath. The weekly, seventh-day Sabbath was both *blessed* and *sanctified* by God in order to serve a perceived need man would have on a regular, weekly basis. That God *blessed* the seventh day implies a couple of important meanings: (a) God made the seventh-day Sabbath *holy* – set aside as *holy time* to be used for *holy purposes* as opposed to ordinary, personal pursuits,¹⁰⁸ and (b) God demonstrated His personal, divine care (for the purpose for which the day was created) by resting – that is, if it is *holy* to God, then it should be *holy* to man.¹⁰⁹ The *sanctification* of the seventh-day Sabbath means that it is to be devoted to a specific, divine purpose.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 5:17-19

¹⁰⁸ Isaiah 56:1, 2; 58:13, 14

¹⁰⁹ See Exodus 31:14 and Leviticus 19:2.

The fourth Commandment makes some interesting demands upon man:

- (a) The holy purpose and intent of the seventh-day Sabbath is to be maintained;
- (b) All of man's ordinary work is to be pursued during days 1-6; and
- (c) Neither man nor anyone or anything under his control is to violate the holy purpose and intent of the Sabbath.¹¹⁰

Because it commemorates God's *rest (Shabath)*, one of the holy purposes for which it was created was to rest the *body* from labor and toil – as well as to rest one's *mind* and *heart* from worldly cares and anxieties. Therefore, God's intention was to give man time, on a regular basis, to be physically and spiritually renewed and refreshed. The person who wastes his six days of labor with laziness and abandonment of his necessary, honest labor is just as guilty of breaking this commandment as the one who labors during the day of rest.

A fourth demand that the Sabbath commandment makes upon man is that of remembering that the Lord God is the creator of heaven and earth. Refusing to obey this commandment would ultimately cause the Sabbath to fail to serve the purpose and intent of God – which would lead mankind to actually forget the origin of creation itself. Exodus 31:12-17 explains this very plainly – vv. 13, 14, and 17 saying: "...You shall keep my Sabbaths because it is a sign [that is, an identification marker] between me and you...*that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you....It is holy to you....It is a sign between me and the*

¹¹⁰ Exodus 20:8-11

children of Israel forever [Why?] because the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”¹¹¹

Another part of Jesus’ comment in Mark 2:27, 28 is that He is *Lord* of the Sabbath. The term *Lord* means that He is: (a) the one who *created* the seventh-day Sabbath and (b) the one who *commanded* that it is to be observed by man. It also means that He is the *owner* and *controller* of the Sabbath. John 1:3 says that all things were created by Him, and Colossians 1:16 says that they were created *by* Him and *for* Him. That being the case, He is the owner and controller of the seventh-day Sabbath.

There is no scriptural endorsement for changing from God’s seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week. Such a change would imply the abolition of one of God’s commandments – which is a contradiction of Jesus Christ’s own words that He did not come to do such a thing.¹¹²

Even those who were the authors of the change from Sabbath to Sunday, as well as many who have accepted the authority of those who made that change, say that they did not do so because of any direction of God by specific or un-specific command. Even Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, made the following charge in his Augsburg Confession (Article 28) against those who instituted that change:

They [the Catholics] allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord’s day, contrary to the Decalogue [Ten Commandments], as it appears; neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day. Great, say they, is the power and authority of the church, since it

¹¹¹ See also Isaiah 56:1, 2 and 58:13, 14 (emphasis added).

¹¹² Matthew 5:17-19

dispensed with one of the ten commandments [sic].

Oddly enough, neither Luther and nor his followers, before or after the Reformation, ever endorsed the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Catholic Cardinal Gibbons, in the 1892 edition of his book *Faith of Our Fathers*, wrote:

You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.¹¹³

A more modern admission is found in *The Baptist Faith and Message* by Herschel H. Hobbs: “There is no specific command in the New Testament to change from the seventh to the first day.”¹¹⁴ The *Sunday* Sabbath is a man-made institution, not a God-commanded institution.

The weekly, seventh-day Sabbath also embodies a symbolic, prophetic meaning. Hebrews 4 implies that the weekly Sabbath is indicative of both a *rest* and a *place of rest*. Verse 9 says that the symbolic, prophetic meaning of the weekly Sabbath indicates that there is coming a time of *rest* for all of creation in a certain place. This, no doubt, is expressed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:18-25 with the imagery of a creation that is waiting to be delivered from vanity and the bondage of corruption. The event that will mark the beginning of this deliverance will be the manifestation of the sons of God (v. 19). That event will occur at

¹¹³ p. 111

¹¹⁴ Nashville: Convention Press; 1971; p. 94

the return of Jesus Christ to establish the Kingdom of God *on the earth*.¹¹⁵

Romans 1:18-32 reveals that God subjected man to the naturally-occurring consequences of his own choices that are in direct conflict with His will.¹¹⁶ Some, using 2 Peter 3:8 as a formula, believe that God, therefore, has allotted 6,000 years after the sin of Adam and Eve for man to labor under the influence and consequences of his own politics, religions, educational systems, and governments (6 days x 1,000 years each). In keeping with the symbolism, he also allotted 1,000 years of a Sabbath rest from the works of man in order to get things back on track for the completion of the original plan of God for creating the heavens, earth, and mankind (1 day x 1,000 years). Revelation 20:3, 5-7, coincidentally, reveals that the Kingdom will encompass a period of 1,000 years. It will be during that time that: (a) the sons of God will be revealed (by the resurrection of the firstfruits), (b) Jesus will take control of the governments of the world, and (c) all enemies of God will be conquered and destroyed – including death and, therefore, sin.¹¹⁷

Isaiah 66:22, 23 – inspired by God – shows that God will enforce the keeping holy of the seventh-day Sabbath in the eternity beyond the 1,000-year Kingdom of God. So, we must ask why God would *temporarily* institute a *Sunday* Sabbath if He intends to enforce the seventh-day Sabbath beyond this present 6,000-year period. Based on what we have seen above, this is simply one more way by which mankind has seized control of matters that are the prerogative of God.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ See 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; 50-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 11:15, Daniel 2:44, 45; 7:13, 14; 21-27, Zechariah 14, and Isaiah 2:1-5.

¹¹⁶ See also Matthew 7:21-23.

¹¹⁷ See Revelation 11:15; 19:11-21; 20; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; and Romans 3:23; 6:23.

¹¹⁸ Isaiah 14:12-17, Ezekiel 28:11-19, Romans 1:18, 19

God's Annual Holy Days

Leviticus 23 lays out a series of holy days commanded by the Lord God that reveal His plan of salvation in a prophetic manner. Since they are prophetic, it would make sense that Jesus Christ (who is the Lord God of the Old Testament) included them in those prophecies that He did not come to abolish.¹¹⁹ Also, since the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath is among them, and they contain special days during the year that are called *Sabbaths*, it is reasonable to conclude that the Lord God intends for Christians to observe them in their appointed seasons. This reasonable conclusion is supported throughout the New Testament as it reveals: (a) the entire ministry of Jesus Christ was centered upon the spiritual meaning of these days and (b) the New Testament apostolic church faithfully observed them. What follows is a list of these holy days and a brief description of their prophetic meanings:

Passover – Observed in the early Spring, *after* the vernal equinox, during the evening at the *beginning* of the 14th day of the first month of the Hebrew calendar.¹²⁰ It is not a yearly Sabbath, but its observance is mandatory for all true Christians. Although it is a memorial of the Exodus Passover,¹²¹ it pictures the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.¹²² Jesus established new symbolic elements in the observance of Passover during His last Passover meal with His disciples: the wine is

¹¹⁹ Matthew 5:17-19

¹²⁰ Leviticus 23:5

¹²¹ See Exodus 12.

¹²² See Isaiah 53 and Hebrews 10:1-17.

symbolic of His shed blood and the unleavened bread is symbolic of His sin-free body that was beaten and broken for the sins of man.¹²³

Feast of Unleavened Bread – Observed for seven days during the 15th through 21st days of the first month of the Hebrew calendar.¹²⁴ The first and seventh days are yearly *Sabbaths* (in the context, called *holy convocations*). It is obvious that they are Sabbaths because of the command not to do any servile work during those days. The Apostle Paul revealed that the concept embedded in the Feast of Unleavened Bread is that of coming out of sin and living a life of sincerity and truth in Jesus Christ.¹²⁵ No leavened products are eaten during these seven days.¹²⁶ The Feast is a memorial of the Exodus from Egypt (symbolic of deliverance from the slavery to sin – see Romans 6), during which Israel was unable to leaven the bread they were taking with them.¹²⁷ It symbolizes the work of Jesus Christ in delivering the individual and creation from sin and death and, thereby, reconciling all things in heaven and earth to God.¹²⁸ The individual believer is delivered from sin by con-

¹²³ Matthew 26:17-28, Mark 14:12-25, Luke 22:1-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

¹²⁴ Leviticus 23:6

¹²⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

¹²⁶ Leviticus 23:6

¹²⁷ Exodus 12:33, 34, Romans 8:19-24, Hebrews 3, Jude 3-5

¹²⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, Ephesians 1:3-10

tinually “feeding upon” the sinless life of Christ.¹²⁹

Pentecost – This holy day is always observed on the first day of the week.¹³⁰ By Jewish tradition, it is the day on which the Lord God gave to Israel the Ten Commandments. Acts 2 reveals that it is the day on which God poured out the Holy Spirit on the new Church being built by Jesus Christ. It is referred to in scripture as the *feast of weeks*¹³¹ and the *feast of harvest* – and by extension, the *feast of firstfruits*.¹³² Leviticus 23:15-21 is the method by which Pentecost is determined. Basically, *Pentecost* means to “count fifty.” It is 50 days from a weekly Sabbath occurring *during the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. It is counted seven Sabbaths plus one day after that Sabbath.

This Feast represents the “harvest” of what is called the *firstfruits*. With regard to God’s salvation process, these *firstfruits* represent those living between the Garden of Eden and the return of Jesus Christ who have been converted toward their coming salvation through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 11 is a great example of these people.¹³³ *First* is an ordinal number that presupposes at least *second* – and, possibly *third*, *fourth*, et

¹²⁹ John 6:26-58, Matthew 5:6; 6:24-33, Romans 12:2

¹³⁰ Leviticus 23:15, 16

¹³¹ Exodus 34:22, Deuteronomy 16:10

¹³² Exodus 23:16 (See also Numbers 28:26.)

¹³³ See also James 1:18 and Revelation 14:4; 20:4-6 – note the distinction between a *first* and *second* resurrection.

cetera. Therefore, there is the revelation in God’s word that there is more than one day of salvation – the 1,000-year Kingdom period, during which Christ and the saints will rule over a human population, represents a *second* “day” of salvation, and the second resurrection represents a *third* “day” of salvation. These will be discussed in the context of the other feasts.

Feast of Trumpets – Observed on the first day of the seventh month – a *Sabbath* month.¹³⁴ It is a yearly Sabbath. The Feast of Trumpets is the first of four yearly Sabbaths during the seventh month: (2nd) the Day of Atonement on the 10th day, (3rd) the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th day, and (4th) the “last great day” on the 22nd day, which is the day following the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles. Exodus 19:16 shows that when the Lord God (the one who became Jesus Christ) appeared to Israel, just before Moses went up into the mountain to receive God’s law, the event was accompanied by thunder, lightning, and loud trumpets. It is in that vein that the return of Jesus Christ will also be accompanied with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and *the sound of the trumpet of God*.¹³⁵

Revelation 8:1 through 11:15 declares that there will be seven *trumpet* plagues that will

¹³⁴ Leviticus 23:24, 25

¹³⁵ 1 Thessalonians 4:16

precede the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God – the seventh trumpet consisting of the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on the earth and to pour out the final seven *bowl plagues*.¹³⁶ It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that this Feast points to the return of Jesus Christ to begin the process of reconciling all things in heaven and earth to God the Father. It will be at this point that the *firstfruits* are changed from flesh to spirit either by resurrection from the dead in Christ or by the instantaneous change effected on those true Christians who are still alive at Christ's return.¹³⁷

The Day of Atonement – Observed on the 10th day of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar as a complete fast.¹³⁸ It is a yearly Sabbath. Leviticus 16 describes the Atonement ritual that is centered upon two unblemished, kid goats – one to be slain as an atonement sacrifice and the other to be a *scapegoat* and have the sins of the people laid upon it before it is taken away to a desolate place and left. The High Priest had to cast lots in order to determine which goat would serve which purpose, which indicates that either goat had the potential to serve either purpose. For that reason, it is commonly believed that each goat represents a

¹³⁶ Revelation 11:15; 19, Zechariah 14, and Revelation 15

¹³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (Pay attention to Paul's comment about *the last trump* and the *trumpet sound* in v. 52.)

¹³⁸ Leviticus 23:26-32

different aspect of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The goat that was sacrificed represented the coming chastisement and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The scapegoat represented the innocent victim upon whom the sins of others were laid. Psalm 103:8-18 prefigures this action on the part of God by stating very plainly that God has not dealt with us as our sins require (v. 10), but that He would provide a means by which our sins will be removed from us as far as the east is from the west. Isaiah 53 is a prophecy about both aspects of the two goats. It reveals that the Christ was to be thoroughly beaten and put to death – wounded for *our transgressions...bearing the sins* of many (vv. 4, 5, 9, 10, 12). Paul proclaims the fulfillment of that prophecy in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21 by saying that God was reconciling the world to Himself by not imputing our sins to us, but by making Jesus Christ – *who knew no sin* – to be sin in our place.¹³⁹

Feast of Tabernacles – Observed for seven days during the 15th through 21st days of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar.¹⁴⁰ The first day is a yearly Sabbath. It is a memorial of the 40 years that God caused Israel to live in *booths* (vv. 39-43). Since this Feast is symbolic of the *temporary* nature of the dwellings in which Israel lived

¹³⁹ See also Hebrews 10:1-18.

¹⁴⁰ Leviticus 23:33-44

while the Lord God was among them during the 40 years of wandering in the desert, it is, therefore, symbolic of the *temporary* nature of our present world, as well as that of the 1,000-year Kingdom of God on this present earth. It also serves as a great reminder of the *temporary* nature of the human body that was made from the clods of the earth¹⁴¹ – even though it might subsequently be infused with the Holy Spirit of God through conversion into the true faith. That Holy Spirit is God’s down-payment *guarantee* that the true believer will be raised from the dead when Jesus Christ returns.¹⁴²

Hebrews 11:8-10 reveals that Abraham did not expect the *temporary dwellings* (tents) in which he lived to be the way he would live for eternity. He expected to eventually live in *permanent dwellings* in that land. It also indicates that he did not expect the *land of promise* to always be the kind of place it was when the Lord God promised it to him. Instead, he believed that God will eventually build a permanent dwelling place for Himself in that very land. This, no doubt, will be realized when God creates the New Heaven and New Earth after having purged the planet of all vestiges of human endeavor.¹⁴³

The Kingdom of God will not perish, but it will have a 1,000-year period of time on this present earth to accomplish the great feat of

¹⁴¹ Genesis 2:7

¹⁴² See Romans 8:11, 23 and Ephesians 1:13, 14.

¹⁴³ See Isaiah 65:17-25, Revelation 21, 22, and 2 Peter 3:10-18.

reconciling all things in heaven and on earth to God. In that sense only, we should understand the temporary nature of the 1,000-year Kingdom period. Revelation 5:9, 10 and 20:1-7 reveal that there will be 1,000 years during which the saints will reign and rule on the earth with Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. First Corinthians 15:24-28 reveals the work that will be undertaken by Jesus Christ and the saints will consist of conquering all of the enemies of God – even sin and death. Since they will be ruling over a *human* population,¹⁴⁴ their work will constitute a *second* “day” of salvation because the survivors of the warfare of the Tribulation and the Day of the Lord will be taught God’s truth – His thoughts and ways – by Jesus Christ and the saints. At some point in time before the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth, these *secondfruits* will be given eternal life.

The Kingdom will not come to an end when that is accomplished because Jesus Christ subsequently will deliver that cleansed, unleavened Kingdom into the hands of God the Father¹⁴⁵ – who then will effect the creation of a New Heaven and New Earth and place His own throne and dwelling place upon the New Earth.¹⁴⁶ This is what Abraham expected – what he had faith in.

¹⁴⁴ See Isaiah 2:1-5 and Zechariah 14:16-19.

¹⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:24

¹⁴⁶ Revelation 21:1-4

The temporary nature of the human body was revealed from the very beginning.¹⁴⁷ Man was created out of clods of earth to be a *living, breathing being* (Hebrew = *nephesh*) – which means that he was subject to physical death (mortal). Ezekiel 18:4, 20 reveal that the *nephesh* (“soul”) that sins will *die*. That death is not just the cessation of his physical, electro-chemical existence; it is the termination of his very existence.¹⁴⁸ There is no innate *immortal* element in man.¹⁴⁹

It is noteworthy, therefore, that God should reveal to His people that there is life beyond the grave – beyond the dust to which man will return after his death. Being returned to life after the *death* of the body is called *resurrection from the dead*. No matter what subsequently happens to the dead body, God is able to raise to life the specific person to whom it belonged. If He judges the person worthy of a new spirit body, then God will raise him with an eternal, self-sustaining, spirit body.¹⁵⁰ If God is not prepared to give him such a body, then He can raise him to a *temporary*, physical, electro-chemical existence and allow him to live however long He desires in order for spiritual remediation to take place. It is with that in mind that one should understand that God’s original plan

¹⁴⁷ Genesis 2:7; 3:19

¹⁴⁸ See Genesis 2:17 and Romans 3:23 and 6:23.

¹⁴⁹ See Genesis 6:3, Job 14:1-15, Psalm 103:13-16, and Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20; 9:4-6, 10.

¹⁵⁰ See Hebrews 9:27.

was for all who qualify through Jesus Christ to *eventually* have a spirit body.¹⁵¹

Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. In this, Paul points out that, even if this body of flesh is dissolved, God has the power to replace it with an eternal body (v. 1). Those who know God's truth earnestly desire to be given that eternal body – what Paul refers to as “...our house from heaven...” (v. 2). Once given that body, we will have been changed from mortal beings *capable* of dying to immortal beings *incapable* of dying.¹⁵² God has given us a down-payment of His Holy Spirit in order to *guarantee* that such is the case (v. 5). Even though we are presently not in that eternal body, we are confident, through our faith in Jesus Christ, that God will do exactly what He has said He will do about the spirit bodies (vv. 6-8). It is Paul's intention to establish the *temporary nature* of the human body and the expectation of a spirit body. Many erroneously interpret this scripture to mean that the believer should long for his immortal soul to be released from the body of flesh so that it can go to heaven. That is absolutely not what Paul is teaching here. The “...earthly house of this tabernacle...” (v. 1) is the body from the earth (clods of dirt) that can and will die because of its temporary nature.¹⁵³ In order for man to go from flesh to spirit, Jesus Christ said that he must be *born*

¹⁵¹ Genesis 1:26, 27; Ephesians 1:4-14; 1 John 3:1-3

¹⁵² v. 4 (See also John 3:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:35-55.)

¹⁵³ See 1 Corinthians 15:46-49.

again.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is in this sense that God has caused mankind to live in *temporary dwellings* – bodies of flesh that can die and turn again to dust.¹⁵⁵

The Last Great Day – Observed as part of the Feast of Tabernacles on the 22nd day of the seventh month.¹⁵⁶ It is a yearly Sabbath. If the Feast of Tabernacles is a prophecy about the “day” of salvation during the 1,000-year Kingdom of God, then this eighth day added to the Feast of Tabernacles has prophetic meaning for another “day” of salvation. Indeed, we find just such a “day” in Revelation 20:5, 11-13. This *second resurrection* comes at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom period and involves all those throughout human history who have never had the opportunity to know enough of God’s truth to make enough of a knowledgeable decision about the sacrifice of Jesus for their salvation. There are untold numbers of dead who have never even heard of Jesus Christ – many because of the circumstances into which they were born and raised. There are untold millions of aborted fetuses – each of which represented an individual human being that was capable of being brought to life and growing to full maturity. Many other lives were cut short in infancy and early childhood – for example, think of the small children offered as sacrifices to false gods. Untold others have been deceived

¹⁵⁴ John 3:3-8

¹⁵⁵ Read carefully 1 Corinthians 15:46-54.

¹⁵⁶ Leviticus 23:39

both by the god of this world and those who have posed as “Christian” ministers.¹⁵⁷ Once this “day” of salvation is completed, Jesus Christ will have conquered all of God’s enemies and will prepare to turn everything back over to the Father.¹⁵⁸

Prophecy and the Prophets

The true prophet is a spokesman sent by God to declare and explain the will of God in a way that is easily understood or comprehended. Deuteronomy 18:15-22 is the Lord God’s instruction about a line of prophets (which included Moses) that will lead up to the “Great Prophet” – who is generally recognized as being Jesus Christ. Pay close attention to the Lord God’s revelation of the demands placed upon God’s true prophets:

(a) The true prophet will be one from among God’s own people (a human) to whom God’s people *must* pay attention (v. 15);

(b) God will put His words into the true prophet’s mouth, and the true prophet shall speak them just as God has commanded them to be spoken...without adding to them or taking away from them (v. 18);

(c) God will punish those who do not heed the things the true prophet speaks in God’s name (v. 19);

¹⁵⁷ See Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4; 11:4, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2; 1 John 4:1; and Jude 3, 4.

¹⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, Revelation 20:14, 15

(d) The true prophet shall speak only what God has required of him and only in the name of the True God (v. 20); and

(e) The test for determining whether or not any prophet actually represents God lies in whether or not his prophecy comes to pass (vv. 21, 22).

Peter wrote: "...No prophecy of the Scripture is of any *private interpretation* because the prophecy of the past *did not come by the will of man: holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*"¹⁵⁹

Prophets are "...divinely appointed moral and ethical preachers and teachers of true religion...."¹⁶⁰ Their primary duty is "...to admonish and reprove, to denounce prevailing sins, and threaten the people with the terrors of divine judgment and call them to repentance. They also brought the message of consolation and pardon...."¹⁶¹ While Zacharias proclaimed that God has had prophets "...since the world began...,"¹⁶² Enoch is the earliest prophet mentioned in scripture.¹⁶³ That is not to say that there were not others – perhaps Abel was the first.

There is the idea that *prophets* disappeared by the time the book of Malachi was written – Malachi being considered by the Jews as the last genuine prophet in Israel – and that no such office exists in the Church which Jesus Christ has been building. One must remember, however, that the Lord God divorced Israel for her adulteries and turned her over to the punishment due her. Numerous prophets came

¹⁵⁹ 2 Peter 1:20, 21 (emphases added)

¹⁶⁰ Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press; 1968); p. 48

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*; p. 49 – quoted from *Lange's Commentary*, XIV, p. 7

¹⁶² Luke 1:70

¹⁶³ Jude 14, 15

and went who explained God's will to her, reminded her of her place in His covenant with Abraham, reminded her of her "marriage" to Him, and foretold future punishments and her eventual restoration after He had removed her sins from her. So, it has not been a case of divorced Israel not having a continuing prophetic message in the canonized Old Testament – or...of there not being such an office in the New Testament Church.

It has been revealed (mostly in Paul's writings) that such an office does exist that cannot be explained away as meaning only "an inspired speaker" and put into the same category as being merely an inspired *preacher*.¹⁶⁴ It is widely recognized that Jesus Christ serves as the Christian *Prophet, Priest, and King*. Acts 11:27, 28 say that *prophets* (plural) went to Jerusalem, and one among them (Agabus) predicted a great famine that would affect "...all the world..." Among the *prophets* and *teachers* in the Antioch Church were Barnabas, Simeon (Niger), Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen. God revealed to them that Barnabas and Saul (later known as the Apostle Paul) were to be paired for a mission that God had planned for them – they were ordained as Apostles by these prophets.¹⁶⁵ After the Jerusalem Conference, Judas and Silas are shown to have been prophets working with Paul and Barnabas among the brethren at Antioch to explain the results of the Conference.¹⁶⁶ Timothy was the recipient of certain spiritual gifts, as Barclay translates it in *The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (p. 113), "...When the voices of the prophets picked you out for the charge which has been given to you..."¹⁶⁷ The Apostle John was a prophet similar to many in the Old Testament – complete with multiple visions, dire warnings, and consolations for God's

¹⁶⁴ See 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11.

¹⁶⁵ Acts 13:1

¹⁶⁶ Acts 15:30-35

¹⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 4:14 (emphasis added)

people. The *Revelation* is often paired with the book of Daniel for interpretation purposes, but it is not a copy of Daniel's prophecy any more than it is a copy of Isaiah's, Jeremiah's, Ezekiel's, or any other Old Testament prophet's.

To say that New Testament prophets are not the same as Old Testament prophets is a complete misunderstanding of John's role, for example. It *limits* God's prerogatives in using individuals as He sees fit. Even the Apostle Paul served in a prophet's role when he wrote in Romans 11 about the ultimate salvation of Israel and about the last days in his second letter to Timothy.¹⁶⁸ God has set this "office" in the Church, and it is mentioned by Paul in close connection to the work of apostles.¹⁶⁹ While it is evident in 1 Corinthians 12:28 that God set the apostles in high positions in the church, it is not evident that He established a hierarchical government in the Church where the prophets are under the direct control of the apostles. The prophet is no more subject to the apostle than he ever was to the high priest or the king in Israel in the Old Testament.

The gift of prophecy in the New Testament Church serves several basic purposes:

1. Edification, encouragement, and consolation (1 Corinthians 14:3, 4);
2. Education (1 Corinthians 14:19);
3. Conviction of unbelievers and convincing the unlearned (1 Corinthians 14:23-25);

¹⁶⁸ 2 Timothy 3

¹⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29, Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11

4. Special communication of revelation from God (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 14:29, 30); and

5. The occasional prediction of future events (Acts 21:10, 11; 1 Timothy 4:1).

If the Pentecost experience in Acts 2 was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, then it would be understandable that God can and will select individuals who can and will prophesy in much the same way as the Old Testament prophets.¹⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that there are numerous warnings in the New Testament about *false prophets*.¹⁷¹ Their work is set in contrast to the work of God's true prophets – especially during the last days. God's people are warned about their responsibility to know God's thoughts, ways, and will in sufficient depth to avoid being taken advantage of by the false prophets.¹⁷²

The Gospel of the Kingdom

The gospel which Jesus Christ taught *was not* the good news that the Christian will die and go to heaven. From *Genesis* to *Revelation*, there is not a single line of scripture that says that the reward of the "saved" is to go to heaven. Indeed, the gospel that Jesus Christ preached and charged His Church to preach was that of the establishment of the *Kingdom of God* on the earth.¹⁷³ There is no difference between Matthew's use of the term *Kingdom of heaven* and

¹⁷⁰ Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:14-21

¹⁷¹ for examples: Matthew 24:24; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1

¹⁷² Matthew 24:23-51

¹⁷³ Compare Mark 1:14, 15 to Matthew 24:14, Daniel 2:44; 7:13-28, Zechariah 14:1, and Revelation 5:9, 10; 11:15; 19:11-21; 20:1-6.

Mark's use of the term *Kingdom of God*. Both mean the same thing.

John Bright, formerly the Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and the Interpretation of the Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, wrote this in his book *The Kingdom of God*:

...The concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, *the total message of the Bible*....To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to *the very heart of the Bible's gospel of salvation*.¹⁷⁴

He continues in the development of this idea throughout the book to demonstrate that this was not a theological concept that *gradually* developed in Israel's religion but was there from the very beginning.

Indeed, the patriarch Abraham, who was the grandfather of the man Israel (from whom the 12 tribes of Israel came), looked forward to the coming of that Kingdom.¹⁷⁵ It is this hope and expectation upon which the *promises of God* are based and considered the great *Christian* hope.¹⁷⁶ Genesis 15 is the record of God's giving to Abraham both His promise and oath.

It can be demonstrated, as well, that the original creation was God's action to establish the *place* where the Kingdom will exist and the characters who would be the progenitors of those who will inherit it.¹⁷⁷ One must also consider

¹⁷⁴ Nashville: Abingdon Press; 1953; p. 7 (emphasis added)

¹⁷⁵ See Hebrews 11:8-10 and Revelation 21:1-4.

¹⁷⁶ Compare Genesis 12:1-5; 15:1-21 to Hebrews 6:13-20 and Galatians 3:26-29.

¹⁷⁷ Consider Genesis 1:26-28 as one indicator. Such a concept would be consistent with the assertion by Jesus Christ that God has

statements by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul regarding how one ultimately gains entrance into the Kingdom: the flesh-and-blood human being must be changed to eternal, self-sustaining spirit by a totally new birth.¹⁷⁸ So, being part of the Kingdom of God is not just being a subject of God's government; it is also becoming part of the very family of God.¹⁷⁹

prepared the Kingdom of God *from the foundation of the world* (Matthew 25:34).

¹⁷⁸ John 3:3-8 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

¹⁷⁹ Genesis 1:26, Ephesians 1:1-14, Hebrews 2, 1 John 3:1-3

The Nature of Mankind

One of the most misunderstood revelations about God's creation is focused on *man*. Even though scripture reveals that man was created from clods of earth, breathed into in order to jump-start his life processes, and caused to become a living, breathing being capable of dying and returning to the dust,¹⁸⁰ many religions (including Traditional Christianity) consider man to be an *immortal* creature that *cannot – will not – die*. In doing this, they demonstrate either a gross misunderstanding of the scriptural meaning of *death* – both the *first* and *second* deaths¹⁸¹ – or a gross perversion of the revelation of scripture regarding what man is and what his potential is.

One example of this concept, among many similar concepts, is found in the following quote:

...[Man's] soul, *the real person*, is immortal. *It will never cease to be.*

Man is twofold in nature. He is both spirit and body. Man is not a body and has a soul. *He is a soul and has a body.* The body is mortal; the soul is immortal.¹⁸²

So, the most generally accepted concept is that *the real person is* an *immortal soul* that is temporarily housed in a body of flesh. In some religious concepts of the *transmi-*

¹⁸⁰ Genesis 2:7; 3:19-24

¹⁸¹ Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 20:6

¹⁸² Hobbs, p. 51 (emphases added)

gration of souls, the soul is said to travel through time inhabiting many different types of bodies – including plants, animals, and stones. According to Plato, this reincarnation process will continue for 10,000 years until the soul is able to reclaim its original state in the heavens. That concept, of necessity, changes God’s revealed meaning of **death** from being a total absence of life to being merely a severed relationship between man and God. That, on its face, is a gross perversion of God’s revelation.

Consider the following statement by Norman H. Snaith, former Tutor in Old Testament Literature at Wesley College (Methodist) at Leeds in the United Kingdom:

...There is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word “soul” should be thought of as that which survives death. ...If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the human soul is held to be a *Christian* doctrine, then it should be realized that it is **not** a *biblical* doctrine. The biblical doctrine is of a resurrection life for those who “have the Spirit” and are “in Christ”....¹⁸³

It is apparent, then, that Snaith would not agree with the doctrinal statement quoted above – or with the revision of what constitutes **death**.

Some would ask: “What about the New Testament?” John Short, a minister who was formerly the pastor of Richmond Hill Congregational Church in Bournemouth, England, wrote this in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:51-58:

¹⁸³ “The Language of the Old Testament,” *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press; vol. 1, 1952); p. 230 (emphases added)

The Christian doctrine is not one of *immortality* but of *resurrection*. We shall do well to get this point clear. As expounded by the Apostle Paul...man's hope for survival [of death] depends not on the *inherent immortality of his soul*, but on the act of God. His immortality is involved in his *resurrection* [from the dead], not his resurrection in his immortality. *There is nothing in Paul's writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is inherently immortal.*¹⁸⁴

Indeed, Ezekiel 18:4, 20 says that the *soul* that sins shall *die* – not live forever in any kind of condition...especially not burning forever and ever in a tormenting hellfire. The Hebrew word translated into the English word *soul* is *nephesh*. This word does not imply any aspect of immortality. It simply means “a living, breathing creature.” It is capable of being totally devoid of life. No cow has ever had a severed relationship (that is, spiritual death) with God.

We conclude, therefore, that man is a *temporary being* that is subject to a total absence of life at death because there is nothing *inherently* (that is, belonging to the essential nature or constitution of a thing) immortal about him. As Short explained, whatever *immortality* that might come upon man after death will come by the direct action by God Himself in a *restoration to life*, rather than by an *automatic* consequence or subsequence of the cessation of the so-called “animal life principle” of the human body whereby the supposed immortal soul merely takes it leave and goes to its eternal reward in heaven or hell (or, in the case of various other religious thoughts, *reincarnated* in another body of some sort).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.; vol. 10; p. 253 (emphases added)

God's Original Plan for Mankind

Genesis 1:26, 27 says that Elohim decided to create man in their *image* (Hebrew = *tselem*). In that context, man was to be a *resemblance* of Elohim – a *representative figure*. Initially, man was to be merely an *image* of God, not “God” in fact. The same word is used for the term *idol*, but Elohim was not making an *idol* of themselves. First of all, man was cast in the *form of God*¹⁸⁵ – which means that man’s *outward figure* is the same as Elohim’s (the head, arms, torso, legs, feet, et cetera). Secondly, in that *form*, man was a representative figure of God – a *typical example* (a type or shadow) of a group, class, or quality of creature that will subsequently come into existence. What does that mean?

Simply this: Man became a virtual God (notice the various creative and authoritative characteristics given to him in Genesis 1:28). While all the other creatures were made to be temporary, living, breathing creatures (Hebrew = *nephesh*) that would live, reproduce after their kinds, die, and return to the earth out of which they were made,¹⁸⁶ they were not created in Elohim’s image nor given creative abilities and rulership over anything. Man was made to be much more than a creature of the dust. *Nephesh* includes man in his representative figure. It is important to recognize that Elohim created man in the *form* of a virtual God – that is, man was given all the necessary components by which he ultimately could *become formally* recognized as the *God-kind* and admitted into the Elohim family. It is fundamentally revealed in Genesis 1:26 that Elohim is *in the process* of creating man after the Elohim *kind*. *Virtual* means that man would be, in his fundamental nature or quality and intended purpose, a *potential* member of the

¹⁸⁵ Genesis 2:7

¹⁸⁶ Psalm 104:21-30, Ecclesiastes 3:20

Elohim family (that is, one capable of *actually becoming* a member). How is this to be realized?

Ephesians 1:3-14 is Paul's inspired record of God's original plan for mankind – just as Genesis 1:26 was the inspired revelation given to Moses and John 3:3-8 was provided by Jesus Christ. There are several key pieces of information provided by Paul:

1. The Elohim family constructed their plan before the creation of the orderly universe (v. 4);
2. They determined that man was to be chosen for admission into the Elohim family through Jesus Christ (vv. 4- 7);
3. Their will (desire; desired outcome) was for man to be holy, blameless, and loving creatures (v. 4);
4. Man would be *adopted* as children of God through Jesus Christ – *made acceptable* as members of Elohim through Jesus Christ (vv. 6, 7); and
5. Man would be taught God's thoughts and ways and, upon acceptance and belief of God's truth and plan, would be given a down-payment guarantee that he would be redeemed (freed from sin and *finiteness*) from the grave by a resurrection from the dead and given the eternal body necessary to live forever in the Elohim family (vv. 9-14).

Realize that all of this was determined before Elohim began the creation described in Genesis 1:1. It would fol-

low, then, that Genesis 1:26 is the *beginning* of the execution of their plan. That being the case, man was to be a creature of the dust for a pre-determined period of time in order to be taught God's thoughts and ways through the Lord God – the member of Elohim who later had to become Jesus Christ in order to be sacrificed for man's disqualifying actions.¹⁸⁷ When that period of time had run its course and man had learned what he was supposed to learn, then Elohim would take the next step and move him from the *virtual* to the *actual* by changing his *image* from flesh to spirit.¹⁸⁸

According to this plan, it would be necessary for the *physical* body of man to cease to function – even if for the duration of the twinkling of an eye – in order for the *spirit* body to be given to him.¹⁸⁹ Consider Paul's discussion of the two types of bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:46-54 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Second Corinthians 5:8 means that the Christian actually *prefers* to have the spirit body rather than the temporary body of flesh – not that he will instantly go to heaven when he dies. He would gladly give up the fleshly body in order to be present with the Lord and accomplishing the intent of Elohim's plan.

God's Definition of Death

There is a gross misunderstanding about the Lord God's warning in Genesis 2:15-17 that eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would result in *death*. The doctrine of the immortal soul cited above skews the definition of *death* as the Lord God intended it in that warning. Consider what the following quote suggests in that regard:

¹⁸⁷ Read Hebrews 10:1-10 with that thought in mind (note v. 5).

¹⁸⁸ See 1 Corinthians 15:35-54, Romans 8:11-17, Hebrews 2:1-13; 9:27, and 1 John 3:1-3.

¹⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:52

It should be noted that man was made to live forever. It was after he had sinned that he became subject to death. However, for that reason man's animal principle of life shall cease; his body shall return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). But his soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be.¹⁹⁰

Pay very close attention to the language and logic used there. According to this explanation, man was created to live forever – made twofold in nature as an *immortal soul placed into a body of flesh*. The immortal soul is the *real person*. The body is merely the *animal principle of life*. At this point, it appears that we are to believe that *both* the soul and the body were originally *immortal*. Neither the body nor the soul was capable of *dying*. It was only after man *sinned* that the *body* became capable of dying and returning to its dust; the *soul* was not subsequently reduced to a *mortal* quality. Since the *immortal soul* is the *real person* and will never cease to be, it now becomes necessary to construct a definition by which that immortal soul can actually *die* in some manner or another as a consequence of its sin. After all, the body is considered to be merely the *animal principle of life* and merely serves the function of a *house* for the real person. What real penalty has the immortal soul suffered by losing the house in which it lives? This doctrine seems to suggest that the soul is able to function as a sentient being outside of and separate from the physical body.

Here's how they solved the conundrum:

When man sinned he was separated from God. The fellowship was broken; the [spir-

¹⁹⁰ Hobbs; p. 51

itual] image was destroyed. Adam and Eve died *physically* many years later [and under this concept, the *real* Adam and Eve immediately went either to heaven or hell upon the death of their physical bodies]. However, the moment that they chose Satan's will instead of God's will, *they died spiritually*. They were no longer innocent. Certainly they were not righteous. They were sinners lost from God.

They were driven from God's presence, for a holy God cannot condone sin. Their sin had separated them and their God.¹⁹¹

So, they find it necessary to change the intended definition of *death* to this: "broken fellowship; separation from God; spiritual separation; lost from God." The dictionary definition of *die* and *death* includes such expressions as *end of life*, *loss of life*, *destruction*, and *extinction*. But, what does the word used by the Lord God, and translated into the English word *die*, mean in its context in Genesis 2:15-17?

In 1 Corinthians 15:46-54, Paul states that the *natural body* (the *earthly body* in v. 49) came *first* and the *spiritual body* (the *image of the heavenly* in v. 49) **will come later**. Having already shown in vv. 36, 37 that the physical body must *die in order to be made alive again* as a **different body**, he then shows that flesh-and-blood (the earthly body) cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (v. 50) unless it undergoes a significant change in composition. The change from flesh to spirit will not occur **until the return of Jesus Christ** – at which time the *mortal* will **put on immortality** (vv. 52-54). If you have to **put on** immortality, then you do not already possess it. Paul's concept is based on what

¹⁹¹ Ibid.; p. 54

Jesus Christ revealed to Nicodemus in John 3:3-8: In order for a human's life to be extended into eternity, he *must be born again*. That being the scriptural revelation, man *cannot* be *twofold* in nature: a body consisting of the animal principle of life and an immortal soul that is the real person! There is nothing *inherently immortal* in the human life.

Ecclesiastes 3:18-21 reveals that man has no advantage over the animals. They die a common death. They have one breath (Hebrew = *ruach* – does not describe anything that survives the death of a living, breathing creature). They return to the dust out of which they were created. However, scripture does not reveal that the animals have the prospect of a resurrection from the dead or receiving a new spirit body by resurrection. Ecclesiastes 9:10 reveals that there is no work, device, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave. No ability to feel. No awareness. Nothing that smacks of *life*. Bildad the Shuite said as much in Job 8:8-22. Job showed the temporary nature of man in Job 13:19 through Job 14. He showed that the resurrection from death to life will not occur "...til the heavens be no more..." (14:10-12). At that time, he will live again only when God calls him forth out of the grave (vv. 14, 15). So, it should be evident that the Lord God did not intend to say that *death* would constitute a *spiritual* separation between God and man – a loss of fellowship. This is where we learn the difference between the *death* mentioned in Hebrews 9:27 and the *second death* mentioned in Revelation 20:6.

Genesis 3:22-24 demonstrates that humans do not possess inherent immortality in any shape, form, or fashion. The Lord God's concern with the prospect of man's gaining access to the tree of life and being able to "...live forever..." should be a signal to the aware reader that the tree of life served a different purpose for mankind relative to *gaining immortality*. In this act, the Lord God simply cut off man's access to immortality and eternal life that are

symbolized in the tree of life. Now man's *physical death* gained new significance: *Without God's personal intervention, man would **never** have life of any kind beyond his dust-to-dust composition* (see v. 19).

Man's *physical* ("earthly") body was never intended to live forever; God had another type of body planned for man beyond his present physical, electro-chemical existence that will be the exact type of body as His own.¹⁹² This body will be composed of powerful, self-sustaining, eternal spirit.¹⁹³ How will this be accomplished?

God has planned at least two resurrections from the dead: one at the return of Jesus Christ¹⁹⁴ and one after the 1,000-year Kingdom period.¹⁹⁵ Those who are the *first* to qualify for a change from flesh to spirit will be changed at the return of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁶ Hebrews 11:39, 40 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 reveal that all the faithful saints from man's original creation to the return of Jesus Christ will receive this reward *at the same time* – not *separately* as they individually die. That is why Jesus Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:13 that no one but Jesus Christ has ever ascended to heaven (along with the fact that *heaven* is not the reward of the saved).¹⁹⁷

Those who survive the tribulations and warfare of the last days – who are ruled over by Jesus Christ and the saints – will be the *second* group to have opportunity to qualify for the change.¹⁹⁸ They will be subject to the *second death* if they willingly rebel and choose to be incorrigible. It has not been made clear exactly when their change will come

¹⁹² Daniel 12:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-4, 1 John 3:1-3

¹⁹³ See John 5:25, 26, Romans 8:14-17, and Revelation 1:12-16.

¹⁹⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54

¹⁹⁵ Revelation 20:5, 11-13

¹⁹⁶ Read carefully 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 and James 1:18.

¹⁹⁷ See also Acts 2:25-36. Even *David* is not in heaven.

¹⁹⁸ See Zechariah 14:16 and Isaiah 2:1-5.

during that 1,000-year period – perhaps it will be part of the second resurrection at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom.

Those resurrected to life at the end of the Kingdom period will be raised in their original human form.¹⁹⁹ They represent the vast numbers of humans who have never had the opportunity to know God’s true plan for mankind and accept or reject it. Some have been ignorant of it simply by the circumstances into which they were born and raised. Some have been ignorant of it because of having been deceived by false religions and philosophies. *All of them* have been ignorant of it because God did not choose, for whatever unknown reason, to reveal it to them during their lifetimes.²⁰⁰ After a period of spiritual remediation, which will include instruction and time to practice living according to God’s thoughts and ways,²⁰¹ those who qualify for the change will be changed, and those who willingly rebel and choose to be incorrigible will be subject to the ***second death***.²⁰² That ***second death*** is the kind of death about which Adam was warned because it involves the *complete and utter annihilation* of the individual.²⁰³ If God does not intervene through Jesus Christ, then the individual’s access to the tree of life will not be restored.²⁰⁴ It is one thing to die a normal, physical death, but it is quite another to die a death from which there will ***never*** be the prospect of being recovered.

The Independent Mind

Job 32:8 says that there is “...a *spirit* in man...” That statement is by no means a confirmation of the presence of

¹⁹⁹ See the example given in Ezekiel 37.

²⁰⁰ John 6:44, 45

²⁰¹ Revelation 20:12, 13

²⁰² Revelation 20:14, 15

²⁰³ Consider the warning in Malachi 4:1-3.

²⁰⁴ Read Matthew 24:22 and Romans 6:23.

an immortal soul. The Hebrew word translated into English as *spirit* is *ruach*. While in many instances it means “wind” or “breath,” in this instance it means “the *mind power* that invests man with various abilities – especially with the ability to understand, plan, and gain wisdom.” It is that mind power that *ceases* when the human dies.²⁰⁵ It does not survive the death of the body in the way the immortal soul is said to survive it. The *mind* is what identifies *you* as a unique being. In it are stored all of your unique personal characteristics and thoughts and deeds. It is the record or history of your life that is saved and preserved by God for being able to identify your remains and restore you personally to life after death – kind of like your “black box.” God uses its contents to judge you.²⁰⁶

God never intended to control man’s thoughts and ways like an automaton or robot. He did not make man a being like the animals, which have habits and traits imprinted into their lives that they cannot move apart from. For example: Barn swallows will always act like barn swallows instead of woodpeckers. Sure, they might *learn* a few things as individual barn swallows, but not to the point that they will ever be other than barn swallows. The human, on the other hand, has the capacity to think, plan, create, and bring into existence things that were not originally part and parcel to their environments – to adapt to a multitude of different situations. While it is true that they cannot, on their own, move beyond being a human, they still have the capacity to change numerous aspects of their thoughts and ways and environments instead of living according to an imprinted set of characteristics (*instinct*) like the animals.

If being an *image* of God has any merit, then, of necessity, the human must have an *independent mind* by which to make its own choices and to pursue its own curiosities

²⁰⁵ Ecclesiastes 9:10

²⁰⁶ See Romans 12:2 and 1 Peter 4:17.

and plans. God was never threatened by the creation of an independent mind in mankind. **But** – and this is an extremely important exception – it has been God’s *will* (desired outcome) that man’s mind will be in conformity with His own: holy, blameless, loving.²⁰⁷ Each individual will be held accountable for making the conscious decision to be in conformity to God’s thoughts and ways. Those who do not willingly do so eventually will be destroyed.

The Carnal Mind

Adam and Eve were created with neutral minds. Initially, they did not know good or evil. What has emanated from their choice to disobey the Lord God’s command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has been called the *carnal mind*. The Lord God put Adam to two tests: (a) to obey the command to eat from all the trees in the Garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and (b) naming the animals.²⁰⁸ The first would test his obedience to a direct command in the face of a dire consequence; the second would test his creative abilities and choices with no consequence. There was no *Holy Spirit* used to influence Adam’s and Eve’s decision-making processes.²⁰⁹ The choices they made were made strictly from the *uninfluenced*, independent mind of the human. This absence of the influence of the Holy Spirit marks the difference between the carnal mind and the spiritual mind.

Paul says that those who are not influenced by the Holy Spirit will follow their basic *human* thoughts and ways – and that way only leads to death because of two important reasons: (a) God is treated as an enemy and (b) the carnal

²⁰⁷ Isaiah 55:8, 9, Ephesians 1:4, and Philippians 2:5-13

²⁰⁸ Genesis 2:15-20

²⁰⁹ Read John 14:15-17; 15:26, 27; 16:13-15, Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9-14, and 1 Corinthians 2.

mind is not subject to the law (command) of God and, in fact, cannot be as long as it seeks its own way.²¹⁰ Only those who have the influence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and minds are considered to be the children of God through Jesus Christ (v. 9). It is only through the influence of the Holy Spirit that man will be able to know, understand, and follow the thoughts and ways of God. Any other path of life – even a *seemingly* religious, spiritual life – is considered to be enmity against God.²¹¹ While Satan attempts to influence the human mind,²¹² the independent human mind can choose not to yield to that influence. Therefore, *Satan is not the author of the carnal mind* – but...he certainly attempts to influence it in its opposition to God.²¹³

Sin

Sin is defined by the Bible as being the transgression of God's law.²¹⁴ Paul says that there is no sin charged against man where there is no law.²¹⁵ Many use Paul's argument in Romans 5 to say that there was no law before it was codified for the nation Israel – which, by some accounts, was over 2,500 years after the creation of man. It should be realized, however, that God had at least one law that initially drove His relationship with man.²¹⁶ Man's thoughts and ways are measured against God's.²¹⁷ By what standard would God have concluded Adam, Eve, Cain, and the entire pre-flood world under *sin* if there was no law before the Ten Commandments were given to Israel? Paul concludes

²¹⁰ Romans 8:5-8

²¹¹ See, for example, Matthew 7:21-23 and 15:1-9.

²¹² 2 Corinthians 4:1-7, Ephesians 2:2, and Revelation 12:9

²¹³ See Genesis 3:1-5.

²¹⁴ 1 John 3:4

²¹⁵ Romans 5:13

²¹⁶ Genesis 2:15-17

²¹⁷ Isaiah 55:8, 9

in Romans 6:23 that the wages of *sin* – the transgression of God’s law – is *death*, which is exactly what the Lord God warned Adam about in Genesis 2:15-17.²¹⁸

God’s Plan of Salvation

We have shown aspects of God’s plan of salvation above in the section on the annual holy days (pp. 19-24) and in the section on God’s original plan for mankind (pp. 28, 29). Beyond that, it is necessary to understand what drives the necessity of *salvation* – and...what actually constitutes *salvation* (being “saved”).

If *sin* brings about the consequence of *death* – and “...**All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God...**”²¹⁹ – then the first sin you commit disqualifies you from being able to move from the flesh to spirit at the time set by God.²²⁰ It was not Elohim’s purpose to lose *everything* they created.²²¹ When rightly understood, *salvation* is not something that comes only to mankind. Indeed, all of creation is the object of God’s plan of salvation because it was subjected to *vanity* and the *bondage of corruption* because of sin.²²² This, no doubt, would include rebellious angels.²²³ It should be understood, therefore, that *all of creation* will, no doubt, be ultimately destroyed if *all of human-kind* is ultimately destroyed. Everything and everybody opposed to God’s will and purpose will be destroyed.

That said, has *salvation* of any kind already occurred? No. If man is not an immortal soul (or does not have one) – and he goes to the grave to wait for his change to come beginning with the return of Jesus Christ – then no Chris-

²¹⁸ Read carefully Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 10:1-21.

²¹⁹ Romans 3:23; 6:23 and 1 John 1:6-10

²²⁰ Ephesians 1:10

²²¹ John 3:16-19

²²² Romans 8:19-25, Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20

²²³ 1 Peter 3:18-22

tian has ascended to heaven at the point of death. As long as the Christian is in the flesh, he must *endure in his faith* lest he fall away and have no sacrifice available for him thereafter.²²⁴

The act of confessing one's sins, professing faith in Jesus Christ, being baptized, and receiving God's Holy Spirit does not in and of itself *save* you. It puts you on the path *toward* salvation. From that point on, God is interested in your ability to endure in the faith through all the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortune in life.²²⁵ As long as you endure, you are as good as "saved," but it is not yet an accomplished fact.²²⁶ All of that is the *reconciliation* process and part of the *ministry of reconciliation* God has provided mankind through Jesus Christ.²²⁷

Even before Elohim created anything at all, it was decided that salvation would be through Jesus Christ.²²⁸ The comment Paul makes in Ephesians 1:4 about man being *chosen in Christ* suggests two things: (a) Elohim knew that giving man an independent mind presented the possibility that man could make choices that were in opposition to Elohim's plan and will, and (b) if he made such choices, man would need a *savior* (note the use of the term *Christ* – a *savior* term) to deliver him from the ultimate consequence of such acts. It is in that sense that we will have been *made acceptable to God the Father in Jesus Christ* (v. 6-8) in order to qualify us for the change from flesh to spirit.²²⁹

So, *salvation* is a gracious gift God has made available to mankind through faith in Jesus Christ. It is not deserved, cannot be earned, and cannot be repaid. That faith must

²²⁴ Matthew 24:13, John 15:1-11, Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27

²²⁵ Revelation 12:11

²²⁶ Romans 8:23, 24

²²⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

²²⁸ See also Philippians 2:5-11.

²²⁹ See also Colossians 1:12-23 and Ephesians 2:1-10.

produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit²³⁰ and the works which are consistent with God's thoughts and ways.²³¹ Jesus Christ, then, is responsible for bringing to salvation all whom God the Father draws to Him.²³² It is with this in mind that we must understand the process of salvation that is realized through three stages: *regeneration*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*. Let's understand this process properly – according to biblical revelation.

Regeneration, Sanctification, and Glorification

Regeneration, *sanctification*, and *glorification* are generally accepted as the three stages of the *salvation process*. The problem that occurs with this concept is that most adherents consider *regeneration* to be the point at which one is *born again*. While there can be agreement with the idea that one must be regenerated, sanctified, and glorified in order for the salvation process to be complete, we cannot agree with the idea that *regeneration* constitutes being *born again* – no more than *sanctification* does. How, then, shall this be explained?

We have already seen that those not *in Christ* are not candidates for salvation.²³³ The person who is drawn to Christ by the Father will begin to have a spiritual awareness of the difference between the sinful life and the spiritual life.²³⁴ This is called *prevenient grace* – God's divine grace that operates on the human will prior to his turning to God. *Prevenient* means that it is *antecedent* (it comes in advance) or *anticipatory* (it is provided beforehand). The *firstfruits in Christ* receive it before other groups receive

²³⁰ Galatians 5:22-25

²³¹ See also Ephesians 2:10 and James 2:14-28.

²³² John 6:37-44; 10:1-18, Acts 4:10-12, Hebrews 2:1-13

²³³ Romans 8:9

²³⁴ John 6:44

it.²³⁵ There is a caution to which we must pay attention: man can develop various religious opinions and systems without prevenient grace,²³⁶ but they do not represent the types of religion that worship the Father in spirit and in truth.²³⁷

Once “called” into God’s truth, the individual begins a process of *regeneration*. This process involves changing his mind from a *carnal* mind to a *spiritual* mind.²³⁸ This is *spiritual conversion*. It is not completed in one fell swoop of divine fiat or divine magic. When the individual makes his profession of faith in Jesus Christ, accepts His sacrifice for his sins, and sets his heart and mind to turn away from the carnal way of life, he becomes a *new creation*, which is equivalent to saying that God starts over with him as though he never sinned at all.²³⁹ He begins a process of spiritual education in God’s thoughts and ways. He has not yet been *born again* because that event is part of his eventual *glorification*. His new spiritual mind puts him on the path to full reconciliation and the eventual *new birth* because the educational process makes him more aware of how to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ by developing the mind of Jesus Christ.²⁴⁰

Once baptized, God gives to the individual the gift of His Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands by God’s true ministry.²⁴¹ This gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s way of identifying those who belong to Him through Jesus Christ.²⁴² This

²³⁵ Compare Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, James 1:18, and Revelation 14:4; also, remember the discussion above about the meaning of God’s holy days.

²³⁶ See Matthew 7:21-23.

²³⁷ John 4:23, 24

²³⁸ Compare Romans 8:1-8; 12:2 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

²³⁹ Compare Acts 2:38, Romans 6, and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:16, Ephesians 4:11-16, Philippians 2:5, 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, and 2 Peter 1:3-12

²⁴¹ Compare Acts 2:38 to Acts 8:14-17; 9:17, 18; 10:44-48, and 19:1-6.

²⁴² Romans 8:9-16

partial gift of the Holy Spirit is called an *earnest* or *first installment* or *guarantee* or *down-payment*.²⁴³ It *guarantees* that God will raise that individual from the grave at the return of Jesus Christ – or change him from flesh to spirit.²⁴⁴ It is with the gift of the Holy Spirit that one is *sanctified* – set free from sin (forgiven and justified) and made holy.²⁴⁵ Being *justified* means that God has forgiven the individual to the point that He looks upon him as though he has never, ever sinned at all. Once the individual has been delivered by God through Jesus Christ to this condition, he must endure in that *new creation* state until the day he dies or until the return of Jesus Christ.²⁴⁶ Having been *regenerated* and *sanctified* does not mean that the individual has received the *new birth*. The new birth makes it *impossible* for the regenerated, sanctified individual to ever die the *second death* from which there is no recovery. What does this mean?

In John 3:3-8, Jesus explained to Nicodemus that one must receive a totally new birth in order to enter into the Kingdom of God. That new birth will make the individual like the wind (v. 8). Jesus called that process being *born again* (vv. 3, 7). Nicodemus understood what Jesus was saying because he asked if a man was to *re-enter his mother's womb* in order to be *reborn* (v. 4). Paul, taking his cue from Jesus Christ, wrote that flesh-and-blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God but must be *changed*: the *mortal* must ***put on immortality***; the *corruptible* must ***put on incorruptibility***. He showed that such a process will not occur until the return of Jesus Christ.²⁴⁷ From the begin-

²⁴³ 2 Corinthians 5:5, Ephesians 1:13, 14

²⁴⁴ Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

²⁴⁵ John 17:11, 17, Romans 6:6-23, Ephesians 5:25, 26, 1

Thessalonians 5:23, Hebrews 2:11; 10:10, 14, Jude 1

²⁴⁶ Matthew 24:13, John 15:1-17, Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27; 2 Peter 3:18

²⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

ning of this present Adamic world until Jesus Christ returns, those who are counted as *firstfruits* will undergo that change *together*.²⁴⁸ That process is called *glorification*. *Glorification* comes with the redemption of the body.²⁴⁹ What does *redemption* mean in this context?

The Greek word rendered *redemption* in English is *apolutrosis*. The *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Greek/English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines it thus: “fig., of the release fr[om] *sin* and *finiteness* that comes through Christ.”²⁵⁰ Man is *finite* – having a *limited* nature or existence and being *incapable* of perpetuating himself beyond his death.²⁵¹ In other words, once you are *born again* into the spirit body, you will never, ever again be subject to sin or *finiteness*.

When Jesus Christ asked the Father to “...*glorify* me with your own self with the *glory* which I had with you before the world was...,”²⁵² He was asking the Father to return Him to His original *infinite* state – as expressed in John 5:26, one of eternal, self-sustaining spirit life possessed of *unlimited* ability to know and learn (*omniscience*), *unlimited* ability to create and control (*omnipotence*), and *unlimited* ability to be where He wants to be at the speed of thought (*omnipresence*). The *regenerated, sanctified* individual has the *potential* to be changed into the very image of God Himself through *glorification* and to have all of those same unlimited attributes.²⁵³

It is when the individual has received the *glorification* that he will be “saved.” Until that time, there still exists the possibility that he can change his mind, chuck it all, and be

²⁴⁸ Hebrews 11:39, 40

²⁴⁹ Romans 8:23, Ephesians 1:14

²⁵⁰ p. 95 (emphasis added)

²⁵¹ Genesis 6:3, Job 14:1-5

²⁵² John 17:5 (emphasis added)

²⁵³ Compare Genesis 1:26 to Psalm 17:14, 15, Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:10, and 1 John 3:1-3.

delivered over to the second death.²⁵⁴ That possibility does not equate itself with *salvation*. *Salvation* is equated with having been delivered from sin ***and finiteness***.²⁵⁵ To teach God's word any other way is to expose one's spiritual ignorance of God's revelation.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26, 27

²⁵⁵ See Daniel 12:3.

²⁵⁶ John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

The Basic Doctrines of Jesus Christ

Hebrews 6:1, 2 reveals seven basic doctrines of Jesus Christ that should be studied, understood, and practiced by professing Christians. Those doctrines are as follows:

1. Repentance from dead works;
2. Faith toward God;
3. Baptisms;
4. The laying on of hands;
5. Resurrection of the dead;
6. Eternal judgment; and
7. Spiritual maturity (completeness).

What follows is a brief discussion of each doctrine. For a fuller discussion of these doctrines, you can request our 12-lesson *Bible Study Course*, which is sent free of charge with no obligation on your part to join anything or to purchase anything. You will also be sent literature that will serve as additional reference sources for the information contained in the Course.

Repentance From Dead Works

Repentance is basically defined as “changing one’s mind,” but is scripturally applied to “turning from sin and resolving to change one’s life.” The basic command is found in Acts 2:38, and the basic definition is found in Romans 12:2. It is vitally necessary for the repentant per-

son to replace the sinful mind with the spiritual, righteous mind.²⁵⁷

Faith Toward God

Faith is defined simply in Hebrews 11:1 as “confident assurance”: “...the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen.” *The Jerusalem Bible* translates that verse as follows: “Only faith can *guarantee* the blessings we hope for, or *prove* the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen” (emphasis added). So, the faith of the true Christian is not mere hope; it is ***belief with absolute certainty***.²⁵⁸

Adam Clarke’s explanation of this verse certainly should arouse one’s interest in what is actually required of the true Christian – especially in light of Paul’s assertion in Hebrews 11:6: “But *without faith* it is ***impossible*** to please God: because whoever comes to God ***must believe*** that He exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him” (emphases added). Here is Clarke’s explanation:

“Faith is the subsistence of things hoped for, the demonstration of things not seen.” The word *hypostasis*, which we translate *substance*, signifies “subsistence,” that which becomes *a foundation for another thing to stand on*. And *elenchos* (evidence) signifies such a “conviction” as is produced in the mind by the “demonstration” of a problem, after which demonstration *no doubt can remain*, because we see from it that *the thing is, that it cannot but be, and that it cannot be*

²⁵⁷ 2 Peter 3:18, Galatians 5:13-26

²⁵⁸ See Paul’s explanation of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4:9-25 and Galatians 3.

otherwise than as it is and is proved to be. ...Elenchos is defined by logicians, “A demonstration of the certainty of a thing by sure arguments and indubitable reasons.”²⁵⁹

Such is the strength of Paul’s argument in Romans 1:18-20 about God’s revelation of Himself, His power, and the righteousness by which mankind is expected to live.²⁶⁰ God’s *demonstration* of these things was designed to erase any doubt, to show that these things actually exist, and that they cannot be other than what God has represented them to be. *Faith*, in that context, is what is necessary in order to please God and to be in unity with His plan and purpose.

Just so you will understand: This entire presentation of *A Statement of Beliefs* is, in fact and intent, a *demonstration* of God’s revealed truth through numerous examples, definitions, explanations, and scriptures.²⁶¹ Such is the commission of God’s True Church as the “...pillar and ground of the truth.”²⁶²

Baptisms

It should be noteworthy that *baptisms* is a plural term. It is from the Greek term *baptize*, which means “complete immersion.” There are three types of baptisms (complete immersions) mentioned in the scriptures: baptism with *water*, baptism with *Spirit*, and baptism with *fire*. According to Christ’s own words, it is **mandatory** for the believer to be baptized with water and Spirit.²⁶³ It is not enough to simply “name the name of Jesus Christ on your lips” and be

²⁵⁹ *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967); p. 1275 (emphasis added)

²⁶⁰ See also Ephesians 1:4.

²⁶¹ See Isaiah 28:9, 10 and 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

²⁶² 1 Timothy 3:15 (See also John 4:23, 24.)

²⁶³ John 3:5

“saved” (you can request our book *There is More to Salvation Than Meets the Eye* for a more exhaustive discussion on the subject). The incorrigibly wicked ultimately will be baptized with the fires of the lake of fire and destroyed.²⁶⁴

Jesus’ description in John 3:5 is that of a *begettal process*: first, through water baptism; then, through the gift of the Holy Spirit.²⁶⁵ Paul describes this process in Romans 6 – which is a description of a *symbolic death, burial, and resurrection*. Here is what Paul describes:

1. The repentant individual is “...baptized into [Christ’s] death...” (v. 3), which assumes that the individual *symbolically dies* to his old life and is *symbolically buried* with Jesus Christ (vv. 4, 6, 7; 8:12, 13));

2. That *symbolic death*, therefore, anticipates a *symbolic resurrection* to a new life (vv. 4, 5, 8-12; 2 Corinthians 5:17) in which the individual is led by the Holy Spirit (8:1-11) – which places him in the position to be *adopted* (8:23) as a son of God through Jesus Christ with all the rights and privileges that Jesus Christ enjoys as the “...only begotten Son of God....”²⁶⁶

3. Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is a *partial* empowerment with the spirit with which the individual ultimately will be *fully* clothed.²⁶⁷ It is God’s *guarantee* that He

²⁶⁴ Revelation 20:14, 15

²⁶⁵ Acts 1:5; 2:38

²⁶⁶ John 1:14, Ephesians 1:3-14, Hebrews 2:5-13, Romans 8:15-17, and Galatians 3:26-29

²⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:9, 10; 2 Corinthians 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:1-3

will raise the Christian from the dead with new, powerful bodies composed of eternal, self-sustaining spirit (Ephesians 1:14 is to be understood as God's *guarantee* to free us from *sin* and *finiteness* – our present, *limited*, physical existence as described in scriptures like Job 14:1-12). That experience is anticipated in another part of the definition of baptism: “thorough saturation.”

All of this presupposes that the repentant individual is committed to this new life for the remainder of his temporary, limited, physical existence – and desires to have the fullness of this life in the Spirit throughout the eternity ahead. If he does not endure and overcome sin through the power of the Holy Spirit which God has provided, then he will not be given the ultimate “baptism” with the Spirit – which is the *full immersion* and *complete saturation* (baptism) into that great spirit body.²⁶⁸

The “baptism with fire” serves two distinct purposes – neither of which should be the goal of those who seek the great salvation which Jesus Christ is bringing.²⁶⁹ Notice in Matthew 3:11-13 that there are two distinct aspects of the “baptism with fire”: (a) there is the aspect of *purging* in order to cleanse something and (b) there is the aspect of *destroying* in order to be rid of something.²⁷⁰

Revelation 3:14-19 is a description of the *purging fire* that is executed upon those true Christians who begin to be less than they should be in Jesus Christ. This is not a literal fire; *fire*, in this sense, is a symbolic term meant to express the kind of action God will take in order to insure that those who are delivered from sin through Jesus Christ are reminded about His expectations of them. “Gold tried by

²⁶⁸ Matthew 24:13; John 8:31, 32; 15:1-8, Hebrews 6:4-8

²⁶⁹ Matthew 3:11-13

²⁷⁰ See also Luke 12:49-53.

fire” reminds those lax Christians about the process that gold goes through in order to become more purified and, therefore, more valuable. In the process, the impurities are exposed and skimmed off – leaving gold that is practically 100% pure. You can see this same imagery of *purging* in Jesus’ comments in John 15:1-6 and Paul’s analogy of discipline and training in Hebrews 12.

Then there is the *fire of destruction* – the complete immersion into the lake of fire. This was also pre-figured by Jesus Christ in John 15:6. Malachi 4:1-3 shows that the incorrigibly wicked will be burned to ashes – being left neither root nor branch. Paul, evidently, shows the same punishment happening to Satan (and, presumably to the rebellious angels) when he writes in Romans 16:20 that God “...shall bruise [alternate translation = *tread*] Satan under your feet shortly.”²⁷¹

Revelation 20:14, 15 describe this as the *second death* that awaits those whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life.²⁷² It is a death from which there is no recovery. They are entirely forgotten by God and the saints forever.²⁷³ The last half of Psalm 109:8 was used by the Apostles to determine whether or not to fill the office of Judas Iscariot,²⁷⁴ but read carefully Psalm 109:12-15 to see David’s complaints to God about the wicked men who persecuted him. He asked God to *blot out their names and any memory of them*. This is consistent with God’s revealed intentions for the incorrigibly wicked. Ecclesiastes 9:5 can indicate one of two things: (a) the personal memory of the dead person ceases to function or (b) the dead person himself is forgotten. Isaiah 26:13, 14 are more specific in that

²⁷¹ See Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 14:12-20, Ezekiel 28:11-19), and Revelation 20:10.

²⁷² See also Revelation 21:8.

²⁷³ See Isaiah 65:17.

²⁷⁴ See Acts 1:15-20.

regard because it shows that their destruction brings about their being once-and-for-all forgotten.

The great conflagration spoken of in 2 Peter 3:10-13 should not be confused with the lake of fire revealed in Revelation 20:10, 14, 15. Although both are *temporary* in nature, the lake of fire seems to exist throughout the 1,000-year Kingdom period – Revelation 19:20 showing the Beast and False Prophet being cast into it when Jesus Christ returns, and Revelation 20:10 showing Satan being cast into it when the 1,000-year Kingdom has completed the work for which it was intended.²⁷⁵ The great conflagration to which Peter refers evidently takes place at the end of the judgment period after the second resurrection in preparation for the creation of the New Heaven and New Earth.²⁷⁶

So, the use of the plural (baptisms) is scripturally appropriate. Each serves a practical purpose in God's plan and purpose. We must properly understand the role of each.

Laying on of Hands

The laying on of hands is a special act performed by God's ordained ministry for the purpose of conferring upon an individual a special gift or blessing. There are four of these specifically mentioned in scripture: blessing, receiving the Holy Spirit, healing, and ordination.

Blessing: Matthew 19:13-15 is an example of *blessing*. In this case, Jesus laid hands on small children to bless them – there is no record of the words He uttered as He did so. Most church groups in our tradition have a *Blessing of Little Children* service in the late Fall after the Feast of Tabernacles. Small children who have never received the blessing are brought before the congregation to have God's

²⁷⁵ See also 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

²⁷⁶ Revelation 20:11-13; 21:1

ministers lay hands upon them for special blessings by God.

Receiving the Holy Spirit: The laying on of hands for *receiving the Holy Spirit* is required after baptism. Acts 8:15-17 shows the example of people who had been baptized, but who had not received the Holy Spirit because they did not have hands laid on them. Peter and John did the laying on of hands in order for them to receive the Holy Spirit. In Acts 10:44-48, God gave Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Spirit *before* baptism because this was a special circumstance in which God was showing Peter that God's will was for Gentiles to be brought to salvation (read the entire account to get the idea presented here). The same was true in the conversion of the great enemy of God's Church, Saul of Tarsus – who became the Apostle Paul.²⁷⁷ Acts 19:1-6 shows that men who were baptized by John the Baptist had to be re-baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and immediately had hands laid on them for the receipt of the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates that some baptisms are not acceptable to God – and...they must be corrected in order for God to accept them. “Baptisms” by pouring and sprinkling would, no doubt, be examples of such baptisms because they are not *complete immersions*. Baptisms in the name of a *Trinitarian God* also would not be acceptable because “God” has not been revealed to be a single God who plays three different roles. Not all things done in the name of Jesus Christ are acceptable to God.²⁷⁸ That includes various types of baptisms.

Healing: Matthew 10:1 shows that Jesus Christ conferred upon His disciples the power and authority to cast out demons and to heal all manner of sickness and disease. Mark 16:17, 18 show the signs that would follow His true

²⁷⁷ See Acts 9:1-18.

²⁷⁸ See Matthew 7:21-23; 15:1-9; 24:4, 5 and 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15.

people: casting out demons, speaking new languages,²⁷⁹ miraculous protections, and laying on of hands for healing. James, the brother of Jesus, wrote in James 5:14, 15 that the sick should call for God’s ministers to come and (a) pray over them and (b) to anoint them with oil. This, of necessity, requires the laying on of hands. This is the only instance in which anointing with oil is coupled with the laying on of hands. The use of oil in this case is a symbol of the Holy Spirit of healing. This act is in keeping with the meaning of the stripes laid upon Jesus Christ before His crucifixion.²⁸⁰

It is not in keeping with the intent of the laying on of hands for healing to say that the absence of healing in this present life will be fulfilled in the resurrection of the dead. The Seventh Day Christian Assembly teaches that healing is directly applicable to this present life. The so-called “healing” that will take place during the resurrections will be generalized to all who are resurrected *without the direct benefit of the laying on of hands and anointing with oil beforehand.*

Sometimes it is not God’s will to intervene in an affliction. The Apostle Paul had to suffer his “thorn in the flesh” in spite of asking God on three different occasions to remove it.²⁸¹ One could imagine that Jesus Christ included this among all the things Saul/Paul would have to suffer for His sake – partly, it may be supposed, because of the great harm he brought to God’s Church before his conversion.²⁸² Therefore, one should not assume that the absence of healing indicates a *false doctrine*. It merely indicates the will of God for some specific purpose in the development of faith and character in the believer.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ See Acts 2:1-11.

²⁸⁰ See Isaiah 53:1-5 and 1 Peter 2:21-25.

²⁸¹ 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

²⁸² Acts 9:13-16

²⁸³ Consider Romans 5:1-5 and James 1:2-4.

Acts 19:11, 12 reveal that God’s ministers have the authority to anoint cloths that can be used by the sick for healing purposes. Among those churches of our tradition, we send anointed cloths to those who request them. God’s ministers anoint the cloths and pray over them concerning the particular healing request that is made. The cloths are then sent to the individual with instructions about our God-given authority to do so, how to use them properly, and how to properly dispose of them.

Ordination: Finally, the laying on of hands is used in the ordination of individuals to offices of ministry in God’s work. First Timothy 3 names two specific offices of ministry: (a) minister and (b) deacon – along with the qualifications of each. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul reminds Timothy of the gift of God (Timothy’s calling into the ministry) that was put upon him by the laying on of Paul’s hands. The prophet Ananias had originally ordained Paul for his ministry.²⁸⁴ However, when Paul and Barnabas were sent out on a special mission by God, they had hands laid on them.²⁸⁵ It may be supposed that this marked their ordinations as apostles – although it could have been for a special blessing of *Spirit* they might have needed for completing their task. It was after this that Saul began to be referred to more regularly as Paul (v. 13).

Acts 6:1-6 reveals the creation of the office of deacon in God’s Church. The diaconship is the lowest ranking office of ministry. Deacons are appointed to take care of the daily business of “serving tables” (v. 3). These men pursue the responsibilities of that position in order to allow the Church Elders to pursue the preaching and teaching aspects of proclaiming the gospel (v. 2). *Daily ministration* includes seeing after the needs of widows, orphans, the poor and needy, and emergency situations. At least two of the first seven

²⁸⁴ Acts 9:15-22

²⁸⁵ Acts 13:1-3

deacons ordained also served very important roles in spreading the gospel: Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8). This indicates that their offices of ministry are not to be relegated to positions of non-importance.

The Resurrections From the Dead

As discussed above in reference to the meanings of the holy days Pentecost and Last Great Day, scripture reveals that there will be *three* resurrections from the dead. As discussed above in the section on God's definition of death, *death* means "absence of life." It will be from this state of total *lifelessness* that God will raise the dead.

The first resurrection will occur at the return of Jesus Christ.²⁸⁶ It will include any true Christians who are still alive when He returns.²⁸⁷ All of God's saints who lived from the Garden of Eden (like Abel) until the return of Jesus Christ will be raised together.²⁸⁸ This group is referred to as the *firstfruits* (symbolized in the Pentecost holy day). This revealed truth repudiates any claims by those who teach the doctrine of the immortal soul and going to heaven or hell upon the death of the individual.

The second resurrection will occur at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom period.²⁸⁹ This will include all generations of humans who have ever lived (since the Garden of Eden) without the truthful knowledge of Jesus Christ. It will include those whom God never drew to Jesus Christ – many of whom had been deceived into accepting a false "Christianity."²⁹⁰ They will be given a period of time to be instructed in God's truth and brought to salvation.

²⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

²⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17

²⁸⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:15, Hebrews 11:39, 40

²⁸⁹ Revelation 20:5, 11-13

²⁹⁰ John 6:44; Matthew 24:4, 5; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15

The third resurrection, as described by Jesus Christ in John 5:29 as the *resurrection of damnation*, would be for all of the incorrigibly wicked who simply did not make the “cut” for the first and second resurrections. Those who did not endure to the end after having been brought to God’s truth will face this judgment.²⁹¹ It also will include those who are not brought to salvation during the Kingdom period. The Pharaoh of the Exodus, Herod, and Judas Iscariot also might be examples of the incorrigibly wicked included in the *resurrection of damnation*. While it is God’s desire that all should repent and come to salvation,²⁹² it is logical to conclude that there will be those who simply choose not to do so because of being so thoroughly and completely deceived by their own independent minds and Satan the Devil that they either will not or cannot be converted. Especially in danger of destruction are those who have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit.²⁹³ Revelation 20:14, 15 describe that third resurrection.

Satan and his rebellious angelic host will be thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed.²⁹⁴ Since they will not have *died* because of the *immortality* God originally granted them, God will revoke that privilege and execute them for their gross depravity and sinfulness. This is certainly consistent with Ezekiel 18:4, 20, Isaiah 14:12-20, and Ezekiel 28:12-19. There is no logical reason to assume that God would torment them forever and ever if He would not do so to the human for his sins. God would prefer to never have to remember them and their evil rebellion. Whatever living being Elohim has created can be destroyed for not fulfilling the purpose for which it was created. Having been given independent minds, they have not been given the liberty to oppose God and His will and purpose.

²⁹¹ Luke 9:62; John 15:1-6; Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-39; 2 Peter 2:20

²⁹² 2 Peter 3:9

²⁹³ Mark 3:28, 29

²⁹⁴ Matthew 25:41, Revelation 20:10

Eternal Judgment

Eternal judgment consists of God's determination whether or not an individual is suited by *character* and *spiritual disposition* to be granted an *eternal existence*. Whatever His judgment is, it will be an *eternal judgment*. Paul says in Romans 6:23 that "The wages of sin is *death*; but the gift of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord" (emphasis added). In that statement, Paul puts into contradistinction – that is, showing the difference between distinctive characteristics – *eternal death* and *eternal life*.

If man were an immortal soul that went to hellfire to roast and be tormented forever, that would still be *eternal life* as a sentient being because he would be aware of what is going on and would feel the horror of the pain and suffering he is undergoing. Paul's example shows that *death*, as God defines it in His word, is an *eternal death* – **no existence whatsoever**.

Just as surely as the dead sinner will be forgotten, his memory will never, ever come to God's mind again forever.²⁹⁵ It will be as though that individual had never even existed in the first place. Why should God remember any who have neglected so great a salvation as we have been offered?²⁹⁶ Peter writes that God's True Church is presently undergoing its eternal judgment,²⁹⁷ while, as we have seen, others will undergo their own judgment when God determines to set His hand to draw them to Jesus Christ for salvation.²⁹⁸

This *sentence which lasts for all of eternity* is predicated on what God has revealed to us in His holy word. No one once brought face to face with God's truth should ever for-

²⁹⁵ See again Isaiah 65:17.

²⁹⁶ Hebrews 2:3

²⁹⁷ 1 Peter 4:17

²⁹⁸ Read 1 Corinthians 15:23 – paying attention to "...in his own order...."

get that, in the end, he will have to stand before God and account for his life's choices and actions. What God thinks of us is vastly more important than what any human being thinks of us.²⁹⁹

Spiritual Maturity

The final doctrine of Jesus Christ which Paul discusses in Hebrews 6 is found in v. 1: "...Leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto *perfection*..." (emphasis added). The Greek word from which *perfection* is translated is *teleiotes*, which basically describes a person who completes the charge given to him – one who finishes what he has started.³⁰⁰ Some in the faith are the *beginners* – those who are generally called "babes in Christ."³⁰¹ Some are *making progress*. But, Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Hebrews 5:12-14 that it is impossible to make progress if we have to start over all the time. The objective is to come to the end of your life having completed what you began in Jesus Christ.³⁰² In the process, you must learn and grow spiritually.³⁰³ You cannot be stagnant and complacent without paying a terrible price.³⁰⁴ The goal that you have set before you in Jesus Christ is to come to whatever level of spiritual maturity of which you are capable – to be *teleiotes*.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁹ Acts 5:29, Galatians 6:7-10

³⁰⁰ See Luke 9:62 and 14:26-33.

³⁰¹ See 1 Corinthians 3:1 and Hebrews 5:12-14.

³⁰² See 2 Timothy 4:7, 8.

³⁰³ See 2 Peter 3:11-18

³⁰⁴ See Hebrews 6:4-8 and John 15:1-8.

³⁰⁵ See Matthew 5:48, 1 Corinthians 2:6, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 4:11-16, Philippians 3:8-16, Colossians 1:23-29, and 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

The Church of God

It might be noted in our literature that we make reference to God’s *True Church* (as opposed to a *false church*) and to *True Christians* (as opposed to *false Christians*). There is very good reason for this. Early in my ministry, I learned that there were over 400 different “Christian” denominations. Sometime after A.D. 2000, I learned from a *History Channel* documentary about “Christianity” that there were over 20,000 “Christian” denominations. On a recent *Tomorrow’s World* program, the host, Mr. Richard Ames, revealed that there are now almost 33,000 “Christian” denominations (The Living Church of God, Charlotte, NC; December 12, 2010). Here is the problem: In the face of Ephesians 4:4-6, it is ludicrous to think that all of these “Christian” denominations make up the True Church of God – simply because they teach different, opposing doctrines that contradict one another. ***If they were all led by the same Holy Spirit, they would all believe and teach the same things.*** That scripture does not simply apply to the *local* church group; it applies to any Church that claims to represent the True and Living God and the truth He has revealed in His word.³⁰⁶ If some are *wrong/false*, then how do you recognize God’s *True Church*?

The Rise of *False* “Christianity”

Jesus Christ warned about the rise of false “Christianity” in His statement in Matthew 24:4, 5: There will be people

³⁰⁶ John 4:23, 24; 1 Timothy 3:15; 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:15

who will come in Christ's name and claim to represent Him...yet, they will be *deceivers* who will deceive the *many*, as opposed to the *few*. Under the umbrella of the "live and let live" philosophy of *political correctness* and the doctrine of the soul's competency in matters of religion, this warning has gone largely unnoticed and almost completely ignored. It is a serious error in judgment to assume that it has no warrant (authorization, justification, foundation) in our present world that includes almost 33,000 "Christian" denominations. As a card player might put it, such an outcome has fulfilled Jesus' warning *in spades!* And...that warning does not even include all of the religions *outside* of Christianity!

The Apostle Paul had to contend with this rise in false Christianity in his day very soon after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13-15, he warned of those who teach *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit*. He called them *false apostles* and *deceitful workers* who, under the leadership of Satan the Devil, *masquerade* as the ministers of righteousness. He also warned the Galatians about falling for a *perverted gospel* and pronounced a very serious curse upon any who taught such a perversion.³⁰⁷ He also prophesied that the problem would continue to expand and grow worse as the return of Jesus Christ draws near.³⁰⁸

The Apostle Peter warned of the same thing in 2 Peter 2, and the Apostle John warned of it in 1 John 4:1-6. The book of *Jude*, written by one of the Lord's brothers, also addresses this problem faced by the early Church – and, by extension, faced by true Christians today. Finally, John was shown a vision about the ultimate conquest of the governments of the earth at the return of Jesus Christ and after-

³⁰⁷ Galatians 1:6-12

³⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 3:1-9 (Note especially vv. 5, 7.)

wards. The account of the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” in Revelation 6 is a larger discussion of Matthew 24.

The first horseman on the white horse carrying a bow is symbolic of the rise of *false* “Christianity.” Once begun in history, this horseman will continue to be a problem to mankind until Jesus Christ returns to set things straight. It is significant in Matthew 24:21-25 that Jesus Christ’s warning stretches to those true Christians living at the time just prior to His return. Specifically, He warns them to endure to the end (v. 13) and to beware of the false “Christ” and “Christians” who would claim to represent Him. Following them would lead the true Christian to forfeit his right to eternal life.³⁰⁹

Think about this very carefully: Those who accept the change from the seventh-day Sabbath use as part of their “proof” the idea that “Christians” during the days of the Apostolic Church observed Sunday. What they either do not *admit* or do not *know* is that those “Christians” were the ones that John, Paul, Peter, Jude, and others warned about because they taught *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit* (“God”). They were *already* going *astray* from the faith once delivered to the saints! That problem has continued to this very day.

It should not fall unnoticed upon the spiritual eyes and ears of those who claim to worship God in spirit and in truth that such is the case. This is a serious warning to all who would claim to be *in Christ* because it makes a difference to God whether or not you are in the *True Christ*. If you have fallen for a Christ that is not revealed in God’s holy word to be the True Christ, then all of the hopes and promises you seek by following that “Christ” will never be fulfilled. Perhaps you can see now why God will take such extra pains to make sure that every person who has ever lived will have the opportunity to know and understand the

³⁰⁹ See also Matthew 7:21-23.

unvarnished truth of God before He finally passes His eternal judgment upon them. There is no excuse for knowing God’s truth and ignoring it in favor of the religious traditions of men and political correctness.³¹⁰

The Body of Christ

Scripture describes God’s Church as the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.³¹¹ As Paul described the marriage relationship in Ephesians 5:18-33, being “the body of Jesus Christ” means that the True Church is to be His “wife” by covenant.³¹² When the Lord God created the marriage relationship in Genesis 2:18-24, His intention was for man to have a mate that is appropriate for him – suitably adapted to a specific purpose (example: bearing children) – and capable of meeting his needs and desires (that is, being in spiritual and emotional unity with him). In the physical relationship that is supposed to exist in the marriage of men and women, there is the *shadow* or *symbol* of the ultimate “marriage” of Jesus Christ to His Church. In that relationship, the man is the symbol of Jesus Christ and the woman is the symbol of His Church. Being *one body* in Jesus Christ is descriptive of the spiritual and emotional relationship that should exist between Him and His Church as He prepares her for the “marriage supper” that will occur at His return.

First Corinthians 11 is Paul’s instruction about the original will of God when He created humans as males and females. In v. 3, Paul shows how God intended the relationship to be – note that: (a) God the Father is the *head* of Jesus Christ;³¹³ (b) Jesus Christ is the *head* of man; and (c) man is the *head* of woman (see vv. 8, 9). In this vein, it

³¹⁰ Hebrews 10:26-31

³¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 12:14-27, Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4-6, 11-16, Colossians 1:18

³¹² 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:5-9

³¹³ See Philipians 2:5-11, John 14:28, and 1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

should be remembered that the Church was created for Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was not created for the Church. Paul's use of the Greek term *kephale* (pronounced *kefalay*) is *figurative* rather than *literal*. This figurative use of *head* denotes a superior rank.³¹⁴ It in no way gives the man the right to be an abusive tyrant over his wife. As the *head*, man's role is like the description Jesus Christ gave to His disciples about the role of a leader: "Whosoever will be *chief* among you, let him be your *servant*."³¹⁵ Neither should the wife take advantage of this role of *servant* as though it gives her license to try to make a *slave* of her husband – trying to dominate him in the marriage.

One of Adam's great failures in Genesis 3:1-7 was that he did not exercise the authority of his rank relative to the temptation of Eve *if he was present while the situation unfolded*. There was not one word of reluctant protest uttered by him *if he was present*. This is the situation addressed to the Corinthians by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:2-4 in which he expressed his fear that they would fall for the false doctrines based on *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit* and be led astray like Eve had been.

Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is not a misogynistic tirade by a woman hater. He is simply attempting to put God's Church into the order intended by God – that is, God's will is for man to be the *head* of the woman in the marriage relationship. If God's Church decides to go about dictating to God what He should do as opposed to what He has willed and commanded, then the Church will have fallen into the same trap that Eve fell. In that case, she would not be *fit* to marry Jesus Christ.

It is especially important to note the attitude of Jesus Christ toward His *head*, God the Father: (a) It was His desire to carry out the will of the Father and to finish the Fa-

³¹⁴ See similar usage in Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23 and Colossians 2:10.

³¹⁵ Matthew 20:25-28 (emphasis added) Read again Ephesians 5:25-

ther's work;³¹⁶ (b) He did not seek to do His own will, but to do the will of the Father;³¹⁷ and (c) He faithfully taught the doctrine given to Him by the Father.³¹⁸ Notice especially John 12:49: "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father which sent me has himself given me commandment *what to say* and *what to speak*."³¹⁹ Yet, Jesus Christ said that He and the Father are in complete unity.³²⁰ It should be apparent that God's Church, therefore, will be in complete unity with God and will be subject to His will and purpose rather than its own devices and choices. Read Proverbs 31:10-31 to understand the value of a virtuous, faithful wife and the liberty she can be given to contribute to the marriage relationship. ***She is not expected to be a mindless slave to her husband.***

It should also be clear that there is only one spiritual body of Christ – not many bodies that compete with and contradict one another. That one, True Church is scattered in various local fellowships and ministries around the world. They *are not* distributed throughout the various almost 33,000 "Christian" denominations. While God does not require His True Church to be under one specific leader, all of the ministries will teach God's truth and the members will manifest the fruit of God's Holy Spirit (exhibiting the character and mind of God – see Isaiah 55:8, 9), and faithfully keep the commandments of God as magnified by Jesus Christ.³²¹ *That one body of Christ will not teach a gospel that is a mixture of paganism, doctrines of men, and biblical doctrine.* Doing such would represent a

³¹⁶ John 4:34

³¹⁷ John 5:17-31; 6:38-40, Hebrews 10:7

³¹⁸ John 7:16-18, 28, 29; 14:10, 24; 17:6-8, 14, 17

³¹⁹ RSV (emphases added) See also John 14:24.

³²⁰ John 10:30 (*One* in this case does not mean "one and the same"; it means "in unity" as in Genesis 2:24 and 1 Corinthians 6:16, 17.)

³²¹ See John 4:23, 24.

gross misunderstanding of the truth God has revealed throughout His word.

The Ministry of God's Church

There is no scripture that says that God appoints only one Apostle at a time to be the only one who brings God's truth to true Christians worldwide. While that might occur in some odd circumstances from time to time, it is by no means the rule of thumb by which membership in the true Church is measured. Such an idea would not explain the existence of different groups who, under their own special sets of circumstances, have been led by God's Holy Spirit to believe and teach the same truths from God's word without ever having conferred with one another.³²²

How else could one explain what happened when the 12 Apostles went their separate ways to carry out the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 after the ascension of Jesus Christ? They did not all go to the same area in the world, and they were not always in touch with a centralized authority in Jerusalem. In most cases, they were forced by circumstances to operate independently of one another in teaching the "faith once delivered" (Jude 3) that they learned from Jesus Christ and the Old Testament. It is no different today: God calls those whom He wants to understand His truth and sets them on a path to evangelize others as they are led by the Holy Spirit. It would stand to reason and logic that being led by the same spirit of truth would result in the teaching of the same truth.³²³

Jesus Christ told His disciples that He had "...*other sheep* that are not of this *fold*..."³²⁴ Other translations continue that thought and render it thus: "...there shall be one

³²² See Paul's account of his own experience in Galatians 1:11-24.

³²³ John 14:15-17; 16:13-15

³²⁴ *KJV* and others (emphasis added)

flock, one shepherd...” (examples = RSV, *Modern Language*, *Living Bible*, *The Jerusalem Bible*, *Moffatt*, and *ASV*; emphasis added). The *Luther* translation (German) is rendered thus in English: “I have other sheep that are not of this *stall*...there shall be one *herd*...” (emphasis added). Barclay, in his translation, renders it thus: “...they will *become* one flock; and there will be one shepherd” (emphases added). It appears from this that God’s *ultimate goal* is for all of the individual folds to *eventually become* a single flock under the leadership of Jesus Christ. Barclay opines:

The unity comes from the fact, not that all the sheep are forced into one fold, but that all the sheep hear, and answer and obey one shepherd [Jesus Christ]...the unity is a unity of loyalty to Jesus Christ.³²⁵

It should be noted that Barclay did not intend for his statement to be used in the context in which I have used it because he was speaking specifically about the presence of numerous “Christian” denominations – of whom, according to Barclay, none should have the right to claim to be the only true Church to the exclusion of all others known as “Christian.” I have used that quote to make the point I am making, relative to Jesus’ statement in John 10:16, about how the True Church of God is distributed among the nations of the world. I have already addressed the absurdity of the existence of nearly 33,000 different “Christian” denominations.

So, there emerges the distinction between *different folds* that will *eventually* belong to a *single flock* under Jesus Christ. While the Jews were a single fold, other Israelites who had been scattered to other parts of the world could

³²⁵ *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John*, (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1955); p. 75

certainly qualify as *other folds*. No doubt, God also intended to call out various *folds* among the Gentile nations to become part of the *one flock*.³²⁶ This is by no means an indication that God intended for there to exist nearly 33,000 *denominations* that compete with and contradict one another by teaching *another Jesus*, *another gospel*, and *another spirit*. In order to educate and edify those whom He would call out to be part of the single body of Christ, He would have to provide called-out ministers to whom He would give the gift of teaching and preaching the “faith once delivered.” How does God’s true ministry serve that great purpose?

Ephesians 4:11-16 sums it up about as succinctly as possible. There are various areas of ministry that God has provided – different offices with different spiritual gifts.³²⁷ There are several purposes served by God’s ministry:

(a) to bring God’s people to spiritual maturity (v. 12);

(b) to *edify* them – which implies that they will be improved morally and spiritually, as well as built into a great spiritual “edifice” (vv. 12, 15, 16);³²⁸

(c) to create among them the unity of faith and knowledge that God desires (v. 13); and

(d) to teach them God’s truth in order to prevent them from being led astray by deceptive teachers of strange doctrines (v. 14).³²⁹

³²⁶ Galatians 3:6-9, 26-29

³²⁷ See also 1 Corinthians 12:28-31.

³²⁸ See also 1 Peter 2:5.

³²⁹ See also Matthew 20:28 and John 21:15-17.

Any man who is called by God and ordained into the office of an *elder* may serve in either one specific capacity or many different capacities as God dictates. The ordination certificate of The Seventh Day Christian Assembly specifically states that the ordained minister occupies his office *by the will of God*.³³⁰ It is, therefore, *God's choice* to assign each minister his specific gift(s) and area of service.

The qualifications that must be met by the candidate for ordination as one of God's true ministers are given in three places in the New Testament: 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-10. It is not necessary to lay out a detailed commentary about these requirements. As discussed above under "The Laying on of Hands," the man who qualifies for the office of minister (elder) will have been called out by God and have had hands laid upon him by at least one other ordained minister.³³¹ God will provide the means by which that proper ordination can be administered (see Acts 9:10-22).

³³⁰ John 15:16

³³¹ See 2 Timothy 1:6-14.

The Christian's Financial Responsibility

There are three specific areas of financial responsibility to which the Christian should pay attention: family, needy, and Church. What follows is a brief discussion of each point.

Toward Family

Proverbs 27:23-27 is a reminder to keep account of your personal finances because of the temporary nature of riches. Proverbs 28:19 reminds us that the industrious person can provide for his needs, while a slothful person will live in poverty. Proverbs 31:10-28 extols the virtues of an industrious woman as she does her part to provide for the needs of her family – as well as being able to “...reach out her hand to the poor...” (v. 20). In all she does, she is not afraid of hard work, thrift, and generosity. In Mark 7:10-13, Jesus reminds us that selfish, self-righteous use of our resources – not tending to the needs of our family – is a gross transgression of the will of God. He also implies that family must be provided for even before giving offerings to God. Paul warns in 1 Timothy 5:4, 8, 16 that providing for one's own household – which can apply beyond one's immediate household to the extended family (v. 4 – note the word *nephews*) – is expected as part of the true faith. Those who do not do so “...[have] denied the faith, and [are] worse than an infidel” (v. 8). Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 6:24-34 that God will provide for His faithful ser-

vants if they will seek first to do His will rather than focusing on storing up riches for themselves.³³²

Toward the Needy

God commanded ancient Israel to set aside a special tithe in the third and sixth years of a seven-year cycle. This tithe was especially for the widows, orphans, poor, and unfortunate (see Deuteronomy 14:28, 29). He commanded them to be liberal in their assistance to the poor.³³³ He provided in His law that the farmers should not reap their fields twice over, but should allow the poor to come and freely glean the leftovers.³³⁴ Psalm 41:1-3 says that God will bless those who remember the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says that giving to the poor is like lending to the Lord Himself – and the Lord will repay it as though it were a debt. Proverbs 28:27 says that those who give to the poor will not lack; those who have no regard for them will have “...many a curse.” Jesus Christ reminded us that the poor will always exist among us – which tells us that so-called “wars” on poverty will not be won by human governments.³³⁵ The early Church shared among themselves to make sure that all their needs were provided.³³⁶ This service to the poor must be done with a cheerful and willing heart, not with a grudging resentment.³³⁷

³³² See also Psalm 23:1, 34:9, 10, and 146:3-7.

³³³ See Deuteronomy 15:1-18.

³³⁴ See Deuteronomy 24:17-22 and Ruth 2:2, 3.

³³⁵ Matthew 26:11

³³⁶ See Acts 2:44-45; 4:34, 35; 11:27-30, Romans 15:25-28, 1 Corinthians 16:1-3, 2 Corinthians 8:1 through 9:9, and Galatians 2:10.

³³⁷ See also Matthew 25:31-46.

Toward the Church: Tithes and Offerings

How does Jesus Christ intend for His Church to be able to proclaim the gospel of His soon-coming Kingdom to their local areas? There is, of necessity, a financial burden to be born if that local group is going to undertake preaching and teaching the gospel truth to the congregation and reaching out to the community in which it is located to help with the poor and needy. Once a congregation grows large enough, it becomes necessary to either rent or purchase a facility in which worship and teaching can take place. After all, Jesus Christ also provides capable ministers for educating His people.³³⁸ With such facilities, there come all of the attendant financial responsibilities, like utilities, salaries, maintenance, insurance, and so on. It is difficult to imagine how any group of worshipers could adequately function just on the premise that all of that would be miraculously provided – especially if none of the members felt any responsibility to give toward the financial upkeep of a local congregation. So, let’s understand what God’s word reveals to us about the Christian’s responsibility for the financial burden that must be born by local church congregations.

Was tithing only for *Israel*? God did, in fact, command Israel to tithe. Why? Leviticus 27:30-33 says that all of the tithe – seed, fruit, and cattle – are the Lord’s. Notice that it says that “...the tenth [tithe] shall be *holy unto the Lord.*” What this shows us is simple: God has a prior claim on that first tenth part.³³⁹ In Israel, that tenth part was given to the tribe of Levi. Numbers 18:20-32 tells us that God gave them the tenth part because they did not receive a land inheritance like the other tribes of Israel did (vv. 20, 21).

³³⁸ See Ephesians 4:11-16.

³³⁹ See Exodus 22:29, 30, Leviticus 2:12-16, Numbers 18:12, and Deuteronomy 18:1-5.

The Levites were “redeemed” (bought) by God to serve as the keepers of His Tabernacle (later, the Temple). The tithe was, therefore, the *inheritance* of the Levites for their service for God. It was “...*holy unto the Lord...*” because the tribe of Levi was *sanctified* – set apart for holy usage – as laborers in the Tabernacle and Temple, teachers, judges, and priests. The high priest could only come through the lineage of Aaron, the brother of Moses. You can see in Exodus 2:1-4 that they came from a Levite family.

God required three separate tithes of the Israelites – each having a special use that God deemed necessary for their covenant relationship with Himself, their families, and their fellow man. The first tithe, as we have seen, went to the tribe of Levi as an inheritance. Deuteronomy 14:22-27 shows us the plan for the second tenth part. Verse 22 refers specifically to the first tithe. Beginning with v. 23, God reveals a second tenth part that the Israelites themselves could “...eat before the Lord your God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name....” It is obvious that they cannot be eating the *Levites’* inheritance! So, what does this mean?

Leviticus 23 reveals holy days that God required the Israelites to observe. They begin in early Spring with Passover and end in early Fall with the Feast of Tabernacles. They are often referred to as “pilgrimage feasts” because God required them to travel to a place designated by Him as the holy site at which they would observe these feasts. While there, they needed to be able to support themselves with food, drink, lodging, and offerings. So, God required them to set aside a second tenth part of their increase in order to be able to do so. Think about the needs for the trip and the length of time they would be there – especially Passover and Unleavened Bread (eight days plus travel time to and from the feast site) and the Fall feasts (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles – almost an entire month!). If they were not faithful in this, they could not worship God at the

place where He required them to do so – unless, of course, they could depend on the kindness of strangers. According to v. 27, they were to also share with the Levites “...within [their] gates...” – that is, with those Levites who lived in their home areas as judges, teachers, lawyers, et cetera.

In vv. 28, 29, we see another tenth part commanded. This is more appropriately called the “third-year tithe.” Israel observed a seven-year cycle – the seventh year being a “Sabbath” during which they let their fields lie fallow, forgave debts, and released slaves.³⁴⁰ The next year began another seven-year cycle. Notice that this “third-year tithe” is “...[laid] up *within your gates*...” for the relief of the Levites, strangers, fatherless (orphans), and widows (v. 28). This was done during the third and sixth years of that seven-year cycle. It was not given to the Levites as their inheritance for the Tabernacle service, nor was it eaten by the individual and his family during the “pilgrimage feasts.” It was stored up *locally* and used like a welfare program for the unfortunate and an emergency fund.

In God’s True Church, the time for giving the additional “third-year tithe” at one time was determined by one’s baptism date relative to the Feast of Tabernacles: (a) If it occurred *before* the Feast of Tabernacles (say, May, 2001), it was determined from that year (the first year to pay it would be after the Feast of 2003); (b) if it occurred *after* the Feast of Tabernacles (say, November, 2001), it was determined from the Feast of the following year (the first year to pay it would follow the Feast of 2004). The third-year tithe was paid for one year from Feast of Tabernacles to Feast of Tabernacles. This was done in the third and sixth years of seven-year cycles relative to one’s baptism.

Now, with that understanding, we should be able to tell if God intended that the principle of tithing would apply only to Israel – and not to others at any time in any way. It is

³⁴⁰ See Leviticus 25:1-7 and Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

important to understand this because if it did not only apply to Israel, and it does apply to modern-day Christians, then you would want to know God's truth and be obedient.

The first specific mention of tithing in the Bible is in Genesis 14:20 where Abram gave tithes of the booty he took in his battle with Chedorlaomer and the kings with him. His objective in this battle was to recover his nephew Lot, who had been taken captive by Chedorlaomer. The booty Abram took was recompense for having to take his 318 fighting men out to recover Lot (see vv. 21-24). To whom did Abram pay the tithe? He is called *Melchizedek, King of Salem*. There is not very much discussion of the details here, but who was he that Abram should pay a tithe to him? Notice, too, that Abram did this as though it was *already customary* for him to do so.

His name consists of two words: *Melchi* and *Tsedeq* – the combination of which means “The King [Melchi] of Righteousness [Tsedeq].” He was *King of Salem* – the place that would later become *Jerusalem*. Paul discusses this incident in Hebrews 5 and 7. In Hebrews 5, he quotes scriptures from Psalms 2:7 and 110:4 to do two things: (a) to prove that Jesus is the Messiah – the Son of God, and (b) to prove that Jesus is an eternal priest in the order of *Melchizedek*. As he continues his argument, begun in chapter one, that Jesus is superior to the angels and Moses, he comes to Hebrews 7 where he begins to prove that Jesus' priesthood is even greater than the high priesthood of the Aaronic Levites. In doing so, he uses what is called an *a fortiori* argument – an argument that begins with the strongest reason in order to argue for a reason that is even stronger than it – called by some a “how much more” argument. Let me demonstrate.

In Hebrews 7:1-3, he shows that Melchizedek was known as the King of Righteousness, King of Salem, and King of Peace. All of these names are equally applicable to Jesus Christ. Then, in v. 4, he begins his *a fortiori* argu-

ment: “Now, consider how great this man [Melchizedek] was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.” In v. 5, he shows how the Levites had a commandment of God – a law – that supported their right to collect tithes. He points out that these Levites – *Israelites* – were *descended from* Abraham. That means that Abraham was not an *Israelite* and, therefore, neither was he a *Jew* because Judah (father of the Jews) was an *Israelite* brother to Levi. Melchizedek was not descended from Abraham, or Isaac (Abraham’s son), or Jacob (Abraham’s grandson), whose name was changed to *Israel*.³⁴¹ Jacob fathered 12 sons who eventually made up the 12 tribes of the nation Israel. All *Jews* (Judah) are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews (Judah). Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin – a descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob.³⁴²

In v. 3, he shows that Melchizedek had no genealogy. The book of Genesis is filled with genealogies! But there was none for Melchizedek, so Paul concluded that he must have been without father or mother, without descendants, and had neither a beginning nor an end – an *eternal* priest. The Levites, who were men who died, received tithes. Yet, we have God’s witness that this Melchizedek, who lives continually, also receives tithes.

Now, Paul argues in v. 7 that the *lesser* is blessed by the *greater*. Genesis 14:19, 20 say that Melchizedek blessed Abram – and Abram was the great grandfather of Levi. In Hebrews 7:9, Paul concludes that Levi, therefore, also paid tithes to Melchizedek since he was yet to come from the loins of Abraham. This, in effect, would make Melchizedek *greater* than Levi because when Melchizedek blessed Abraham, he also blessed Levi, who was yet unborn as a descendant of Abram. Any blessings Abraham received

³⁴¹ See Genesis 32:24-32 and 35:9-15.

³⁴² See Genesis 35:16-18, Judges 10:6-9, and Romans 11:1.

from Melchizedek trickled down, presumably, in part to Levi. Thus, he, too, was blessed by Melchizedek.

Now the argument turns on whose *priesthood* is greater. If it is Melchizedek's – and Jesus is an eternal priest in the order of Melchizedek – then there must be a *change* in the law in two ways: (a) The law must change about who will receive the tithes of believers and (b) there must be a change in the law about *which priesthood* will represent God's interests for eternity. Although the Levitical priesthood represented *perfection* while they served God, they were still *flesh* and would have to be continually filling positions as each generation came, served, and died. God considered them to be merely a *shadow* of the real thing;³⁴³ therefore, they were *temporary, not eternal*. So, tithing for the New Testament is now to be directed toward the *eternal* work of Jesus Christ, our high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

In Genesis 28, we read about Jacob's dream about the ladder that reached into heaven – on which the angels of God ascended and descended. In this dream, God revealed that He was transferring to Jacob the covenant He had made with Abraham and Isaac – his grandfather and father, respectively. When Jacob awoke from his dream, he did two things: (a) He anointed a rock and named it *Bethel* (the House of God), and (b) he vowed to give God a tenth of that with which God might bless him (vv. 16-22).

Both of these situations show that tithing was practiced by righteous individuals before the creation of the nation of Israel. This occurred *before* the Lord God commanded tithing as part of His covenant with the Israelites that were in the exodus from Egypt.³⁴⁴ Hebrews 7 demonstrates that tithing is now to be directed toward God's work through Jesus Christ. Therefore, tithing is not only for Israel.

³⁴³ See Hebrews 8:4, 5; 9:8-10; and 10:1.

³⁴⁴ Read Genesis 15:13-16 and Exodus 12:40, 41.

You could argue that Jesus was speaking to *Israelites*, not the Church, in Matthew 23:23 when He told them that they ought to have been tithing and taking care of the weightier matters of the law, but that might beg the point a bit. Most importantly, He was affirming that the principle of tithing is a necessary element in one's worship of God. After all, the tithe is holy to God, as we have already seen. If that is a basic component in worshiping God in spirit and in truth, is there anywhere in the New Testament where we can see God's Church applying this law to their faith and practice? The most direct answer comes from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9. While it does not specifically mention tithing, one would be able to infer from the whole picture presented in God's word that tithing is the means by which the support of a local ministry would take place. Let's briefly examine Paul's comments.

His first point is that he should have the same right as other apostles to be supplied with food, drink, lodging, and salary – and he mentions Peter (Cephas) by name (vv. 1-4). He asks if he and Barnabas have the right to leave their jobs and be supported by the churches (v. 5). After all, soldiers do not pay their own salaries when inducted into the military, and farmers do not refrain from taking food and clothing from their labors (v. 7). In v. 9, he refers to a scripture from God's law to support his argument: "You shall not muzzle the ox when he treads out the corn."³⁴⁵ This is a "how much more" (*a fortiori*) argument like the one Jesus used in Matthew 6:24-34 – that is, if God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers with glory, *how much more* concern does He have for mankind? Paul reasons that if God shows this much concern for the welfare of the ox, *how much more* concern must He have for the ministers who forsake all to serve Him? He says that this scripture was written for *man's sake, not the ox's* (v. 10). Why? Because "...those

³⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 25:4

who plow should plow in hope, and those who thresh should be a partaker of his hope....” In other words, what’s *right is right!*

Then Paul applies the argument to the work he and Barnabas are doing: “If we have sown unto *spiritual* things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your *carnal* things?” (v. 11). Which is of greater worth in the long run? In v. 12, he says that others are using this power over them, so he and Barnabas should also be able to do so. He is quick to point out that just because they have not done so does not mean they are *prohibited* from doing so. But...how do we know that the principle of *tithing* is included in this argument?

Paul uses the principle of the Levitical priesthood to make his point (vv. 13, 14): “Do you not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so has God ordained that they which preach the gospel should *live of the gospel*” (emphasis added). By using this example, Paul speaks of those who, by God’s commandment, received tithes. They had a glorious ministry and were justly rewarded for their labors. Now let’s take the “how much more” argument: Whose ministry is greater – the Levites’ or God’s called-out ministers’? If God cared for the Levites in that manner, *how much more would He take care of the ministers of Jesus Christ (the priest after the order of Melchizedek)?* The minister has the right to not accept them, *but he is entitled to do so if he chooses to do so.*

So, we have seen in this brief example (coupled with Hebrews 7) that Christians are required to pay tithes to God for the support of His work and ministry. We should realize that God also expects us to give *offerings* in addition to the tithes we pay. It is part of our training in righteousness to learn to give to others out of Christian love and concern. We will not be neglected by God when we do so. Let’s look at an example of why this is true.

In Malachi 3:8-12, God is revealing a prophetic judgment against His people Israel for breaking their covenant agreement with Him. He accuses them of robbing Him by not paying their *tithes* and *offerings* (v. 8). As a result, they are reaping a *curse* (v. 9). Then He challenges them to a test: “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there might be meat in my house [the Temple], and prove me with this...to see if I will not open to you the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing upon you that you will not have room enough to receive” (v. 10). *That is quite a challenge! Would you dare to accept it?*

We have seen that God requires His people to tithe. Does that mean that you must pay the first, second, and third-year tithe? Let’s examine that very briefly because it is important to understand God’s will and to obey it. How, exactly, are you supposed to tithe?

You must determine your *increase* – the tithe is determined from the *increase*. Here is a simple example of *increase*: if you do \$100 dollars of business and it costs you \$50 to do it, then your increase is \$50 – your first tithe is \$5. If you use the \$45 you have left and end up with \$245, then your *increase* is \$200 – your first tithe is \$20. If you use the \$180 you have left, and end up with \$180, you have *no increase* and owe no tithe. *The tithe is paid on the increase.* You have to be honest with God about that increase; above all others, He knows. Remember this: *God has promised to bless you for being faithful.* Those blessings can come in ways that you have never expected – both physical and spiritual blessings. Can you trust God to be true to His word? If you cannot, then you have more learning to do in order to understand God’s truth.

Are you required to pay the second tithe? If you properly understand God’s word, then you will observe God’s holy days listed in Leviticus 23. God’s people all over the world observe them in their appointed seasons – setting aside a second tenth part of their *increase* in a savings account in

order to be able to do so. Those who teach that those days have been done away do not understand Matthew 5:17-19 – or that the New Testament Church observed them. If you do not presently understand this, be patient and continue to study God’s word so He can open it up to your understanding. Trust me – there are tens of thousands all over the world who understand it and obey it!

What about the third-year tithe? We do not live in a theocracy like ancient Israel did. But, we do live in a nation where the government is charged by its Constitution to oversee the general welfare of its citizens. To that end, they take out taxes from our wages and direct some of them to various welfare and entitlement programs. The third-year tithe was basically a tax *for the poor and needy*, not *from the poor and needy*. Programs like Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security, SSI, Food Stamps, Veterans Programs, Indigent Care at hospitals, Family and Children Services, and so on are the avenues by which we actually pay the equivalent of a third-year tithe. The Seventh Day Christian Assembly understands this and does not put upon its membership any requirement to pay a third-year tithe. Of course, many individuals and congregations give food, money, and clothing to homeless shelters, rescue missions, Salvation Army, Red Cross, Goodwill, and others – as well as volunteer to help, with labor, materials, or money, such organizations as Habitats for Humanity. All of these avenues care for the poor, needy, homeless, infirm, disabled, orphans, and so on. We have numerous avenues in our world by which we can obey Matthew 25:35-46. Regardless of our lot in life, we should be trying in whatever manner possible to be *givers*, not *takers*.³⁴⁶ And Paul reminds us in Acts 20:35 that Jesus taught us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Even more special, God has told us

³⁴⁶ See Matthew 12:41-44.

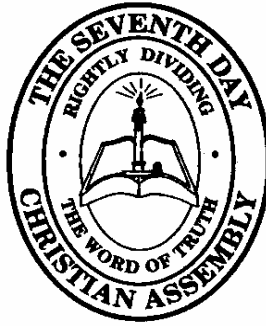
that if we give unselfishly (not expecting anything in return), we will receive.

I would like to point out that, without the tithes and offerings of the people in The Seventh Day Christian Assembly, we would never have been able to make available *free of charge* the books, pamphlets, and Bible Study Course. God has shown us that we have received knowledge of His truth without cost, so we should be willing to pass it on to others without cost. We do incur considerable expense producing it and advertising it to the public. But, it is precious knowledge, and we're happy to have the wherewithal to do it. We gratefully accept contributions from those who wish to contribute to our Christian Education Outreach Program.

If you have further questions about this or any other subject, please contact me. I'm always happy to help you, in any way I can, to understand God's wonderful truth. I appreciate having had this opportunity to do so.

In Christ's Service,

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