Comprehensively Reformed Christianity

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Comprehensively Reformed Christianity

Book II

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Christian Living, Practice, and the Church

Arthur J. Smith

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Ephesians 2:8-10

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Introduction to Book II

In the first book of this trilogy, we discussed the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. They are central and foundational doctrines of which there can be little latitude of thought possible and remain faithful to Scripture and therefore to the true Christian faith. In this second book, we shall discuss various aspects of daily Christian living, which concerns how we apply the crucial doctrines in the first book to daily life both religious and commonplace.

It is in the application of Scripture where we face considerable difficulty and variation in thought as we move from the more intellectual aspects of the faith to the functional side. How we apply theological truths to ourselves affects not only how we think about the Godhead and our salvation, but also how we as men and women conduct our lives before the face of God in the light that we have been given. In doing so, it also affects how we associate with each other, both believers and unbelievers, through our day-to-day involvement with this fallen world.

In the first section of this second book (Section 9), we shall discuss the high standards set forth by God for individual Christian conduct. Unfortunately, this is a goal that man can only see afar as an ideal to be sought after, not something that can be attained by human effort. Nevertheless, those standards do provide us with benchmarks as we find our minds being transformed by the Holy Spirit through his continuous act of our sanctification. The great privilege of being a Christian carries with it serious responsibilities that we dare not ignore. A great part of that responsibility is the stewardship that we have over the Gospel to the extent that we are willing to give our all to broadcast it abroad as a debt we owe to every descendent of Adam's fallen race.

Christian servitude does not go un-rewarded however. Christian benefits and privileges are discussed in Section 10 of this book. God has showered many diverse gifts upon his elect that aid them in their efforts to carry out his holy mandate. Though the struggle is long and often hard, we know that we may bring our every difficulty in life before God in prayer. We know with assurance that He hears us

and that He will answer us appropriately according to his sovereign will.

Much of what we have to accomplish in this world requires a concerted effort with other believers. Unfortunately, there is considerable conflict and controversy over what constitutes the Church on earth. We discuss this difficult topic in Section 11 beginning with a study of the Kingdom and the Church. We shall also examine the conflict in thought over how Israel is related to the new covenant Church that stems from two opposing systematic interpretations of Scripture. We shall then study the temporal aspect of the visible Church as it is organized on earth today. The temporal church is an amalgam of true believers (visible Church) and a large infiltration of unbelievers that most often gain control over its operation and goals.

The visible Church on earth has been aided by God with diverse gifts to help it accomplish his will for it in this age. We discuss this in Section 12. The most important gift of all is the Holy Spirit Himself who works through various men to stabilize and anchor the church while it is yet in its temporal state. Without the presence of the elect, the temporal church would immediately degenerate into just another worldly man-made institution having a religious bent. Where the elect were present in insufficient numbers, this tragedy has already befallen many churches. The early visible Church was endowed by various supernatural gifts that aided it in the days of its early expansion. As unbelievers infiltrated their ranks, however, those gifts were viewed as being intrinsically important without regard to their purpose. Overemphasis of spiritual gifts hid the important Gospel message behind a façade of ritual language. Moreover, it resulted in chaos and disorder in the church itself.

All of this wild attraction to superstition and ritual and the desperate need for order to control it ultimately resulted in the transformation of Christianity into Churchianity. The word Churchianity means, “church worship” whereas Christianity means “Christ worship.” We shall discuss Churchianity in Section 13. Soon every conceivable means was taken by the temporal church to establish its self as a “high church” having the authority of Christ on earth in his absence. The long-standing traditions of baptism and the

memorial of the Lord's Supper were subsequently declared to be sacraments over which the temporal church claimed exclusive authority. Furthermore, the simple Christian worship of Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week was declared to be a legalistic Christian Sabbath that forbad most activities on that day and forced the attendance of temporal church functions instead. Not satisfied with one day in seven, every conceivable day was elevated into a "holy day" such that each was seen to have spiritual properties that could only be effectively realized within the domain of the temporal church.

Of course, all of the institutional organization and administration of Churchianity required lots of material wealth to support it and its growing clergy. For that reason, the tithe that God had used to build the Temple and support the Levitical priesthood under the old covenant of law was made over into a pragmatic church doctrine that served its worldly need for money. As the temporal church became sufficiently affluent from tithes alone, large buildings and cathedrals were planned to praise its own grandeur. However, tithes were no longer found to be sufficient for such grandiose goals. Many fund raising schemes were fabricated that increasingly extracted funds from the rich ruling class, but often also preyed upon the unregenerated, the superstitious, and the ignorant. In this respect, the Roman church sold indulgences that were supposed to release the dead from suffering eternal torment and pave the way for them to enter into Heaven. While the Reformation Movement effectively addressed the issue of indulgences, much of this desire for mammon has been carried over into the fund-raising efforts of today's Protestant churches as well.

Over the years, various delusive rituals and traditions have been built upon the errors of the past. In Section 14, we shall discuss some of those strange traditions. One deeply rooted tradition is that of glossolalia (tongue speaking), as erroneously practiced by the young Corinthian church, which runs rampant within some temporal churches yet today. The current popularity of this tradition is most probably being aided by the mysticism associated with the New Age Movement and the Neo-Paganism so prevalent today. Added to glossolalia, we find all kinds of rituals that are often substituted for

true petition and communication with God. We shall discuss ritual healing, ritual prayer, ritual fasting, and lastly the worship of angels all of which is unsupported by Scripture.

Buried under the Sacramentalism of an earlier era, we find that the long standing tradition of baptism is actually quite beneficial to believers as long as it is not corrupted by Churchianity that insists on claiming it as an initiation rite into a temporal church. Baptism is discussed in extensive detail beginning with a detailed word study, the nebulous origin of the ritual, and finally ending with an analysis of today's practice of this ritual. Unlike baptism, we find that there is one Christian tradition that stands out as being a uniquely Christian ritual that also carries with it the direct authority of Christ. This is what we refer to today as the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, or Holy Communion. Of course, the temporal church has done everything that it can to retain exclusive control over this tradition by claiming it as a church sacrament. In doing so, its own massive institution is elevated and memorialized through it thus effectively negating its intended memorial to the death of Christ. Both of those traditions will be discussed in considerable detail in Section 15.

Finally, in Section 16, we shall candidly discuss various controversial life issues that include marriage, divorce, childbirth, feticide, infanticide, child adoption, and a wide range of other issues that are concluded in the last chapter of this final section with a discussion of physical death, suicide, euthanasia, and ultimately the proper disposition of the physical body after death. All of this is discussed from a carefully considered Christian perspective.

With regard to the many errors inherent in Churchianity, we must admit that we have only scratched the surface of the various insidious ways it undermines and mischaracterizes Christianity. All of this reexamination of church tradition will be highly resented by many today. This is quite understandable inasmuch as Churchianity has now hardened into a widely accepted religious form. The Christian faith for many today means accepting church dogma without question, not the acceptance of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Few have ever dared to examine the Churchianity that they hold so dear. This is especially true of those who are directly involved

in various functions of the temporal church at a privileged level that such error supports. The laity today has no appetite for further reform, and the paid clergy dare not risk their own livelihood. Therefore, a symbiotic relationship of ignorance exists. There is no intent in this work to destroy the temporal church through this exposition, but to reform it and free it of the Churchianity that encases it. It could be hoped that a biblical survey of Christian application and practice such as this would at least result in sufficient concern that the visible Church can at last be heard above the spiritually ineffective den of noise that Churchianity makes in today's world.

Book Name Abbreviations

Old Testament

Genesis…Ge.
Exodus…Ex.
Leviticus…Le.
Numbers…Nu.
Deuteronomy…De.
Joshua…Jos.
Judges…Jud.
Ruth…Ru.
1st Samuel…1Sa.
2nd Samuel…2Sa.
1st Kings…1Ki.
2nd Kings…2Ki.
1st Chronicles…1Chr.
2nd Chronicles…2Chr.
Ezra…Ezr.
Nehemiah…Ne.
Esther…Est.
Job…Jb.
Psalms…Ps.
Proverbs…Pr.
Ecclesiastes…Ec.
Song of Solomon…Song.
Isaiah…Is.
Jeremiah…Je.
Lamentations…Lam.
Ezekiel…Eze.
Daniel…Da.
Hosea…Ho.
Joel…Jl.
Amos…Am.
Obadiah…Obad.
Jonah…Jona.
Micah…Mi.
Nahum…Na.
Habakkuk…Hab.
Zephaniah…Zep.
Haggai…Hag.
Zechariah…Zec.
Malachi…Mal.

New Testament

Matthew…Mt.
Mark…Mk.
Luke…Lu.
John…Jn.
Acts…Ac.
Romans…Ro.
1st Corinthians…1Co.
2nd Corinthians…2Co.
Galatians…Ga.
Ephesians…Ep.
Philippians…Ph.
Colossians…Col.
1st Thessalonians…1Th.
2nd Thessalonians…2Th.
1st Timothy…1Ti.
2nd Timothy…2Ti.
Titus…Tit.
Philemon…Phm.
Hebrews…He.
James…Ja.
1st Peter…1Pe.
2nd Peter…2Pe.
1st John…1Jn.
2nd John…2Jn.
3rd John…3Jn.
Jude…Jude.
Revelation…Re.

Those abbreviations are used throughout this work followed by the chapter number, and a colon, followed by a verse number. (i.e. Jn.7:13 means the book of John, Chapter 7, and verse 13). If multiple verses are being referred to, a comma is placed between non-consecutive verses while a dash is placed between the first and last verse of a continuous text. (i.e. Jn.7:13,15 would refer to verses 13 and 15, but not 14). (Jn.7:13–18 would refer to verses 13 through 18). If the notation includes more than one reference, a semicolon is used to separate references. (i.e. Jn.7:13; Mt.2:1 refers to John, Chapter 7, verse 13 and Matthew, Chapter 2, verse 1). In addition, one may occasionally find the abbreviation cf. that means to confer or compare the verses that this abbreviation separates.

At various places throughout this work, one will find a word or short text within quotations of Scripture or other quoted text that is enclosed in brackets []. It should be clearly understood that this text is not a part of the original text that is being quoted, but is an annotation that was added by the author to amplify or clarify the meaning of the quoted text.

Section 9, Individual Christian Conduct

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The High Standard for God's People

Christian Living and Responsibility

Christian Stewardship

Chapter 9.1 The High Standard for God's People

That portion of Christ's teaching known generally as the "Sermon on the Mount" is found in Matthew Chapters 5–7. Quite similar teaching is found in Luke Chapter 6; the discourse in Luke's Gospel is generally known as the "Sermon on the Plain." Jesus very likely gave many similar addresses at various times and places because of the importance of the message. The general subject matter is similar in the two accounts, but we find that the Gospel of Luke includes various topics that are not included in the Gospel of Matthew and vice versa.

There is controversy over whether both the record in Matthew and the record in Luke are accounts of a single address or whether they constitute two separate addresses. Since Matthew was writing to the Jew and Luke was writing to the Gentile (Greek) population, it would follow that their accounts would be tailored to meet the needs of that particular reader. Therefore, the controversy cannot be settled with any degree of certainty.

The Kingdom Proclamation

We must understand that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed exclusively to the Jews in Israel while the Kingdom of Heaven was still being offered to them. What we have here is a statement of intent by King Jesus of the laws and conditions of the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not so much a sermon as it is a proclamation of Kingdom standards. It was not so much intended to instruct or exhort to obedience and performance, as it was to express Kingdom conditions and what was required of any who would live in it.

God had already given his standard of conduct for his people in the Decalogue. Unfortunately, the Jews came to see it only as ritual observance. We find within the Sermon on the Mount a restatement of the Ten Commandments in such a way that they reveal the necessity of total obedience of the mind and heart as well as in outward activity. This restatement strips away any possibility of conforming to the Law

by performing mere works through form or ceremony. As we shall observe in the first part of the discourse (the Beatitudes), the keeping of the Law must first originate from an inward spiritual disposition and desire to please God that the "natural" man does not have, neither can he attain it even through his most diligent efforts.

The Provisional State of the Kingdom

Though the Kingdom was rejected by the Jews such that it was not established on the earth in any physical sense at that time, the Kingdom in its present form, which we may broadly refer to as a "provisional state," was established in spite of man's sins. The term "provisional" as we use it here denotes the fact that God ***provides*** fully for his righteousness to be imputed to men through grace alone. That present state was made possible only through the atoning blood of the King Himself, as He died a sacrificial death on the cross. The word "provisional" also refers to the spiritual character of the present state of the Kingdom, as it exists in the hearts of redeemed men, not within institutions and organizations.

Moreover, the term "provisional" is not meant to suggest that the future Kingdom on earth is in any way contingent upon the success of mankind in this present state of grace since God has preordained the Kingdom age to come to pass at the time He has allotted for it. The provisional Kingdom is only a preparatory state to the complete and perfect Kingdom that is to come into existence when Christ personally returns to the earth to establish it. Therefore, during the present period, strict Kingdom Law has been temporarily suspended. The powerful judgments that we find under the old covenant are greatly tempered by mercy in the new. God, in freely ***providing*** for man's righteousness by his grace, withholds immediate judgment on us.

The Beatitudes

In that first portion of the Sermon on the Mount known as the "beatitudes" which means "blessedness," Jesus explains the state of blessedness that those who are accepted into the Kingdom will enjoy (Mt.5:3–10). Those eight verses form one complete subject that begins and ends with "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (verse 3 and

verse 10). The present verb tense in this phrase would imply that they already possess the kingdom in the sense that they already have the certainty of it, but the verb tense used in the verses between (verses 4-9) indicate that the benefits of that perfect state are being deferred to a future time.

The word "blessed" as it is used here does not refer to a state of perpetual happiness inasmuch as the content of verses 4 through 9 clearly include suffering and mourning that must take place in this life even as we live in a blessed state. The blessed state is something that God sees us as existing within throughout our trials such that He favors us as his own. Therefore, the blessing comes from the internal joy that we have in knowing that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Ro.8:28).

Applying the Beatitudes to Christian Living

Let us discover how we can apply the beatitudes to the provisional state of the Kingdom that is parallel to the present Church age. Jesus describes the perfect character of the subjects of the Kingdom. We notice that Jesus never suggests in his discourse ***how*** such a state can be attained by human effort since that is clearly impossible. Surely, Holy-Spirit constraint is required of any that would enter the provisional Kingdom. God himself must supply that blessed state of being by infusing the mind of Christ into his Kingdom subjects.

The Christian accepts the righteousness of Christ that was received entirely by grace to wear as a covering over his sin. The pure character of Kingdom subjects is such that only the indwelling Holy Spirit declaring the righteousness of Christ within him can allow him any claim to the certainty of it in this age. As Jesus told Nicodemus, without a spiritual rebirth[1] it is not even possible for a man to ***see*** the Kingdom of Heaven; entering it would be equally impossible.

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[1] The doctrine of the new birth was discussed in Chapter 5.4 of book I

Precepts of the Beatitudes

"**Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**"(Mt.5:3; cf. Lu.6:20). Jesus began by informing his audience of the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven can only be occupied by those who suffer from spiritual poverty, not those who seem outwardly to be towers of spiritual strength.[2] Kingdom candidates are not self-centered and are not filled with pride in their own thoughts and abilities. The Kingdom of Heaven is not attainable by those who think themselves religious or of exemplary moral fiber. It is not for those who by their works think that they have regenerated their own soul to the required level of holiness; rather, it is for those who humbly recognize very well their perilous short-comings. Only those who are destitute in spirit are suitable candidates for entry into the Kingdom since they, being empty vessels, can be filled as they depend upon God alone.

Jesus went on to describe the poor in spirit in more detail in the remaining beatitudes. Each individual beatitude does not describe a separate state of being but is part of a whole, and Kingdom subjects will exhibit all of the attributes expressed in all of the Beatitudes without exception. Merely satisfying one or more of those requirements would gain us nothing.

"**But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation**"(Lu.6:24).[3] If our spirits are already full, being overfed with the things of this world, will there be room for the Spirit of God to bestow his blessing there? No, for our sustenance is already being found in material things. Since we are not spiritually hungry, we do not have a hunger for God's righteousness. That is what was meant by it being extremely difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of

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[2] This Beatitude does not refer to the physically destitute as is clearly evidenced by the prepositional phrase "in spirit." Subjecting ourselves to physical poverty in this life cannot in any way change our spiritual state.

[3] Here in Luke, we do not find the prepositional phrase "in spirit," though it may be easily assumed by the context. However, material riches can obviously contribute to the state of a proud spirit.

Heaven (Mt.19:23). All human effort to enter the Kingdom is as impossible as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle (Mt.19:24;Mk.10:25)![4]

We find in the instance of the rich young ruler (Mk.10:17–27) that Jesus told him to "sell all that he had and give it to the poor." The giving away of all his wealth to the poor would not have ***bought*** him entry into the Kingdom, it would merely have positioned him to place his trust in a "heavenly treasure" when his eyes were no longer blinded by his temporal wealth (Mk.10:21; Mt.6:19–21). It was therefore not the fact that the young ruler was rich that kept him from entering the Kingdom gate, but that he was trusting in his riches to earn salvation through good works outside the gate.

We notice that Jesus did not recite to the young man the first portion of the Decalogue that applied to man's obligation to love God, but only that part which applied to his responsibility to his fellow men. That was an area in which the young ruler apparently excelled (Mk.10:19). That is why, when Jesus finally told the young man to follow Him, he sadly walked away.

A rich man has many means at his disposal with which to benefit his fellow man, while a poor man has few. It would appear that the rich young ruler was right in every way with his fellow men and, no doubt, gave generously to the poor as his riches allowed, and was zealous to do even more that eternal life would be his reward (Mk.10:17,19,20). However, the rich young ruler was not right with God just because he was charitable toward other men. It is not our fellow men that will judge us, and it is not even those whom we have aided or wronged who will judge us, but God alone.

Nevertheless, his disciples were understandably astonished by Jesus' words and asked, "Who then can be saved" (Mt.19:25)? In answer to their question, Jesus answered, "With men it is impossible,

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[4]There seems to be no reason to assume that the eye of the needle was a small door in the larger gate through which a camel could pass on its knees, as is such a popular belief today. There is no evidence that this allegory applied in the times of Christ. What Jesus is showing by the illustration of the huge camel and the tiny eye in the sewing needle is that by all human effort, entry is impossible.

but not with God: for with God all things are possible." (Mk.10:27). Whether we are rich or poor, salvation is a work of God and not of men, and God is no respecter of a person's material status or background (Ac.10:34).

"**Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted**" (Mt.5:4). The poor in spirit mourn, for they are not filled with a sense of their own worth, but grieve over their emptiness. They mourn over their ugly bent toward sin such that they weep with uninhibited sadness. Jesus says that those shall be comforted in the Kingdom, and they will even come to laugh with joy (Lu.6:21). Recognizing our spiritual poverty and our great need of spiritual provision through God's grace is necessary for entry even into the provisional Kingdom as we demonstrate a contrite heart and a desire to turn away from the way of sin that condemns us.

"Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" (Lu.6:25). They that laugh now, enjoying the things of this world, shall most certainly mourn and weep later because they will find themselves shut out of the Kingdom. That is because they have discerned only the things of this world and have neglected the things of the Spirit; they have already received their comfort in temporal things. They have even laughed at those who would dare tell them of the sin in their lives and warn them of future judgment, deriding them instead for their supposed foolishness.

"**Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth**" (Mt.5:5). "Meek" in this verse does not describe those that crawl into a corner speaking to no one and hiding from the world. Nor do they seek to be doormats for anyone that wishes to spitefully use them. Rather, it means those that are not characteristically offensive or abrasive to others, those who are long suffering in their own difficulties and are gentle to others, those with patience for the cares of others.

When the meek enter the Kingdom in this age, they truly inherit all the people of the earth as an unpaid ***debt*** to which their own redemption obligates them (cf. Ro.1:14,15). They must seek out opportunity to speak the wonders of the grace of Christ to all people on the face of the earth to satisfy their obligations under that debt. They must not go about in great arrogance as if the Gospel is their own

possession to impart upon whomsoever they will. Rather it is their meekness in doing so that will draw those who seek the true Gospel to them.

In the beginning, Adam had control and possession of all the earth. After his fall, nature ruled over man. The earth brought forth thorns and thistles instead of fruit, and Adam needed to labor hard against it in order to eat (Ge.3:18,19). In the future Kingdom-age, the earth will flourish and will again bring forth fruit without thorns. It is clear that the meek do not yet have the earth as their inheritance fulfilled during this present age, inasmuch as much evil and thorns abound. Only when Jesus establishes his Kingdom on earth with its laws in full force will that be true of the meek remnant that populate it.

Yet, in this age who can hold within his heart the physical beauty of this earth as a promise of a future inheritance but him who in meekness can appreciate what God has provided. The arrogant cannot see or appreciate God's creation for they do not recognize it as God's providence. Only those who are "the sons of God" can truly inherit God's creation in a present sense, since in seeing its source they may truly grasp it to their bosom and cherish it as a gift from the Creator.

"**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled**" (Mt.5:6; Lu.6:21). The poor in spirit are like those that are very hungry and thirsty, since due to the poverty of their spirit they are empty of hope. They thirst for the ability to attain righteousness and so come into the presence of God, but they continue to hunger not being able to attain righteousness for themselves. As they look about them in this world, all they see is unrighteousness. They correctly see their own attempts to attain it as futile. Jesus said that those shall be filled.

Joel prophesied that the Spirit of God would be poured out on all nations in the Kingdom age when it comes to full fruition (Jl.2:28). Nevertheless, even in this present age of grace, we who truly believe on the Son of God have received no small measure of sustenance as we receive as a gift the much-needed righteousness from God. The bread of life alleviates our hunger even as the indwelling Holy Spirit provides us with living water that assuages our thirst (Jn.6:35;7:38,39).

"Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger" (Lu.6:26a)**.** Those that suppose themselves to be self-righteous in this world do not hunger after a gift of righteousness from God. "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Ro.10:3). Being full of their supposed self-righteousness, they do not feel the hunger pains that should warn them of their spiritually starved state. Once their own righteousness is revealed to them as worthless in the future, they shall be overcome with a terrible hunger that cannot be satisfied.

"**Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy**" (Mt.5:7). Being merciful is not merely a matter of performing acts of mercy; it is not works, but a state of being. The Law says that only if we have mercy on others can we expect to obtain mercy ourselves (Mt.6:14,15). The merciful have compassion for the suffering and the genuine needs of others. That does not mean that we can ***purchase*** the mercy of God through our own acts of mercy. Rather, the mercy of God and the mercy demonstrated in the redeemed are linked as God's mercy is being shared with others through us. Those of the Kingdom, being freely immersed in the mercy of God that was totally unmerited, can in no way hold others to a standard that we ourselves could not attain. Our own conscience would condemn us.

We must be merciful to all men and not judge them, for the right of judgment is reserved to God alone. If we, deserving death, by God's grace are no longer condemned how can we condemn others for the same fault that is ours? Rather, we must forgive others all that they have done to us even as we have been forgiven for all that we have done to others (Mt.6:12). "For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Lu.6:38).

When we see unbelievers as we ourselves were (before receiving the redemption of God), we shall ***involuntarily*** show mercy toward them in ***response*** to God's mercy that was given to us. When we see fellow believers struggling against the law of the flesh, we can only identify ourselves with them, not condemn them. The Holy Spirit within us persuades us that we cannot do otherwise; to do so would be to deny our own undeserved deliverance in Christ. We should pray

that as we have received mercy, others might find release from sin and also find peace with God.

"**Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God**" (Mt.5:8). The word translated "pure" is more properly translated "clean." This is a state of internal cleanness, not merely a show of outward piety. It is the "dirty" heart of man that prevents him from seeing the glory of God. Therefore, Jesus could only be referring to those whose innermost being is cleansed by the washing of regeneration through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit (Tit.3:5). We have discovered in this work that no believer is truly pure in heart because of the contamination remaining from his old nature. Therefore, we shall not be fully "pure of heart" in this life, because the desires of our flesh remain with us.

Nor, has any living person seen God at any time, though Jesus has fully revealed Him to us (Jn.1:18). No man can see the face of the eternal God and live (Ex.33:20). If we corrupt mortals should look directly upon the face of God, we would be consumed by the holy fire of his countenance (Mal.3:2). However, we do see Jesus, through the eyes of Scripture, whom we can understand through his humanity, and who is the express image of the Father's person (He.1:3). If we see Him, we also see the Father (Jn.14:9). Therefore, the "cleansed in heart" shall see the Father's ***glory*** that is reflected in Christ in his own life, and he shall be able to fully look upon the Father's ***face*** in the life to come.

"**Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God**" (Mt.5:9). Peacemakers in this verse do not refer to diplomats that make peace between nations, but to God's subjects that make peace between themselves and others of God's Kingdom. The natural man is in an irreconcilable war with God over his sins; only in Christ, the prince of peace, is peace to be found. God has established his peace with mankind exclusively through Him (cf. Lu.2:14). By the internal witness of the Spirit of Adoption, we know that we are the children of God, and as members of God's family, we should always seek to cultivate peace with our brothers in Christ.

Yet in a far greater sense, we are called upon to carry the Truth to those who are not yet brothers, but do actively seek God. In doing

so, we facilitate peace between them and God as well as ourselves by proclaiming the Gospel to them that they may also receive the reconciliation that is theirs in Christ. For "…as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Ro.10:15)!

"**Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**" (Mt.5:10). Being the children of God in his spiritual Kingdom does not endear us to the people of the world, nor will it bring peace between the world at large and us. The worldly system is not a part of God's Kingdom, nor can it understand it, being only temporal.

While we may correctly consider ourselves to be within the "brotherhood of men" in that we have all fallen from Adam, we who believe in Christ Jesus have been transformed into new men through the new birth we have received from above. Through the rebirth, our souls have been severed from the fallen brotherhood of Adam and placed within Christ's new brotherhood of the redeemed. Therefore, while we now have true fellowship with our brothers in Christ, being of the same Spirit, we most certainly must experience hostility with the world at large because of our radical separation from it. The old serpent, the devil, is presently the prince of this temporal world (Jn.14:30;16:11) and enjoys evil fellowship with his own subjects as they continue to accept his lies and hate God's elect (Jn.8:44).

So absolute is the separation of the elect from the world that Jesus said to them, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Mt.5:11). When that happens, we know with certainty that we are the true heirs of the Kingdom since the kingdom of this world would not reject its own. Nevertheless, we must be very sure that the world's rejection of us is because of our hope in Christ, not for other causes of which we should be ashamed. If we, through false piety, are hostile to the unsaved, their animosity toward us is fully justified.

> **"Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold,**

your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets (Lu. 6:22,23).

If, therefore, by the reproach of the world, we are being blessed of God, how can we despise those through which that reproach is being conveyed? When we are hated because we are identified with Christ, we are actually being confirmed as subjects of the Kingdom so that by their evil reproach they actually exhort us to assurance. Though the world intends it as evil toward us, we can perceive it as producing goodness in our lives (cf. Ge.50:20). The prophets of old who spoke for God suffered the same reproach and persecution of the Jewish nation.

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Lu.6:26). If we should fail to receive the expected negative response from the world at large, we should become greatly concerned that we are not speaking the Truth to them. We have watered down the Gospel until it no longer has any power to convict anyone of sin that men may repent and turn to Christ. Just as the false prophets of old, we are only seeking to receive their praises to the extent that we are willing to tell them whatever they wish to hear. In doing so, we become complicit with them in their rebellion against God and have fellowship with the world.

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you" (Lu.6:27). If any man does evil to us for the sake of our hope in Christ, we should return a double portion not of evil, which should never find a place in us, but a double portion of love as we consider their lost condition from which the evil deed sprang. "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same" (Lu.6:32,33). Even those belonging to the kingdom of the world love those that love them because it is personally rewarding for them to do so; however, those who walk in the light of the Holy Spirit are also enabled to love those who do them ill as well. We observe that God also showers good things on the unthankful and the evil in this life; even those that revile Him, curse Him, and deny Him (Mt.5:45).

If God from his limitless resources gives good things to those, how can we do any less? Can we claim to be more righteous than is God?

Kingdom Subjects' Influence on this World

After describing the character of Kingdom subjects Jesus went on to describe the desired effect of Kingdom subjects in this world. First Jesus impresses upon us the need to remain steadfast in the faith ourselves. If we do not preserve that which is true in our own lives, how can we ever hope to preserve that which is good in others? Jesus said, "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mk.9:50). "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Mt.5:13). We must hold Truth within ourselves with integrity, otherwise we shall find ourselves castaway as worthless in witnessing to a fallen world.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Mt.5:14). God in redeeming us has lit us like a candle that we may become a positive example and witness to the rest of the world. We are constantly being held up to public display for the sake of our belief in Christ. Why should we ever consider hiding who we are and what we believe? Do men who light a candle put it under a bushel (or bowl) (Mt.5:15)? Certainly not, for light is intended to reveal that which is genuine in the midst of darkness and should therefore be placed in a high place on a lampstand so that reality may be seen by many (Mt.5:15). God desires the same of us. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mt.5:16). We should give out the Truth freely to all, and through our good works, to which we are enabled by the Holy Spirit, bring testimony to men of God's glory, grace, and mercy that they may be drawn to the light and come to know Christ.

The Letter and Spirit of the Law Fulfilled by Christ

Some in his day argued that Jesus taught contrary to the Law, and refuted the prophets. To that Jesus answered, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Mt.5:17). Jesus came, being born a Jew under the Law, to do all of the things that are contained in the Law — being the only righteous man before God as judged by the strict demands of the Law. "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Mt.5:18). God will not withdraw his Word that he spoke in the Law, for it is eternal, even as is God Himself, and is therefore not subject to change.

Those who have received the Spirit of Christ have an inner desire, in response to God's love and mercy, to do those things contained in the moral Law without the rigid adherence to the letter of the Law itself. In Jesus' own words, "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.5:20). Outwardly, the Scribes and Pharisees were zealous keepers of the Law, checking off each of the Commandments on their fingers through strict ritual observance, but inwardly they were men of poor spiritual perception and totally lacking in the qualities of love and mercy.

They wore their phylacteries[5] outwardly on their foreheads, hung in place by cords, in which was written passages of the Law (Mt.23:5). That was only an example of their apostasy, for they could not understand that God would one day engrave his moral Law in the minds of his own, hung in place by bonds of love. The keeping of the Law would not be in outward ritual, but stem from a burning inward desire to do God's will made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit who had set them free from the condemnation of the Law that they might live lives pleasing to God as well as themselves (Je.31:3; Ro.8:1).

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[5] Phylacteries were small leather pouches that were worn on the forehead (frontlet) and another on the left arm. In those leather pouches were four passages from the Old Testament: Exodus 13:1-10, 11-16 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:3-21.

Christ Raises the Law to the Highest Plane

Jesus revealed the purpose of the moral Law by demonstrating that even the most outwardly "righteous" of the day, the Scribes and Pharisees, could not fulfill them. Violations of the Law are a result of an inward spiritual fault that makes every man fall short in his ability to adhere to them. Jesus lifted the keeping of the Law far above the level of ritual or methodical effort to an extremely high spiritual plane. He did that primarily through the commandments of the moral Law prohibiting murder, adultery, and the use of God's Name in vain, though it is most certain that He could have made similar applications from the other commandments as well.

Murder

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill…" (Mt.5:21; Ex.20:13). If we have not physically murdered another, we would seem to be fully in compliance with this commandment — and by the letter, so we are. However, Jesus said that if we have only contemplated harm to others in our hearts, we have already broken this law (Mt.5:22). It is highly improbable that any living has not at one time or another harbored murderous thoughts against another, at least for a brief moment. The fact that we did not give in to that anger, carry out those thoughts, and physically murder that person is of no consequence, since God looks inwardly at that corruption from which such an act springs forth. Therefore, we must understand that the root of our terrible fault is spiritual and deeply entrenched in our fallen nature. No amount of outward legal observance of any law or regulation can change who we are by transforming us inwardly; only the Spirit of Christ can do that for us through a spiritual rebirth.

Adultery

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Mt.5:27,28; cf. Ex.20:14). Again, we find that from our

own nature we cannot fulfill the requirements of the Law, because of the weakness of the flesh.

It is better that we “mortify the flesh”; that we put down and away those lusts that destroy us, said Paul (Ro.8:13). It would be better if we gouge out our eye and cast it away if through keeping it we should perish. If our right hand offends and causes us to sin, we would be better to cut it off and cast it away from us (Mt.5:29,30). Since our bodies shall surely die as God has ordained, why should we allow our souls to die with it (1Co.15:22)?

Nevertheless, such physical mutilation of our bodies would be ***useless*** since the root cause of our sin is spiritual, not physical. Therefore, we must seek to nail our old fleshly ***nature*** to the cross (Mt.16:24) counting our old selves as being ***already crucified with Christ.*** We must seek to live fully in the spirit until that glorious day when we shall rise, even as Christ has risen, with new incorruptible bodies that are not subject to the ravages of sin (Ro.6:6;1Co.15:20–22).

Abusing God’s Name

Can we ever effectively swear to the truth of our own statements (Mt.5:33; Le.19:12)? Jesus surely refers in this passage to using the name of God in vain — that is, in a disrespectful, meaningless, or frivolous manner (cf. Ex.20:7). Many so easily do that today even without thinking about what they are doing. If we default in the words we speak, can we deliver God in exchange for them? Can we offer up Heaven or God’s throne as collateral for our words (Mt.5:34)? Can we even swear by the things of this earth since they are all God’s by creation (Mt.5:35)? Can we even swear by our own head (Mt.5:36)? Even our own life is in the providence of God alone. Therefore, we should merely answer "yes" or "no" in truth, since only evil can come from doing more than that (Mt.5:37). The word of a Christian should carry its own integrity as a child of God.

The High Standard of Righteousness

Jesus stated the need for a personal righteousness that exceeded that of the most religious men of Israel (the Scribes and

Pharisees: Mt.5:20). Jesus' proclamation states the absolute requirements of Kingdom law without putting forward any means for reaching that high level of perfection. Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount is actually an absolute restatement of the Decalogue raised to the painfully high level of its spiritual intent that condemns us all.

Jesus demonstrated through his words the necessity for an inward law-keeping to his followers that far exceeds mere ritual observance. Jesus' reiteration of the Law does not imply that we who are saved by grace should now resort to a ritual observance of the Ten Commandments, as some seem to think. As we have seen, ritual observance does not satisfy the intent of the Law. Jesus spoke to Jews who believed that their hope was to be found in a strict observance of the letter of the Law, but we find that the way that Jesus restated the law made compliance in that manner humanly impossible.

Has a sinful thought never crossed our minds? Do we never become angry with a brother? Do we never experience lust? Do we always see marriage as a sacred indivisible trust with God? Do we never swear of the truth of our actions by using God's name in a vain manner? Do we always love our brothers as is fitting our high calling as children of God? Yet, those are only a few of the things that are required by the Ten Commandments. The commands were removed from the engravings in stone tablets and applied to human flesh in the Sermon on the Mount discourse. Imagine the impact those sayings must have had on those who actually thought they were fulfilling the Law of God by outward ritual observance. Their efforts were revealed as being superficial, and they did not even begin to touch the depth of the Law of God!

Jesus' Authority Established through Miracles

As Jesus expounded the law of Kingdom living in what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, the Jew of that day would naturally ask what authority He had to say any of those things. After all, statements of Kingdom law are all the prerogative of God, not of any mortal man. Jesus authenticated his authority through the performance of miracles. The miracles were of a quantity and quality that no mere mortal could possibly have accomplished by any means.

That left no doubt that Jesus was truly the sovereign ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven, and that He therefore had every right to state his proclamation regarding its laws. The miracles that Jesus performed were not an end in themselves, but were performed as signs for the express purpose of teaching his followers regarding both matters concerning the Kingdom and the fact of Jesus' deity as the Son of God that also identified Him as the long awaited Messiah and King.

The Quantity of Jesus' Miracles

The Apostle John wrote that if all of the things that Jesus did during his ministry were written down in books, he supposes that the world would not be able to contain them all (Jn.21:25). Therefore, in all of the Gospels combined, we are only told of a small percentage of the miracles that Jesus performed. It is very probable that many thousands were healed and that many more were restored from death that the biblical records do not relate.

Of course, God had performed miracles before, as is evidenced by the Old Testament text, but never in the abundance with which Jesus performed them. In particular, we see the many instances where Jesus healed physical infirmities are not evidenced to any extent in the Old Testament. Jesus said that there were many widows in the days of Elijah, but none received a miracle through the prophet Elijah except one in Sarepta a city near Sidon (Phoenicia) (Lu.4:26; 1Ki.17:8–24). In addition, many lepers were in Israel during the time of Elisha, but only Naaman the Syrian was healed (Lu.4:27; 2Ki.5:1,10,14). Moreover, those were both Gentiles, not Jews!

Rather than being filled with miracles of physical healing, the Old Testament is full of miracles of severe judgment. Therefore, we must realize that the quantity of the miracles of the kind that Jesus performed were unique in the history of the world. Never was God so intent upon getting our focus upon ***one person*** as is evidenced by the many miracles of mercy that were literally showered upon the nation of Israel. So much so, that even Samaritans and Gentiles received the overflow of God's grace as many of them were also physically healed.

The Quality of Jesus' Miracles

Not only were men in those days impressed with the quantity of Jesus' miracles, they were also overwhelmed with the ***quality*** of his miracles. So much so that even his devout enemies, the Scribes and Pharisees, found it impossible to deny that genuine miracles were taking place (Jn.11:47). As Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews stated, "…we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (Jn.3:1,2).

Jesus' miracles firmly established his authority over all spiritual as well as physical aspects of the Kingdom of God. Jesus conquered every mortal enemy of mankind when He conquered illness, death, and the grave. Beyond that, He has also conquered the sworn enemies of God, which are evil, sin, and as He cast out demons even Satan the prince of darkness himself.

The Kingdom scepter had come to earth in the hand of Jesus Christ. Through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is now sent to rule in every subject of the Kingdom according to the express will and purpose of God. Jesus is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending… which is, and which was, and which is to come the Almighty" (Re.1:8). "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power…" (Re.4:11). Jesus Christ is "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Re.19:16)!

Reconciling Law with an Age of Grace

The religious liberal of today seeks to equate, or even supersede, the Gospel of grace with the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, seeing its requirements as something that is attainable by the average man (or at least by the dutiful man) by strength of mind. That is because he sees man as being basically good if he is only aimed in the right direction. He believes that it is only necessary to reform the old nature socially to attain righteousness. If everyone by strength of will lived by the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, there would be a social utopia to be sure. Therefore, the Gospel, which

emphatically states that Christ died for our sins and that He was raised again for our justification, could be thrown out as irrelevant!

Of an opposing view to the liberal, the Hyper-dispensationalist states that since the Sermon on the Mount is purely a restatement of Old Testament law, it can be ignored as belonging to a strictly Hebrew dispensation. It has no application to Christians in an age of grace. Both the liberal and Hyper-dispensational viewpoints are extreme positions that have been rejected in this discussion as we seek to determine the important relationship between grace and law. Though God's grace supersedes his Law as the sole means of our redemption, it does not change the mandate for personal conduct that God has set forth in his divine law for his people of every age.

Moral Relevance of the Sermon on the Mount

As with the Decalogue itself, there is a moral relevance of the Sermon on the Mount that is still applicable to Christians in this age of grace. Although we are not presently under the strict mandate of Kingdom Law, we can still benefit greatly from studying it since it emphatically states God's requirements for his acceptance of mankind. The moral Law consistently demonstrates how far we fail to measure up to the righteousness required by God and in doing so keeps us looking to Christ for his righteousness to be continuously imputed to us.

The Law of God is pure and irrevocable. Consequently, any of the redeemed that through ignorance breaks the Law of God, and teaches others to do so, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven, while those that do the things contained in the Law and teach others shall be called great (Mt.5:19). Here we see the power of grace in that even those who have broken God's law and have even taught others to do so are still to be found in God's kingdom though their status there is greatly diminished.

Our Need for God's Grace in Christ

Rather than say, as some have, that by Jesus' further explanation of the depth of the Law in his discourse we can now readily accomplish those things, we should instead be brought to our

knees! Jesus' words demonstrate that the moral Law of God cannot be fulfilled by our outward actions, but can only be fulfilled within the depths of our own heart, which in the natural man is totally corrupt. The Law requires us to be ***perfect even as God is perfect,*** a demand that we cannot ever satisfy (Mt.5:48). Therefore, we must bow to the perfection of God for we, as sinners, can do no more than that. Yet, Christ fulfilled the Law, and justification to God by ***Jesus'*** perfection is our sure hope of redemption through the continuous regeneration of our minds and hearts by his Holy Spirit within us until the redemption of our bodies take place.

For the Jews of that day, the acceptance of the laws of the Kingdom of Heaven was just not possible. How they must have recoiled inwardly from the Kingdom platform! They lacked the spiritual discernment necessary to even see the Kingdom of Heaven let alone enter it. So it was, that the only way any could be brought into the Kingdom was by the way of a cross. That was not to be a cross that they were able to bear, but one that Jesus, the life giver, must bear for them. It was necessary that the King should die for his people and not just for the Jew only, but for all the peoples of the earth.

The Path of Life

Today, there are two ways before us toward the city of refuge —the New Jerusalem coming out of Heaven, a wide easy way that leads to destruction in route, and a strait narrow way that leads to eternal life (Re.21:2; Mt.7:13,14). Many enter the wide gate, which is the way of ritual and religious activity, thinking they have found the narrow path. We should beware of the false teachers who constantly point to the broad way of mere religion as the path to eternal life as so many do today. They only seek to devour us along the way, and at the end of the broad path is eternal destruction (Mt.7:15).

The narrow path is a way of pure grace that is not tainted in any way by man's faulty works. There is only one door opening into that narrow path: Jesus Christ, the Son of God and savior of the world (Jn.14:6). He is the narrow door opening into the path of grace, which we must walk daily with God's Spirit living within our hearts. There is

no other door, no other way, and no other name by which we ***must*** be saved (Ac.4:12).

At the time of judgment, many will say, "Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works" (Mt.7:22)? However, those are actually "workers of iniquity" (Mt.7:23) that have not truly known Christ, nor has Christ known them. They have not walked the narrow path of grace, but have strayed onto the broad road, not discerning Jesus deep in their soul, but only superficially through outward ritual and reprobate labor. Therefore, we must not engage in religion or mere church attendance and activities seeking only a temporal answer to our needs, but rather come to Jesus Christ Himself for the true path of life eternal (Ps.16:11).

The Sermon on the Mount is truly the Law of the future Kingdom Age, but it also demonstrates the great need we have today for a savior to deliver us from moral decay and the consequences of disobedience to the perfect Law of God. As children of the provisional Kingdom, it is what we should strive to achieve even though we must always fall short of the mark. Here is the way, the Truth, and the life: Jesus Christ. He is the only way into today's provisional Kingdom, since He is the undisputed King of that future Kingdom on earth as well.

Chapter 9.2 Christian Living and Responsibility

The Kingdom, while yet in its present worldly garb, is suffered to exist and to grow in the midst of the evil of this world. Jesus demonstrated that fact in many of his parables.

Parable of the Tares

That is what Jesus taught in the parable of the tares (Mt.13:24–30;36–43). "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in the field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (Mt.13:24,25). Jesus later said, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man, the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil" (Mt.13:37–39).

Christ, through the Holy Spirit, sows the children of the Kingdom in the world (Mt.13:37). The children of the Kingdom likewise become distributors of that good seed as they grow and bear fruit. Not all men will receive the Word of God, since most violently reject it in anger. Those are the children of Satan that he has planted. In this world, the children of God and the children of Satan reside side by side, and it is often difficult to tell which is which. Although the children of Satan are obviously sinners, the children of the Kingdom are redeemed sinners that are still prone to falling into sin. The children of this world grow along side the children of God as a weed, blocking the light, choking the wheat, and hindering both the elect's spiritual growth and fruit-bearing.

The Time of Harvest

If God should choose to destroy the tares before the time of harvest, some of the children of the Kingdom could be destroyed along with them since they exist side-by-side (Mt.13:28,29). Therefore, both must be allowed to grow in the field of this world until the day of the harvest comes. At that time, the tares can be easily discerned from the wheat since the tares will not have borne any spiritual fruit in all their lifetime. They often only mimicked the wheat as they grew next to

them. They were never useful for anything but, rather, continued to work as an obstruction against the harvest of that which is good. Jesus will winnow them out on the thrashing floor to be burned up as chaff in the fire of judgment (Mt.3:12).

Jesus said, "Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Mt.13:30). The harvest is to be a time of severe judgment upon evil as well as a time of great reward for that which is good. The harvest involves the cutting down of both good and evil; that is, it involves the removal of both from the soil of the earth; however, the good are to be "saved" and the evil are to be "burned" in judgment. That we may be clear about the time of that harvest; we read in another place that Jesus said, "…the harvest is the end of the [age], and the reapers are the angels" (Mt.13:39).

The Elect In, But Not of the World

In this world, we who are God's elect are to grow like wheat that bears spiritual fruit for the eventual harvest to come at the end of the age of grace. The children of the Kingdom must of necessity grow up among the tares, yet must not be one of them or identify themselves with them. Jesus prayed concerning his disciples, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the [evil one]. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn.17:15,16). Though we are not ***of*** the world because we have our citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven, we are, nonetheless, ***in*** the world as strangers, travelers, and ambassadors until the day that we are recalled to return home to our Father's house.

Parable of the Draw Net

Jesus similarly compared the Kingdom of heaven to a fisherman's draw net (Mt.13:47–50). When the net is cast into the sea all manner of fish and other sea-life are caught up in it, but the fisherman does not attempt to remove the undesirable sea-life as they ***enter*** the net lest some of the fish also be rejected. Rather, he waits until the net is full of sea-life of all kinds. At that time, the net is drawn

to the shore, the fish are removed and kept, and the residue is cast away. In like manner, at the end of the age, all evil will be separated from the just and will be cast away into the fire as completely worthless (Mt.13: 49,50).

Laying up Heavenly treasure

If we are the grains of wheat that shall be redeemed at the harvest, we must not seek the wealth of this world to sustain us since we know that it is both corruptible and temporal, and we shall depart this life soon enough leaving all behind. Rather, we must look beyond the glitter of the world toward spiritual treasures laid up in store for us in Heaven.

> **"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"** (Mt.6:19–21).

We should not envy the tares because they grow and prosper all about us, since we know all too well what their end will be. Evil is all around us in this age as we await the day of God's harvest, and yet, we should not live as the children of this world live just because they are prospering. Should a small and delicate flower envy crabgrass? Our attitudes and our hopes should be on a higher plane than the physical and the temporal. After all, we seek an eternal Kingdom, not of this world, but in Heaven where our true treasures await us!

Worthlessness of Worldly Treasures

Worldly wealth is fleeting and God certainly has no personal need of it such that we could present it to Him. We see that our redemption was not purchased with gold or silver nor with any other wealth that this world could hold, but, as Peter said, "…with the precious blood of Christ…" (1Pe.1:19). Such is the insignificance of the wealth of this world. Not all of the wealth of the world combined

could purchase that which the human race so desperately needed above all else — our spiritual redemption.

We clearly recognize the error of laying up for ourselves the treasures of this world in contrast with spiritual treasures in the parable known as the parable of the" rich fool" (Lu.12:16–21). In that parable, a certain rich man owned ground, which brought him great wealth. However, rather than considering the providence of God, which had brought him his wealth, he became concerned because he ran out of space to store it (Lu.12: 17)! Therefore, he decided to build from his wealth more and more places to put it so that he could save up all the more. Then, he said to himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Lu.12:19). We see that the man trusted in his riches for his security. Yet, his security was only a ***worldly sense*** of security, satisfying his fleshly mind, but ***not*** his soul. It was only temporary security, not eternal.

"But, God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided" (Lu.12:20)? When this man died all in which he had placed his security remained behind. It is far better, then, that we lay up spiritual treasure in the Kingdom of God. It is better that we seek to be rich in our service to God, not rich toward providing temporary comfort for ourselves (Lu.12:21). It is far better to trust in God than to trust in the riches of this world, since the riches of this world only provide physical comfort for such a short time, while that which is laid up in store for us in the Kingdom of God provides security forever. We should first seek the Kingdom of God and the righteousness of Christ knowing that God will provide for all our physical needs as we do so (Mt.6:33).

We cannot carry earthly wealth with us beyond the grave, and even if we could, what use would it be to us in the life to come? Moreover, to whom shall our worldly treasure belong when we are gone from this life? Surely, we shall not benefit from what remains behind! Jesus warned, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Lu.12:15).

Exercising our Responsibility in the Kingdom

We who have received the Gospel of redemption have not received it for our benefit alone, but received it in trust that we may dispense it to others while time remains. It would be well if we discussed various important matters of Christian stewardship as they are revealed to us in the many parables that Jesus taught.

The Parable of the Ready Servant

In the Gospel of Luke, we are told to be ready at his coming (Lu.12:35–40). We must be dressed and ready for service when He calls on us (Lu.12:35). We are not to be asleep, but have the lights on in the house anticipating the time of his arrival so that when He does come, we may immediately open the door and bid Him enter (Lu.12:35,36). It is obvious that Jesus is using a house metaphorically to represent our innermost being, the house of our soul.

However, we do not know the hour in which He shall come requesting our service. If He comes and we are not ready, He will have to break into the house just like a "thief in the night" for it is not reasonable that the master of the house should be kept waiting at that late hour while we prepare for Him (Lu.12:39). Our Lord will not delay his coming to us for an accounting until we "clean up the house" or are in a spiritual mood to receive Him. Therefore, we must always be in a state of expectancy — spiritually awake and ready — for Jesus will call on us in an hour when we least expect Him (Lu.12:40).

The Parable of the Evil Servant

Some of God's servants have been given more responsibility than have others. Those who, by the circumstances of their lives, have been put in charge of other believers spiritually must feed those believers and see that they never hunger for the Truth. If one to whom God has given much goes about "beating" (that is, mistreating, abusing and denying spiritual sustenance to) other believers, he himself will be punished and treated as an unbeliever upon Christ's return (Lu.12:45,46).

Such a man may say to himself that Jesus will certainly not come very soon; therefore, he feels free to fleece the flock, taking from them their possessions and giving little or no spiritual sustenance in return. He will soon become drunk with his ill-gotten gains, perhaps even seeking to justify such gains as his due for stewardship. However, the servant who withholds the Truth and who knows God's will and doesn't do it will be severely punished upon Jesus' return.

A Servant Must Serve

Perhaps an irrational fear of punishment is the reason that many do not seek to assume a position of leadership out of concern that he may inadvertently offend believers. Many site James Chapter 3, verse 1 in that regard: "My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." Nevertheless, a faithful servant ***must*** serve, or how can he hope to receive a "well done" (Mt.25:21)? Furthermore, we are told that he who does not fully understand God's will in all matters, and so has done things worthy of punishment, shall be punished lightly, because he did those things out of ignorance, not willfully (Lu.12:47,48). Therefore, we must not allow our lack of knowledge of ***all*** things stand in the way of our giving forth to others that which we ***do*** know. We can surely trust Christ to judge us rightly. We must constantly pray for the light of understanding and go forward.

If however we have been entrusted with the Word of God in abundance, we had better be about investing it in the power of God. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lu.12:48). We should not so much fear our ignorance as our ***lack of desire*** to serve God in the capacity that we have been given by Him to do. The more Truth we have been given, the more we must give out to others. He, who has been put in charge of much, should seek to invest that abundance to produce as much gain as possible for the honor of his Lord.

The Parable of the Talents

We plainly see the mandate to invest regardless of the gifts we may have received demonstrated in the parable of the talents

(Mt.25:14–30). Jesus said, "…the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods" (Mt.25:14). When Jesus ascended to the Father, He gave spiritual gifts to men by means of the Holy Spirit (Ep.4:8).[6] The gifts are for the sole purpose of building up the Church in this age and so advance the Kingdom toward its full fruition at the time of the harvest at the end of the age. When those gifts are used according to God's will, we invest them in his power.

From the "interest" that God receives on those gifts, His Kingdom continues to grow even as money grows with interest when it is invested. The word "talent" in this Scripture text actually refers to a weight of gold of considerable value and not natural ability as some may suppose. We are ***not*** being told to invest mere natural ability, since man's ***natural*** talents are tainted with evil. Conversely, we should not think that we are merely being told to invest money that we have earned for "God's purposes" either. Jesus is using an allegory showing how ***Truth*** and the ***gifts of the Holy Spirit***, which we have received through Him, should be invested in the world.

This quite worldly example, centered on a metaphor of money, describes the actions of men who have financial knowledge regarding investments of this world in order that we may better understand similar principles of spiritual investment. We know that any investment in the financial things of this world has "risk" attached to it; that is why we receive interest. The higher the interest earned, the greater is the risk. Likewise, the investment of the gifts of the Holy Spirit involves risk on our part. We must be willing to accept the risk of personal persecution or at the very least risk our social standing in the world. Moreover, we must be willing to risk our physical and spiritual comfort by stepping out into the hostile world with the Gospel.

It is all too easy for us to crawl into a comfortable corner with our "precious faith" and "protect" it from the world. Instead of

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[6] In Section 12 we shall discuss how those gifts are dispensed as the Holy Spirit sees fit, and according to our opportunity to utilize them (Mt.25:15).

investing it, we hoard it! That is why so many believers that have been given the ability to witness or teach others are not willing to do so. We fear risking our personal comfort, our standing with others and, to some extent, even our faith itself. There is a nagging fear that the hostile world will win out over our puny faith and cause us to lose that confidence which we have. However, true faith can withstand every assault, and a faith that cannot stand against all else is not true in the beginning. Furthermore, we find that our faith is constantly proved genuine only when we exercise it.

Many may say, "my gift is so small compared to that of others, I will just keep my little gift and let others with greater gifts enter the struggle, rather than risk losing what little I have." To compare our abilities with that of others whom we may view as "super saints" is often a humbling experience to be sure. We ***do*** see that from those to whom much has been given, much is expected; yet to those to whom ***any*** has been given, the minimum "interest" on that amount is still required (Mt.25:26,27). Perhaps, we only belittle our gift, for even one talent of gold weighs about 125 pounds and is easily valued today at about $800,000 (at $400/oz.)! God's Truth is infinitely more precious than gold and even a "small" amount is of enormous value. Therefore, if we have been given only one gift for service and in that one gift we consider that we have received only a small portion, we must still exercise what we have in furthering the Kingdom.

By continuing the illustration, we see that money has value based only upon what it will buy. Money horded and unused is the same as money lost or unclaimed. Furthermore, if we bury it in the ground, hoping to hold on to it rather than risk loss, we will lose even that which we have to inflation, not to mention catastrophic loss to worms and decay. Likewise, in that portion of the field that was ours, another must expand his territory to invest, and that God-given gift to us will be lost because it is dormant. Therefore, we must not be afraid to use any gift that God has given to us no matter how small we may think it to be and in any way that we can as long as we seek to use it for the continuing growth of the Kingdom of God and his glory.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

We observe the principle of lost opportunity again in the parable of the barren fig-tree (Lu.13:6–9). There are those that say that the fig tree is exclusively symbolic of Israel. We must admit that Israel as a nation was "cut down" like that fig tree, and we should learn from Israel as a nation whose witness to the world was lost in her own religious pride and through the rejection of the Gospel. Yet, the application of this parable transcends a mere symbolic reference to Israel. Today, the Church is in the unique position of being God's witness to the world of the Gospel of Christ, not Israel. Moreover, each of the children of the Kingdom in this age is also likened to a fruit tree. We have received a portion of that field in the world in which we live and grow. We are expected to produce fruit for Him who planted us there. Too often, we remain unfruitful and merely "cumbereth the ground" (Lu.13:7). We produce no fruit, and we prevent others from producing fruit in our territory because we occupy it.

God does not allow his servants to merely lounge about without some spiritual prodding. To awake us from our slumber, our roots are often dug about and we are abruptly shaken from our lethargy (Lu.13:8) as some event in our lives changes everything, and the Holy Spirit fills in the empty chambers of our being. We awaken, and we flower and bear fruit. That which had lain dormant for years gloriously springs to life.

However, if even then we resist and fail to bear fruit, we are removed, and our portion of the field is given over to another servant (Lu.13:9). We are often up-rooted and moved to another place where we can flourish or, if all fails, we are cut down (taken in death) so that we do not merely occupy ground where another could bear fruit. Understand that when a ***believer*** is removed from this world in death, it does not mean that the salvation that God has freely given him has been lost. It is merely God's purpose and will to remove him from his place of unfruitfulness so that he does not continue to hinder God's work on the earth. Any heavenly reward the believer may have earned is of course forfeited.

Privilege Brings Forth Responsibility

It is important that we, who believe in Jesus Christ, consider ourselves stewards and not the owners or the source of the Gospel that we expound. The Truth has been given to us in trust to distribute it to others who are chosen by God to enter the Kingdom.

Preaching the Gospel is not an option for believers to accept or refuse with a "no thank you" since we have been entrusted with it. As Paul said, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1Co.9:16,17). We are duty-bound to give out the Good News even if begrudgingly, but to do so faithfully and cheerfully as willing stewards is personally rewarding.

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1Co.4:1,2). We are to behave as faithful and loving servants of Christ by whom we have been entrusted with the mysteries (the now revealed Gospel) of the Kingdom. In as much as the Truth has been dispensed to us by God's will, we become stewards who ***must*** preach the Good News to every person. Stewardship is not a task given exclusively to church officers or to paid preachers. Every man and woman who has received redemption in Christ must distribute the Gospel message as a consequence of his or her new nature.

As fallen men, we did not volunteer for that service, nor did we seek it because of a natural desire in order to exercise our abilities. Rather, just as we have received eternal life because of God's grace and mercy, we have also received a gift, in whatever measure, to be a witness of Him. Let us seek out the extent of our gift, whether large or small, to the end that we glorify God by sending forth the truth of what God has done as far as this world will receive it. Let we who are the redeemed of God open our mouths and say so (Ps.107:2) that the world may discover his grace and mercy and know that redemption

has been made available to all that turn to Him for refuge in the name of Christ Jesus.

In Conclusion

We find that living in the provisional Kingdom in this time of grace is a wonderful privilege, but that privilege carries with it a great responsibility that brings forth serious consequences to our way of life. We must learn to live side-by-side with worldliness without entangling ourselves in it. We, above all, must be faithful stewards of the Gospel at every turn of the way. We must be willing to accept the vexing of our own soul as we take the Gospel to a desperately lost and needy world that is presently ruled by evil, not by Truth. We must be prepared to give out the Gospel of Truth in the face of overwhelming falsehood and be willing to suffer the consequences of that testimony in our lives.

We must be willing to accept the barbs of the tares that grow around us and seek to choke us out. Those tares may be our neighbors, our friends, or even our own close relatives. We must often be satisfied with little in this life while evil flourishes in abundance around us. We must be constantly on guard to protect our spiritual lives both in the world abroad and within the temporal church as well. We must understand that we presently live in a Kingdom where good and evil grow side-by-side until God comes to harvest the earth and the Kingdom of Heaven begins in the next age. We must always be willing to accept the promise of ultimate victory in the face of present defeat. We must be willing to serve and wait patiently for a simple "well done" from the only One from whom such a phrase really matters. We must know in our hearts that it will be worth it ***all*** when we behold Jesus face-to-face.

Chapter 9.3 Christian Stewardship

In the entire New Testament, we find no examples of giving money to a denomination or to one's local church. Denominations did not exist at that time and local churches were simple gatherings of believers meeting wherever they could assemble in safety from persecution to worship Christ. There was no administrative overhead. The emphasis and examples in Scripture all have to do with giving to satisfy the physical needs of other men and women — other believers in particular. Today, we offer no animal sacrifice to God on an altar, and we support no priesthood for their service in a temple for we are collectively that priesthood, and the Temple is Christ.

Christian stewardship has primarily to do with the dispensing of the Gospel that was entrusted to us as believers, not stewardship over mammon. Nonetheless, in material Christian giving, we show ourselves able stewards of ***all*** that God has given us. When we give to others in their need, we give not from our own wealth but from the wealth of Him who "owns the cattle on a thousand hills" (Ps.50:10). Rather than amassing temporal earthly wealth for ourselves, we should seek a permanent spiritual wealth stored up for us in heaven. "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Lu.12:33,34).

With the exception of Luke 8:3, stewardship examples in the Gospel texts are all figurative. That is, they actually refer to a ***spiritual trust fund*** rather than material wealth. Because Jesus used material wealth as an allegory, many have erroneously assumed that the point being stressed by those parables was actually Christian stewardship over money. That is particularly true of the parable of the pounds (Lu.19:12–27) and the parable of the talents (Mt.25:14–30). Those erroneous interpretations are merely another example of our lack of spiritual insight that makes us little different from Nicodemus. We surely know that Jesus was not referring to stewardship over material things when we consider his disciples' meager purse. In fact, we know

that Judas Iscariot was solely entrusted with the purse and apparently guarded it greedily – and that to no good end.

Christian stewardship without exception refers to the Gospel of Christ that we have received in trust to care for and invest throughout the world in order to gain a "payment of interest" to Christ in the form of new believers for his Kingdom. We are to be his stewards acting on his behalf in that great endeavor. That emphasis is made clear by all of Paul's writings (cf. 1Co.9:17; Ga.2:7; Col.1:25; 1Th.2:4; 1Ti.1:11; Tit.1:3). The giving of money to support a local church that builds up the faith of all who attend as well as the giving of money to send forth missionaries with the Gospel message is most certainly a component of good stewardship in as much as it aids the Gospel message in going forth. However, it is only the cart that the horse must lead.

Giving of Substance an Act of Grace

As we study Christian giving of his material substance, we find that all legalism is cast out as both inappropriate and unnecessary because the motivation for Christian giving comes from within through the Holy Spirit, who pours forth the love of Christ in our hearts, not from without. We should stress the value of demonstrating mercy, sound judgment, and solid faith in our giving. True Christian giving is an outgrowth of our faith and our personal knowledge of the mind of Christ and love for his people.

Paul, speaking of the generous giving of the Corinthians for Hebrew Christians in the time of their great need, referred to their giving as a "grace," not as a precept. "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also" (2Co.8:7). Paul is also quick to point out that commandment does not enter into it: "I speak ***not by commandment***, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love" (2Co.8:8; emphasis added). We should freely give materially to others because we realize that we have become spiritually rich in Christ, even as He gave his all in order for us to receive it (2Co.8:9). The act of giving materially is but a reasonable response to the spiritual gift that we have received through Jesus Christ.

Out of the Abundance of God's Love

When we give that which we have earned through the works of our hands, we give of ourselves as well. Christian giving is not the strict obedience to any rule or law, but is instead an expression of God's love flowing through us. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul said, "…though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it profiteth me nothing. [Love] suffereth long, and is kind; [love] envieth not; [love] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up…" (1Co.13:3,4). If we give in accordance with a legal precept only out of a sense of duty, our pride may become elevated in a sense of meeting that accomplishment, but such pride destroys love. God is pleased when we give to others out of love and concern for their welfare rather than from any legal constraint to do so. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and ***labour of love***, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (He.6:10 emphasis added). "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (He.13:16).

Only when we give to others in need from a willing heart is it a clear demonstration of God's love. "But, whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him" (1Jn.3:17)? Having tasted, even having drunk deeply of God's love, how can we not have compassion on our brothers who suffer from material needs? We know exactly how far God's love was extended toward us, "…in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro.5:8).

Therefore, we cannot withhold our generosity to those that are truly in need. "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Mt.5:42). "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Lu.3:11). In those words of Jesus, we do not read that we should impoverish ourselves, only that we should give freely out of our surplus and abundance. Paul especially charged the rich that they make their riches available for good works, so that they could be ready

to share their wealth with the less fortunate, and give to the needy (cf. 1Ti.6:18).

We must, of course, first direct our giving to brothers and sisters in Christ as we read in Romans 15:27. We who share spiritual things should quite naturally share our material blessings. We read, in fact, that our "…duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things." In context, Paul is speaking of the Macedonian Christians sharing with the Jerusalem Christians because of their great material need (cf. Ro.15:26). However, as Christians, we are not limited to giving only to other believers for Jesus said, "… love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again…Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Lu.6:35,36). The Christian's giving must extend outside the sphere of the local church to believers in other congregations and to neighbors in the unbelieving community as well.

In Proportion to How God Has Prospered Us

We should give according to how God has prospered us. Under the old dispensation of law, giving was regimented in a legalistic manner by requiring an exact tithe (Nu.35:8; De.16:10,17). Since the Holy Spirit was not living in the old covenant believer to direct them in their giving, law was a necessary external motivation, but under the new covenant of grace, no specific percentage can be set without doing impairment to grace. For some, ten percent may constitute an extreme burden while for others, ten percent may not nearly represent what they can afford to give or should desire to give. The smaller gift of the poor is made equal to the greater gift of the affluent as Jesus demonstrated when He spoke of the widow's offering of two mites (Mk.12:42–44). It should be apparent, after all, that God has not chosen to prosper us all the same materially.

The state of the giver's mind is much more important than the exact amount given, "for if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened" (2Co.8:12,13). If a man gives from a willing mind, he will give all that he is able to give according to how God has prospered him to fill a true need in others. That obviously does not mean that we should impoverish

ourselves by giving so that others can become rich from our generosity and labor rather than from their own. For, if an able man refuses to work, we have no moral obligation to sanctify his laziness (cf. 2Th.3:10).

Frequency of Giving

Many preachers and lay people as well use the text of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 16, verse 2, to try to teach that we should give money to support the local church every Sunday when the collection plate goes by without fail. However, that teaching is totally out of context. We can plainly see that the collection being referred to was specifically intended for the physical welfare of the impoverished saints (believers) in Jerusalem, and that the local church was going to retain none of it for its own operations.

In fact, Paul's advice is quite practical, not a legal edict. The Corinthians conversing among themselves had already determined to send that aid. Paul is merely advising them that they should gather their relief gift little by little each week "as God had prospered them" so that no big outlay of money need come from them at one time. Many of us find it easier to come up with smaller amounts each week or each month rather than one large sum at the beginning or end of the year. It all depends upon how we receive our income.

Giving with Humility

Nor should we allow giving to elevate our pride: "when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Mt.6:3). In the context of this idiom, we should not expect praise from our left hand for what our right hand does lest together they applaud our efforts. We should always give freely and with simplicity (cf. Ro.12:8). We should not praise ourselves any more than we should ever expect praise from others for our generosity. We should not give with great ceremony as if we are doing something worthy of praise, nor should we give as if we are undergoing a great sacrifice for the Lord. We should merely give out of a cheerful heart with gladness that we are able to help others. Material giving should be part of a

Christian's new nature and second only to serving the Lord by dispensing the Gospel.

Planning Our Giving

Most of us must labor daily to earn a living. From what we earn we spend a portion on necessities and some on luxuries. We may also save a portion for our future needs. The Christian, however, should also work in order to benefit others. We can accomplish that primarily by honest labor to provide goods and services for the benefit of others, but we must also provide for those who cannot purchase our goods and services. Again, that does not mean that we are to work to support the lazy or the greedy. What it ***does*** mean is that when we labor we should consecrate our labor to God in order that we may be able to help others that are weak and in need.

An important principle to be understood is that we should prepare in advance to give to those in need. A portion of our "bounty" should be periodically and systematically set aside specifically for giving so that when we do give, we can give out of a sense of abundance and "…not as of covetousness."(2Co.9:5). If we must reach into our pockets at the last minute and give of what remains there, we may indeed be very reluctant to give anything at all, but if we give that which we have previously set aside specifically and lovingly for that purpose, we can give it cheerfully, even joyously! "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2Co.9:7). If we observe that principle, we should always be able to give without any sense of severe loss or sacrifice.

As good stewards of all that God has given us, it is proper that believers live on a reasonable budget based upon expected income. That helps them avoid spending money unwisely with the resulting neglect of their own basic needs and legal obligations. By that means, the believer can also assure that his responsibilities to support his local church and other charitable causes are not going to be neglected due to unexpected shortfalls. Christian giving should be placed at the top of the list, followed by rent or mortgage, transportation, food, clothing, utilities and other necessary expenses. A large portion of what remains

should be saved for unexpected emergencies. Only then can we consider discretionary spending on luxury items to make our lives more comfortable. Those should always be purchased out of a budget surplus or through planned savings in the budget, not through borrowing. Unnecessary debt will ruin a budget and destroy ones planning abilities.

Avoiding Poor Stewardship

We must be absolutely sure that the money we give to churches or to para-church organizations is being used to truly reach the lost with the true Gospel, or that it is being used to bolster the faith of believers in order that they, in turn, may advance the Gospel abroad. Blind ritualistic giving of a tithe or other gifts to a church or any other organization without determining by conscience, prayer and the Word of God that that investment is truly furthering Christ's purposes in this age of grace is ***poor stewardship***.

A good steward does not invest his master's goods in the first thing that comes along, especially so when it is being extorted from him. He must investigate carefully lest he lose the principal as well as the interest. Many Christians today are giving unwisely in ways that are detrimental to the perpetuation of the Gospel and apparently believe that they are actually doing their duty as good stewards. Stewards of the Gospel must be faithful to the cause of Christ by being wise about how any investment of effort or money is made.

For that reason, it is also imperative that we expect churches to give a regular detailed accounting of how funds are being spent so that the members of the congregation can exercise good stewardship by determining that their gifts are truly being used to further the Gospel of Christ and not being used to further expand Churchianity. If the budget is expressed in complex or nebulous terms, we should determine what is really meant by them. If money is being used in questionable ways, every member of the congregation not only has the right, but a holy responsibility as a good steward of the Gospel, to see that such practices are changed or eliminated.

The Blessing of Giving

In the story that the Lord Jesus told concerning the "good Samaritan" (Lu.10:30–35), we read that the priest went out of his way to avoid helping the wounded man as did also the Levite. The Samaritan, on the other hand, immediately sought a way to help the man, and went out of his way to do it. The ritual observance of the Law did not inspire the priest or the Levite to help, while grace apart from the Law stimulated love for his fellow man within the Samaritan.

The practical lesson to be learned from this illustration is that if we would sincerely help others, we must not overlook or bypass opportunities and ways to do so. It is always easier to avoid putting ourselves in a position where we may need to help someone else. Perhaps that is why many large fund-raising charities are so successful, since we can give from a distance through them and not become personally involved. We can stop short of treating wounds and binding up lacerations (Lu.10:34). However, it is clear that we must always bring ourselves directly in touch with others in order to truly aid them in their great spiritual need.

"I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Ac.20:35). This verse does ***not*** mean that we should expect to receive a special blessing from God for our generosity to others, but that we are already spiritually blessed in the act of giving itself. He who is able-bodied should work to minister to his own necessities and not be a burden to others, and then he must see to the necessities of others who are unable to work due to circumstances beyond their control (cf. Ac.20:34). That is a wondrous blessing, indeed. In Proverbs we read, "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labor. He coveteth greedily all the day long: but the righteous giveth and spareth not" (Pr.21:25,26).

We must serve God with all of our resources, for there is no material possession that we have that has not been received through his providence, and the gift of eternal life is beyond any measurable value. What could we ever hope to give God in return and in kind? We

can never repay God, nor should we insult his marvelous grace by trying to repay Him with mammon.

God asks nothing of us but our reasonable service and worship as his adopted sons (Ro.12:1). Of course, that does mean exercising good stewardship over material things as well as the spiritual blessings of the Gospel in support of that which we have been entrusted. We should give generously to the genuine needs of poor men and women, having compassion and understanding, but give to God that which is his design for us — our love and the response that springs from that love as the Holy Spirit enables us.

Section 10, Christian Benefits and Privilege

Gifts of God to the Believer

Effective Prayer

How We Should Pray

Classifications of Prayer

Unanswered Prayer

Chapter 10.1 Gifts of God to the Believer

In this section, we shall discuss the various gifts of God to the believer, and in particular, those gifts associated with the Holy Spirit. In this first chapter, we shall define the scope of this section as we look at the many and varied types of gifts which God gives to man and the various means through which He provides them.

Gifts of God through His Providence

The word used to describe the general gifts that God gives to all men is "providence." God's providence accounts for the many material benefits that man receives in this life. Those gifts provide for our life on this earth and as such are temporary as is our stay here. God has provided us the earth on which we live and the air that we breathe. Food and the materials for clothing is a provision that God has given us even without our asking Him (Mt.6:25,33). The rain that provides water to drink and brings forth produce from the land is a provision obtained from God (Ge.8:22). Our natural talents, abilities, and physical health are also provisional gifts. We should use all of those gifts and fully enjoy them (Ec.3:13), but we must never forget that God has provided them (De.8:18). Those gifts are not only given to God's redeemed, but are provided for all men and all creatures of this earth alike without discrimination (Ps.136:25; 145:15,16).

Gift of the Holy Spirit

When we say "gift of the Holy Spirit," thoughts immediately go to various physical and visible phenomenon associated with the charismatic movement today. We shall discuss those in this book in due course. However, we must first recognize that the person of the Holy Spirit is, Himself, a gift that God has bestowed upon every believer. We clearly read of that in the Gospel of John where Jesus said,

> **"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of Truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it**

seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth in you, and shall be in you" (Jn.14:16,17).

As we discover in Scripture, the internal presence of the Holy Spirit is a ***free gift*** [7] to those who ask God for Truth. "… How much more shall your heavenly Father ***give*** the Holy Spirit to them that ask him" (Lu.11:13, emphasis added)? We observe that the Holy Spirit was ***given*** to the Samaritans when Peter and John offered up intercessory prayer for them (Ac.8:15). Again, when Peter and John identified themselves with the Samaritans by the laying on of hands, the Holy Spirit was ***given*** to them (Ac.8:17; cf. Ro.1:17).

The value of the person of the Holy Spirit is beyond measure. It is through the Holy Spirit, and because He lives within us, that we experience eternal life in Christ. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are convicted of our sinful nature (Jn.16:8–11), that we are comforted (Jn.14:16,17,26), that we are guided (Jn.16:13), that we are regenerated (Jn.3:5,6), that we are sanctified (1Co.6:11), that we have access to God in prayer (Ep.2:18;6:18). We could go on and on about the value of this one gift of God that is the gift of Himself (Jn.4:10) made possible by the blood of his Son (Jn.6:32,33). Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit also brings along with Him additional spiritual gifts that He distributes in the lives of those in whom He dwells. It is those gifts that we shall primarily concern ourselves with in this section.

Kinds of Spiritual Gifts

We may divide the gifts that are distributed by the Holy Spirit into three general categories: 1) fruits of the Spirit, 2) sign or ephemeral gifts, and 3) permanent or enduring gifts. We shall also find that some gifts seem to fit into more than one category. For instance, Paul referred to love as a gift to be desired above all others in Chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians while love is also the first fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22. Likewise, faith is seen as both a

[7] The word "free" in the term "free gift" is redundant inasmuch as a true gift never has any strings attached to it. However, in today's world we are used to seeing various so-called gifts being offered which are not really free of remuneration.

fruit of the Spirit and a gift (cf. Ga.5:22 and Ep.2:8,9). We shall also find that there is great similarity between fruits of the Spirit and the permanent or enduring gifts of 1Co.13:13. Both faith and love are listed as enduring gifts — gifts that never fail (1Co.13:13). Therefore, it is difficult to be dogmatic regarding the placement of certain specific gifts, especially in the first and third group. Those three categories are only general ones that we will use in an attempt to aid us in our study.

Fruits of the Spirit

Many would not consider gifts in the ***first category*** gifts at all, but prefer to call them "fruits," because those gifts are virtues that are manifested in our lives as the Holy Spirit regenerates us for God's use over time. Yet, the grace of God transforms us to live godly lives; and the indwelling Holy Spirit actually brings forth such fruits as we mature in the faith.

> **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"** (Ga.5:22,23).

Try as we may, we could not produce even a small percentage of those fruits through our own efforts. While the indwelling of the Holy Spirit inclines us to desire such fruits or virtues, the means to produce them are not within the capabilities of our own strength. Christian virtues, then, are actually outright Spiritual gifts and not in any way the product of human works. It is interesting to notice that none of those fruits are outward physical gifts that can be observed directly with the human senses, but rather create a state-of-mind in the believer.

Of course, those virtues must eventually manifest themselves outwardly in good works, which are visible and beneficial to others. Moreover, we can see that those virtuous gifts also greatly benefit the one in whom such fruit has been produced. Love, joy, and peace produces hope and assurance in the believer that in turn encourages the additional virtues of longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. The more fruit that is produced in our lives, the more comforted we are as we realize that the Holy Spirit is diligently working within us to conform us to the image of Christ.

Therefore, those virtues are the gifts of the indwelling Holy Spirit that should be most valued by the individual Christian for his own sake.

Sign Gifts

The second category consists of that which are commonly referred to as "sign" gifts. While the fruits of the Holy Spirit are not themselves visible except through the good works that they ultimately produce, this second category consists of highly visible gifts. They are called "sign" gifts because, like a sign, they point to something else and have no purpose in themselves apart from that. For instance, a city limit sign is only a thin piece of metal that signifies the presence of a city of massive size. It is the city that is important, not the sign.

We may also refer to sign gifts as being ephemeral as well because unlike the virtues listed in the first category, most were only given for a brief period of time and for certain specific purposes and circumstances in the past. Once a sign has served its intended purpose, there is no need for it to continue on an hour-to-hour or day-to-day basis. For instance, a road construction sign remaining on a highway that is no longer under construction only impedes traffic.

Unlike fruits of the Spirit, which are progressive and greatly aid the individual believer in reaching maturity, sign gifts were given as an outward signal to alert non-believers. Sign gifts in the early Church helped develop an initial means of outreach by gaining the attention of the unsaved in order that they might hear and ultimately believe the Gospel. We must understand that the impartation of the Gospel is what was important, and that the gift was merely a sign that drew attention to it.

Paul listed those particular gifts of the Holy Spirit in the order of their significance in his time:

> **"For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:…"** (1Co.12:8–10).

The sign gifts as listed in this verse can be further subdivided into the ***intangible sign gifts*** of wisdom, knowledge, and faith through which the true Gospel was imparted to the apostles, and ***tangible sign gifts*** that attended the intangible ones to draw man's attention to the Gospel message. Without a truth to reveal, a physical sign is of no value whatsoever. It would be like posting city-limit signs in the middle of nowhere, or like advertising a product that does not exist. Not only would the signs represent wasted effort, they would not point to anything useful. They could, in fact, lead someone completely astray of reality if they were placed indiscriminately with total abandon and accepted as an end in themselves. Just as none would loiter at a city-limit sign without ever entering the city, and none would be happy with an advertisement of a product that could not be purchased, a sign gift without the true Gospel it purports is meaningless.

The first three gifts in Paul's list: wisdom, knowledge and faith though not directly visible to others, are the most important ones as seen by the fact that Paul listed them first. Wisdom and knowledge, by implication, are stated here as ***special*** wisdom and ***special*** knowledge regarding Christian doctrine that is bestowed upon an individual in order to benefit the visible Church as a whole. As Paul said regarding his own ministry, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the ***revelation*** of Jesus Christ" (Ga.1:11,12, emphasis added). All of the New Testament writers were given special wisdom and knowledge through personal supernatural revelation to complete the task given them.

To a much lesser degree than the New Testament writers, men of God today may also be given godly wisdom into the affairs of men that they may be a benefit to all as well as special knowledge into certain doctrinal matters in order that they may effectively teach others. The Church always benefits from a clearer understanding of Scriptural truths. However, the gifts of wisdom and knowledge that men receive today are always limited in scope by the fixed canon of Scripture. It can never be unique wisdom or knowledge that refutes or goes beyond what the Bible already states as completed Truth.

Otherwise, the Holy Spirit would be teaching in disagreement with his own "text book" that He had before inspired — the Holy Scriptures.

As the apostles were removed from the scene in the first century, they left their special wisdom and knowledge behind in the form of the Bible books that we all can now read. Every major Christian doctrine has been adequately treated in the canon of Scripture such that the gift of wisdom and knowledge today must be limited to the unambiguous ***interpretation*** of the Truth that we already have in abundance without any additional unique revelation that would alter it. The Scriptures were written for the sound edification of us all that we not err. Therefore, we should beware of any person who claims some wisdom or special knowledge that God has uniquely given to him alone through any means whether by a vision, a dream, or even an angelic visitor — especially so if that information conflicts in any way with the canon of Scripture (cf. Ga.1:8,9).

We must also understand that worldly wisdom, organizational knowledge, and specialized physical skills, which we so often see exercised in churches today in such abundance, are not the gifts of the Holy Spirit that are being referred to here. Rather, they fall into the category of God's providence that we discussed earlier. Regardless of their obvious usefulness in maintaining the various functions and trappings of institutionalized churches, they are natural abilities that we attained at birth and developed during our lifetime, not supernatural gifts directly imparted by the Holy Spirit as a consequence of a spiritual rebirth. Unbelievers often have natural skills and abilities in as much or more abundance than do believers, which they may use for good or evil. Therefore, those natural abilities are not in any way signs of spirituality.

Finally, faith, as we have observed, is also a fruit of the Spirit and in fact is found in the next category we shall discuss as well. Faith abides in everything and is at the core of the Christian life. However, faith as it is stated in this list is ***demonstrated*** faith given to edifying the Church, not merely for the encouragement and comfort of the individual who possesses it. We often marvel when we see the outstanding faith of a fellow believer outwardly demonstrated through their response to trying circumstances. When we observe the

beneficial exercise of their faith, our own faith is likewise strengthened.

Without ***special*** wisdom, ***special*** knowledge, and ***demonstrative*** faith to impart, the remainder of the list consisting of tangible sign gifts is no longer useful in today's world and they therefore cease to have any spiritual attributes at all. That is because the second half of the list consists of the more carnal, physical, and visible gifts such as ritual healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and various interpretations. Furthermore, all of the last mentioned sign gifts are quite seductive to the spiritually unenlightened today as a means of establishing an ***appearance*** of personal spirituality. In some churches today, the outward show of "gifts" seems to have become more important than reality based in Scriptural Truth. As we shall discover in later chapters, the ***collective*** wisdom, knowledge, and faith of the apostles, which we must hold in trust, is commonly being discarded in order to exhibit a form of "pseudo-spirituality" by mimicking various outward signs.

The Enduring Gifts

Of all the gifts to be mentioned, the ***third category*** represents the enduring gifts consisting of faith, hope, and love (1Co.13:13; cf. Ro.5:1–5). Paul says that those three gifts will remain after all other gifts have ceased to be of any value (1Co.13:13). We also notice that they are progressive gifts. We begin with ***faith*** (Ro.5:2) that teaches us patience in tribulation; from patience comes experience which gives us ***hope*** (Ro.5:4); with hope comes assurance, joy, and finally ***love*** (Ro.5:11). "…The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Ro.5:5).

Notice the close similarity of those gifts with the fruits of the Spirit listed earlier. Faith leads the list, and while hope is not specifically mentioned as a fruit of the Spirit, it easily fits into that category along with personal faith and love. Here in 1Co.12 & 13 the emphasis is being placed upon the outward expression of those gifts toward others in the visible Church, not upon a personal fulfillment of individual character.

Chapter 10.2 Effective Prayer

In many ways, the most beneficial gift of all is the privilege of prayer. The importance of engaging God in prayer cannot be overemphasized — especially so in the times in which we are living. Knowing ***about*** the one true God is not the same as actually ***knowing*** God, which requires a close personal relationship with Him. Having first learned about God through the study of his Word or through the witness of others, we must then reach out to Him and experience Him first hand through prayer. We must learn to know Him ***personally*** so that our trust is perfected in that experience. We must come to view prayer as a wonderful privilege through which we can come before the God of the entire universe with the full expectation that He will hear and understand us.

The Benefits of Prayer

The personal benefits of prayer are many. Through prayer, we receive material needs, personal guidance, comfort, peace of mind, encouragement, assurance, and the physical strength to continue in the tasks He has assigned to our lives. As James said, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Ja.5:16).

Material Needs Supplied

As believers, we often do not receive many material things from God merely because we do not turn to Him and ask, but instead seek to achieve the desired results through our own corrupt methods. As James said, "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not" (Ja.4:2). It is in answer to prayer that the believer receives many material blessings from God that go far beyond his general providence. Jesus said to his disciples, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Mt.21:22). When we ask God He readily supplies our material needs for,

> **"…what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give**

good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? (Mt.7:9–11)

Personal Guidance

It is through prayer that God makes his plans for our personal lives known to us. Though we can learn much from Scripture regarding God's overall plans for mankind in general, our own individual marching orders come to us through answers to personal prayer as God reveals to us how we fit into the major scheme of his work. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Mt.7:7,8).

Comfort and Peace of Mind

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Ro.8:28). Yet, in times of stress or illness, we often feel the need to turn to God in prayer for Him to reiterate his personal assurance to us that all things will indeed turn out well in our immediate circumstances. As a hymnist of the nineteenth century wrote, "Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer" (*What a Friend We Have in Jesus,* Joseph Scriven).

Encouragement and Assurance

The encouragement we receive from prayer is best demonstrated in Scripture when the disciples despaired of their own courage in continuing to speak the Word of Truth during a time of extreme persecution. "When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Ac.4:31). When we lack courage or assurance, we must turn to God in prayer.

Power and Strength

When our own physical strength fails us or circumstances around us seek to overwhelm us mentally, prayer is the means by which strength is received to continue in the task that God has assigned us.

> **"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint**" (Is.40:29–31).

Scriptural Principles of Prayer

Though the benefits are great, for many of us prayer is a difficult thing to practice effectively. Prayer is not always easy, but a struggle. As does anything worthwhile in life, it requires effort. Just as we run into obstacles and distractions when conducting our daily activities, we often find that we must work around obstacles and avoid distractions if we are to spend meaningful time in communing with God. Those obstacles and distractions are Satan's way of using the world to keep us from the throne of grace.

We often struggle over words and lack direction as to what we should ask for, or in what manner we should ask for it. We often are repetitious and ramble on in a state of confusion. While we would not consider petitioning a human judge in a court of law without first preparing our case, we go before God without having considered our approach to Him or what we plan to say and ask. We have not taken the time to analyze our prayer life with respect to Scripture and so have no knowledge of how we should go about it. Though the Holy Spirit often transmits needful prayers to God the Father with words that cannot be uttered, our minds remain unfruitful and our hearts unsatisfied (cf. Ro.8:26).

Prayers that are offered contrary to Scriptural principles can even dishonor God and therefore must become ineffective. As we

discuss those principles here, it must be clearly understood at the outset that they are not a set of prescribed rules that when followed to the letter guarantees results by forcing God into responding to our prayers. Rather they only should be considered guidelines that we should follow to prevent our own human thoughts and desires from getting in the way of us approaching the throne of God where we may be heard.

Many examples of prayer found throughout Scripture will be discussed in this chapter in order to achieve a broader perspective of prayer. A large number of the psalms of David were actually written as prayers in the Old Testament. Here we find prayers given by a man who sought after God's own heart, even though he often stumbled and fell into sin. In the New Testament, Jesus gave his disciples instructions and examples concerning prayer many times. It would be especially well if we consider the principles that He taught his disciples, for where could we hope to find a more able instructor than our Lord Himself?

We shall discuss the "Lord's Prayer" in some detail in Chapter 10.3 How We Should Pray, page 73 as He gave it to his disciples in response to their specific question regarding ***how*** they should pray (Lu.11:1). We can most certainly benefit from both the examples and the instructions of Him who knew the mind of God, the Father, so intimately.

Prayer Must be Made in Faith

The first principle is that all prayer must be made in faith. Faith, as we exercise it in our lives, is the means by which God overcomes our many doubts being the evidence of things that we cannot see (cf. He.11:1). If we should doubt the existence of God, or that He hears us, how can He be faithful to reward us? As James said, "…let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (Ja.1:6). A man who lacks faith and doubts God would not even find his blessing when it comes, but will instead reject it out of hand and would only attempt to explain it away as coincidence.

Jesus said, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Mt.17:20). Faith, in itself, is not a big thing, but a very small thing. Certainly, it cannot be seen with the eye in much the same way that a single grain from a mustard seed is so small that it can barely be seen with the eye. Yet, the value of the grain is not determined by its size, but by its purpose. Likewise, our faith, though a small thing, has a great purpose, and when faith comes to full fruition in our prayers, the full power of God is seen in all his glory.

There is no way that we can even approach God in prayer without faith. Lack of faith renders prayer pointless from our point of view and is to no avail before God because "without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (He.11:6). When as a sinner we first turned to God, we see that it was faith alone that led us to come before Him to confess our sins and to receive the righteousness of Christ. As John Newton wrote,

> **"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed."** (*Amazing Grace,* John Newton)

Praying through the Holy Spirit

Prayers must not be made just on the mental level since we are engaged in a spiritual communication. Because of our old corrupt nature and our imperfections in the flesh, it is imperative that we look to the Holy Spirit to aid us when we pray. If we do not enlist his aid, we may easily find ourselves out of God's will in what we ask of Him. The Holy Spirit will help us by overcoming our failings in the flesh:

> **"…the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"** (Ro.8:26).

The Holy Spirit aids us in prayer by filling us with a desire for God's will that we in our minds alone cannot express. It is when we seek to pray through the Holy Spirit that we pray fully in God's will,

for "he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Ro.8:27). If we pray only with the fleshly mind, we naturally pray in lust, but if we pray through the Holy Spirit, we keep ourselves in God's love, and we pray in God's will as well. When we pray through the Holy Spirit we do not just look to satisfy the cares of our immediate earthly stay alone, but in hope, look forward toward our eternal habitation.

Praying without Malice

When we pray we must not harbor any personal malice toward anyone but instead have forgiven any and all of those who may have wronged us. The Lord Jesus said,

> **"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But, if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"** (Mt.6:14,15; cf. Mk.11:25,26).

We are to forgive any and all harmful acts that men direct toward us personally.[8] Only those of us who have been born anew in the Spirit and have received redemption in Christ can ever hope to exercise the pure forgiveness that God requires since the assurance of God's forgiveness of our many trespasses against Him is the sole basis for our forgiveness of others.

It is often too easy to say that we forgive others, but only when we act upon that forgiveness in order to reconcile ourselves to our brother is it proved to be complete and genuine. God is never deceived by our pretense. Rather than hold unforgiveness in our hearts, we should "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another" (Ja.5:16). In our prayers, we should pray for those who have wronged us, and in doing so we cannot fail to forgive them, for God has forgiven us an enormous debt. Therefore, the number of times that we must forgive our brothers in Christ is limitless. It must be as

[8] This forgiveness of personal offences does not mean that we should tolerate lawlessness and sin in our society.

continuous and as on going as is God's grace that He extends to us as we read in Jesus' answer to Peter.

> **"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? til seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven"** (Mt.18:21,22).

Praying with a Clear Conscience

The principle of forgiveness also has a counterpart. If we have wronged another, we should make it right with that person before coming to God in prayer: "if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mt.5:23,24). We must not only come before God holding no animosity toward others, but also having made every attempt to put right any wicked act that we may have committed against another as well. We cannot approach God's throne with a troubled conscience over wrongful acts that we have done to others because our conscience will condemn us before God before we even open our mouth.

Praying in the Name of Jesus

This principle of prayer goes to the very heart of what it means to be a Christian. Jesus said, "whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn.14:13). Effective prayer requires us to ask for all things in the Name of Jesus.[9] We have nothing in ourselves that would even allow us to approach

[9] Many use the phrase, "in Jesus' name" at the end of each prayer. This practice was not common until sometime in the nineteenth century. Perhaps, because of the pluralism that now permeates society, it became necessary to indicate to others that may hear our prayers that we are Christians praying in Jesus' Name. However, it is much more important that we really are praying in his Name and will rather than merely using this phrase to provide a traditional conclusion or postscript to our prayers.

God's throne, but God the Father gave his only begotten Son to intercede on our behalf with Him (Jn.3:16). When Christ rose from the dead, He justified men before God and fully restored the opportunity for fellowship between God and man. Therefore, when we ask of God the Father in the name of his Son Jesus, we glorify the Father. We acknowledge the wondrous gift that opens the gates of Heaven for us to receive God's mercy and goodness.

When we, being one in Christ, ask of God in the name of Jesus, we are not like beggars that have come to the back door of Heaven asking for a handout. Nor are we seen as an unclean sinner that is dressed in rags and covered with the filth of his evil works. God cannot see our sinfulness that has been cleansed away in the blood of Christ, but He sees the righteousness of his Son that covers us.

Nor are we merely like servants in the Father's house who unquestioningly must do what the master orders without knowing why. Jesus said to his disciples,

> **"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"** (Jn.15:14,15).

We have personal knowledge of God and know his purposes because we have heard it from the Son as revealed by his Spirit within us. Therefore, we are immediately recognized as adopted sons in the Heavenly realms honoring our Father and seeking his goodness. We are fellow laborers with God in giving out the Good News of salvation in Christ Jesus and seeking out the lost for redemption. Since God has chosen us to bring forth fruit in the name of his Son and if we carry forth that mission, how could God ever fail to hear us? The Lord Jesus said,

> **"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you"** (Jn.15:16).

Only as adopted sons can we be assured of receiving that which we ask for in prayer. Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my

words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (Jn.15:7,8). We cannot ask in Jesus' Name unless we are in Christ, and unless his words fully remain in us. If Jesus' words truly abide in us, we desire only the same things that Jesus desires, and the things that Jesus desires are the same things that the Father desires.

Chapter 10.3 How We Should Pray

Jesus taught his disciples ***how*** to pray in verses 9 through 13 of Matthew 6 (also Lu.11:1–4). Those verses are usually referred to as "The Lord's Prayer", but it would be more appropriately referred to as the disciples' prayer outline. Certainly, it could not have been our Lord's own prayer for He never required God's forgiveness, He being sinless (compare Mt.6:12 with 2Co.5:21)! It was in response to the disciples' question regarding the right way for ***them*** to pray, that our Lord answered with a sample prayer outline that was fully appropriate for them to use at that time (Lu.11:1). We must be aware of the context regarding the time and place that Jesus gave them this prayer. It was before the cross as the Kingdom of Heaven was still being offered to the Jew. We easily lose the precise meaning of Jesus' words if we draw those instructions out of their original context.

Jesus was also not suggesting that the disciples should repeat his very words verbatim every time in the future that they prayed, but that they should through his words come to an understanding of certain principles of effective prayer. What Jesus gave his disciples was an outline, not the complete details of a prayer. Jesus said: "***after this manner*** therefore pray ye:…" (Mt.6:9 emphasis added). If we only repeat Jesus' words as our own prayer without applying them to the reality of present circumstances, we could find ourselves guilty of "vain repetitions" for which Jesus had admonished others (Mt.6:7). As we must see, Jesus was not actually praying here at all, but was instructing his followers in the ***manner*** in which ***they*** should pray.

Nonetheless, we find certain principles that Jesus taught in that outline that we can readily apply to our own prayers in the present time in which we are living. It would be well for us to look into this sample prayer to see how its expressions can be utilized in the construction of our own prayers today. We find that the sample prayer can be broken down into its underlying outline of principles as follows:

1. The person and majesty of God (Mt. 6:9)

   a. Acknowledge our personal relationship with God as our Father
   b. Recognize His deity and that His abode is in Heaven
   c. Declare His very name as being holy and sacred
2. The coming Kingdom upon the earth (Mt 6:10)
   a. Pray for his Kingdom to come
   b. Pray for God's will to be explicitly carried out in the Kingdom age
3. Personal petitions in the age of grace (Mt.6:11-13)
   a. Pray for our daily sustenance (v.11)
   b. Pray for forgiveness of sins (v.12)
   c. Pray for God's Guidance (v.13)

God Is Our Father

"**Our Father…" (Mt.6:9)**. Believers should always come to God, as a son would approach his father. We have learned from Scripture that we are truly the beloved sons of God if we are born again through the Holy Spirit into an adoptive brotherhood with Jesus Christ (Ro.8:15). When we pray, we should come with great respect, reverence, and love for our heavenly Father. If all of those things are deserved by our earthly fathers who begot us in the narrow natural sense, surely they are more than owed to God who is our creator and sustainer in every sense both physical and spiritual. We should come into the presence of God, our creator, desiring to be near Him remembering that the name "Father" is a term of personal endearment as well as a term of respect and reverence.

Nevertheless, the children of God are in this mortal life more like servants, not yet having obtained the glory that sons will finally inherit when they become fully mature (Ga.4:1–7)). In this mortal life, we must humbly come to God as little children to obey his will. Young children cannot inherit the attributes of their earthly father before they become mature, but are more like servants to a benevolent master, being guided and chastened by their father's hand. So are we with God, but the assurance of the eventual inheritance is within us by the Spirit of Adoption. The Holy Spirit is our seal of legitimacy (Ep.1:12–

14). Therefore, we come to God today not as full-grown sons and daughters, but as adopted children capable of youthful fleshly error not yet able to fully obtain the promise, yet with the knowledge that we are his legitimate heirs of glory.

Our Father Is in Heaven

"**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Mt.6:9)**. Our heavenly Father is not as an earthly father with limited resources and wisdom. Our Father is eternal in Heaven, which is his dwelling place outside our space and time, and He is fully in control of all creation. He is rich beyond all human understanding since both Heaven and earth and all that exist therein are his personal possessions. We should stand in awe of his great majesty and power, his infinite wisdom and knowledge. We have discussed all of that before, and we surely know those things, but we must recall them as we come before Him in prayer. His name is hallowed. Our Father is the ***One God*** who said, "I Am That I Am." The name of God is eternal, awesome, and sacred. All reverence and honor belongs to Him and to Him alone. His very name is holy and sacred to his elect and yet, amazingly in Jesus Christ, He has bid us to come to Him and know Him personally as our dear Father.

Pray for His Kingdom to Come

"**Thy kingdom come…" (Mt.6:10)**. The kingdom could not merely refer to God's absolute rule in the spiritual realm since there has never been a time when it did not already exist. Here we must understand that the disciples were being instructed to pray for the Kingdom of Heaven that would one day be established upon this earth. It had not yet been revealed to the disciples that the Kingdom in its final political form would be held in abeyance until the end of the age of grace in which we now live. It is indeed probable, from what we read about them in Scripture, that they envisioned Jesus soon coming to power, putting down all rebellion, subduing Rome, and taking his rightful place on the throne of David in a very short span of time. However any hopes of that immediate Kingdom were rejected along with its King by the multitudes soon after. The crucifixion that

followed was devastating to the disciples' hopes because of their limited perception of the nature of the Kingdom.

When this instruction to prayer was given, there was apparently no clear understanding in the minds of the disciples of the vast New Covenant Church age that would separate the first coming of Christ from his Second Advent. As believers who live in this present age, we now understand that the Kingdom is in a construction phase with its ramparts continually being built up of the believing elect as stones are placed one upon another in its walls over time (cf. 1Pe.2:5). When we pray for the coming Kingdom, we are actually praying for the growth of the Kingdom in its present spiritual form with a view toward its culmination on earth. To that end, we pray that more and more of God's people would be brought into the safety of its fortification.

The question at hand is, should we continue to pray for the culmination of the Kingdom that will end this age of grace. If anyone has ever built a house or even seen a house being built, it is indeed exciting to see the foundation laid and then watch the walls going up. Yet, the real object and excitement is in seeing the walls completed and the roof being put on it. It is then that the house takes on its final form and beauty. So it is with the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation is the sound teaching of the apostles, and the walls are constructed of the personal lives of the elect layer by layer, until God Himself puts on the roof and the finishing touches. When the house is completed, then Christ will come and take up residence as its King. Yes, of course we must pray for its completion with great expectation and joy.

Pray For God's Will on Earth

"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt.6:10). Keeping within the context of the previous phrase in which the disciples were to pray for God's kingdom to come, we can see that the prayer for God's will on earth is directly associated with the absolute rule of Jesus Christ during the future Kingdom of Heaven that will be established on earth. Our hope while we dwell here on this earth is founded in the certain knowledge that God's will is not confined to

Heaven only, but must ultimately manifest itself upon earth as well. We have no better evidence of that fact than the continuing promise of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. Only when that era commences can we say that God's will is being done on earth in the same manner and to the same extent that it is in Heaven.

Nevertheless, even in this present age God's will is not carried out in Heaven exclusively, since everything that happens on this earth is ***governed*** by God's will — if not by his direct will through decree, at least through the establishing and making known his "preceptive" will until the time of final consummation of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The term "preceptive will" of God means that God through commandment (precepts) directs men to carry out his will. Unlike God's decrees that are inviolate, his precepts and moral laws require the obedience of men in carrying out his will concerning them. When we pray that God's will be done on earth, we are actually admitting that it is not presently so because of our own failure to adhere to his righteous precepts. It is certainly not God's ability to execute his will through decree, but our own inability to adhere to his precepts established expressly for our obedience and well being that is at issue when we pray for the accomplishment of God's will on earth.

God presently ***allows*** certain breaches to come about in his preceptive will because of the fallen nature of mankind, man's inability to throw off the yoke of sin, and God's great desire to redeem them. Sinful acts committed against his laws are not those that God in any way condones, but are those that He permits – sometimes even employs – to attain a higher final goal. All men are breakers of God's law by nature and deed. If it were not for God's good will toward mankind, all evil would need to be judged immediately according to God's absolute decree, and there could be no age of grace and no hope for the redemption of man.

Therefore, while we must agree that God's will must ultimately be fulfilled on earth as it is by his angels in Heaven, it is apparent today that a rebellious mankind opposes God's will at every turn on this earth, and yet God in his sovereignty presently withholds his judgment. The liberty that we enjoy as Christians (and so often abuse) is in full accord with God's will because as believers we now

have a personal stake in God's purpose and, therefore, desire to see his will carried out. For the sake of that great purpose, we should be careful never to pray that our own will be done — that is, that our own desires would be realized — for we most often do not know what is best to equip us for the tasks ahead that are within God's greater plan of redemption. Rather, we should pray only that God's will be done through us, for in his will we can rest assured that in every way his very best is being extended to us that we may fulfill our purpose in the life He has given us.

Pray For Daily Sustenance

"Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt.6:11). After praying for the coming of the ***future*** Kingdom of Heaven on earth wherein His will is done on earth as in Heaven, we turn next to our personal needs in ***this day*** of grace in which we live. The first request has to do with our need of daily physical sustenance. Rather than a petition, this should be a humble acknowledgement for most of us, since our daily sustenance regularly comes from God in such great abundance.

It is indeed strange to see the well-fed praying for food or the rich praying for clothing or shelter. Some see prayer as a means of getting what they want from an indulgent God, and they think that whatever they ask for will be given them if they merely invoke the "mystical" name of Jesus before saying "Amen." We must see that this is not only an incorrect view of prayer, but it would also render prayer as a means of compelling God to satisfy our fleshly lusts thus making Him complicit in our sin. God will not give in to our evil desires — not even when we pray. Otherwise, we would find God standing in opposition to Himself.

Therefore, we should consider our petitions carefully or we may find ourselves pleading with God for things that He is already supplying. Better that we should ***thank*** God, acknowledging the source of our goods, rather than pelt his throne with meaningless petitions for more of those very things. We notice how easy it is for us to go before God in our prayers with requests that we should not make or need not make.

God already knows our needs and consistently supplies them as He wills so that it does not hinder his work through us. If we become overly occupied with providing our present or future physical comforts in this life, how could we also diligently concern ourselves with the things of God? "Ye can not serve God and mammon" (Mt.6:24). "But, seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt.6:33). If we fully trust in God, we need never worry about what we shall eat or what we shall wear. Those are minor obstacles in the light of eternity. In the words of Jesus: "Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment" (Mt.6:25). Therefore, let us place our trust in God to supply the daily requirements of our flesh as He sees fit (Mt.6:33).

In times of drought, flood, fire, earthquake, or other natural or man-made disasters we may find ourselves unable to obtain our daily necessities. At times like those, we should most certainly bring our need before God and petition Him to come to our aid and supply us with food, water, and clothing. Jesus' disciples did not have the means at times to feed themselves, but were dependent upon others and even resorted to gleaning in fields to keep themselves alive (Mt.12:1; Mk.2:23; Lu.6:1). We see how appropriate it is that Jesus included that petition in his sample prayer for them. Since obtaining food for their physical need was a lower priority than preaching the Gospel, they often knew hunger. Their dependence was truly upon God for their daily bread.

Pray For Forgiveness of Sin

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Mt.6:12). In this age of grace, sins are forgiven us based on reciprocity. The debt that we owe God is restitution for our sins that we could never provide. They are forgiven only by God's grace through the cross of Christ. It is often impossible for mortals to make amends to each other in the same way that we are powerless to offer amends to God. Some actions cannot be reversed or corrected and a simple apology is not enough to undo it. Therefore, whether others have attempted to make any form of restitution to us or not, we must unconditionally forgive them on the same basis that God has forgiven

our sins. After all, how could we as mere mortals demand more of them than God demands of us?

It is far better to forgive than to hate; it is better to show mercy than to demand judgment. Hate is an acid burning in our souls that not only destroys fellowship with others, but with God as well. If we do not extend mercy to our enemies, how then can we ever hope to understand the mind of God who showed mercy toward us? "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro.5:8). We should always pray for God's mercy, asking forgiveness for the many transgressions that we commit against Him every day. Yet, in doing so we must be equally willing to forgive our debtors whose transgressions against us are very small in comparison. Since God showers mercy on the likes of us, how can we not extend that same mercy to others that are but mortals even as are we (Mt.6:14,15)?

Pray For God's Guidance

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:" (Mt.6:13). Does God tempt men to sin? James clearly states that He does not (Ja.1:13). Rather, Satan tempts us as he finds occasion to do so, and we are drawn away by our own lusts and fall into the snare of sin (Ja.1:14). The Greek word, *peirasmos* that is translated "temptation" in this verse implies testing through various trials wherein we may be tempted through our sin nature. We may enter into such times of trials because of our own disobedience and carelessness or through circumstances that are beyond our control. Therefore, we must pray and trust that God, who places all paths before us will keep us from wandering into a path that gives occasion for Satan to tempt us. Furthermore, we should pray that God would guide us in all our decisions such that we should choose the right paths and not enter the wrong ones.

Because we do not always obey God, we often make the wrong decision and stumble into the wrong path — at least for a time. The Greek word, *poneros*, which is translated "evil" at the end of this verse, is more correctly translated "evil one." Therefore, the verse could be quite freely interpreted, "And lead us not into paths wherein

we may be tested, but deliver us from the snares of Satan." We must not only pray and trust that we will not stumble into the wrong path, but more than that, we should pray that God will protect us during the time of our trials and deliver us from the snares of the evil one when we do stray from the right path due to our own miserable frailty.

God's Authority, Power and Glory

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever" (Mt.6:13). It is well that we realize that this phrase that is found in the King James (Authorized) and various other translations does not appear in the better Greek manuscripts. If we read the text of this prayer in the Gospel according to Luke, we find that this phrase is not present there either (Lu.11:2–4). It has been speculated that this phrase was inserted along the margin of a copied manuscript by an early-day scribe and was later erroneously incorporated into the "Received Text" from which the King James and other early versions were translated.

Nevertheless, this marginal note, if it is such and not part of the original autograph, is actually an excellent continuation of the outline that Christ Jesus gave his disciples in this prayer. Having just prayed for deliverance from the evil one and the temptation that he directs toward us, it is well for us to acknowledge that the Kingdom, in its present spiritual state as well as its future consummation belongs to God alone; He is the sovereign ruler, and Satan has no part in it. All power is vested in God to do as He wills. No glory can exceed the glory of God. Moreover, all of that is not just for a period of time, but forever, that is, eternally. This is the One whom we petition. In God alone is our trust, our hope, our life, our love, and our salvation. Then, may we truly be able to say "Amen" — not merely as a means to signify the close of a prayer, but with fullness of heart may we cry out, "so let it be Lord according to thy will!"

All Scripture should be carefully studied and applied to our daily lives in an intelligent way that we may benefit from it. While this sample prayer expresses some very important principles about our own individual prayers, as we have already observed, it is not intended to be a substitute for our own personal expressions of praise and

petitions that we should repeat it as a mere ritual.[10] We must not engage in any kind of superficial prayer. To do so is to render our prayers ineffective. How will God hear our prayers if our heart is not in them?

We, therefore, must offer prayers with a sense of their importance and with intensity, and we cannot do that if the words are not our own. We find that principle demonstrated in the parable of the friend awakened at midnight (Lu.11:5–8). The door was opened and the petitioner received because of the urgency of his request. Would any man even go to the door after retiring unless the knocking and calling were persistent? Will God hear your prayer if you are not seriously seeking Him? It is only because of the urgency of our circumstances that we can pray with intensity and complete concentration. The effective and ***fervent*** prayer of a righteous man avails much (Ja.5:16), not the half-hearted prayer of the man rendering a dull duty. Having said that, we must realize that God is not at all like the neighbor at midnight that needs to be awakened from a sound sleep. When we knock on his door via prayer, He opens it immediately — that is, He does if we really knock and not just indifferently tap on it through ritual form or a dull sense of ritual duty.

We found that our Lord valued prayer highly in his own life. That should be a message to us that if the Sinless One needed to pray often, we who are sinners should be even more zealous to pray. We must understand that prayer is not a law or precept that must be adhered to in order to avoid having the wrath of God fall upon us. It is also not a meaningless ritual that we must suffer through to become "devout." Rather, prayer is a tremendous privilege that should not ever be overlooked or neglected by Christians. We are the losers if we do so because we fail to appropriate God's blessings that He offers us through that means. Prayer is the true avenue of communication with

[10] See Chapter 14.4 Ritual Prayer, page 357

our Creator from whom we were once alienated in Adam's fall but are now reconciled by the blood of Christ.

Chapter 10.4 Classifications of Prayer

We must first seek God with all of our hearts in order to claim the promise He made to mankind in Jesus Christ for ourselves. We must come to God in the only way that He could ever hear the likes of our sin-ridden selves — through his Son, Jesus Christ. As un-forgiven sinners, we must open the barricaded door of our heart to receive God's grace. Before we do so, there is no hope that God will hear us regarding any other matter.

We find that demonstrated in Scripture when the repentant thief on the cross turned to the Lord Jesus saying, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Lu.23:42). In the same way, we who were condemned justly to death for our iniquities also have turned to Jesus asking Him to remember us in that great Day of Judgment in order that we not perish along with the unrepentant. The other thief hanging along side Jesus, who failed to petition Him, remained in a state of condemnation, as far as we have any record, and went into perdition.

Prayers of the Godless

Prayer is not unique to the Christian faith, since even the vilest pagan offers prayers to idols, the god of his own hands, or he simply offers up prayers to the creature, because, not seeing beyond the creation, he is blinded against seeing the Supreme God who created everything. That religious conviction is deeply imbedded in all men. Even the atheist has a religious leaning, though he would not call it religion and would certainly deny that he ever prays. Yet, many of them consciously or unconsciously seek out a cosmic force outside of themselves that they can tap into to encourage and strengthen them in times of trouble. The corrupted soul of fallen man seeks to have communion with a greater power as if it can sense its need for dependence upon a being greater than itself — a power that it intuitively knows could provide comfort, a sense of purpose, and even an eternal existence if only it could be realized.

Of course, man's soul should rightly seek to be re-united with their Creator, the one true God, through the person of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, because of mans' sinful nature and his desire to continue in sin, he naturally opposes turning to Him. Though the knowledge of God is evident to him, he has purposefully suppressed it (cf. Ro.1:21,22). Natural man wants the ***power of religion***, in order to use it to satisfy his own desires, but without any of the moral constraints of Christianity, since moral inhibitions are viewed as a sign of mental weakness to him. For that reason, he chooses to seek out a spiritual alliance that suits his own fallen way of life. That is what makes man so susceptible to superstition, idolatry, pagan worship, the occult, gross doctrinal error, and outright Satanic lies to which secular, church, and Biblical History can readily attest.

Atheistic Objects of Prayer

Some men become fascinated by blind "chance" and get involved in gambling in its various forms. They pray to "lady luck" that things will work out to their advantage. Some may try to organize their lives for success under the control of astrology or biorhythms.[11] Still others worship a blind fate over which they have no hope of communication whatsoever — only helpless submission. Many men diligently study human philosophy, technology, or science as a substitute for religion. Some seek purpose and comfort for their lives in the accumulation of money or other valuables. Whatsoever they value most, they worship and attempt to ally themselves with it through some form of communication.

Humanistic Prayer

There is also a move afoot today to suggest that the only benefit to be received from prayer comes from the activity of prayer itself totally apart from anyone to whom it is directed or who can

[11]Biorhythms are merely a modern spin on ancient astrology. Like astrology, biorhythms are based upon one's date of birth with extending cycles that are based upon the numerical overlap and coincidences of graphic curves instead of the movement of stars. Both are versions of numerology.

actually hear or answer that prayer. That is, it is thought to be the mental ***process*** of prayer that resolves problems or heals diseases. This "godless prayer" falls more into the category of internal suggestion since it is only directed inwardly to our own soul such that it could essentially be viewed as praying to ourselves.

In that it also seeks to actually produce change, it is a vain attempt to exercise the mind to gain control over physical matter or temporal situations. In doing so, man attempts to become his own god, which is the basis of shamanism not Christianity. Even the atheist, who denies all religion and prayer along with it, is often attracted to various forms of inner contemplation — especially so if it can be thought of as a natural mental process that can be explained scientifically. Consequently, many eastern religious forms such as Yoga are often adopted or adapted as scientific methods. Satan is very happy to oblige fallen man, since opening the mind through meditation without exclusively directed prayer to God in the safeguard of the Holy Spirit is to leave oneself open to receive every demon that would seek to inhabit a man's soul!

The Sinner's Prayer

Our very first prayer to the One True God must be the prayer of a sinner, not that of a saint as we repent from our stubborn rejection of Him. It must be a desperate plea for mercy coming from a hopeless sinner that is condemned by God's judgment to death for his sins. Before we turn to Christ, all other prayers or petitions are of necessity lost in route because God's ears are closed against them. "The LORD is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Pr.15:29). "We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (Jn.9:31). If we are not right with God, our prayers can only produce an echo in our own ears. Only by coming to God by way of the cross, can our prayers be heard and answered.

> **"Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner. For, I see your holiness and my filthy condition. How I long to know You and commune with You. Yet, my sins separate me from You; the rags of my works shame me before You.**

"By invitation of your grace alone I come before You now. I come because of He who sits at your right hand, He who beckons and calls me even as He makes intercession between You and me that I may approach.

"Blessed Jesus, I truly believe that You have died for me. It was for my sins that your body suffered the wrath of your Father on the cross. It was for my life that your innocent blood was spilled out. It was for my shame that You hung there and was despised of men; even as your Father turned his back on You. I believe not only that You have died for my sins, but also rose again for my justification to make me right with your Father.

"Be my guide, precious Savior, and rule in my life such that sin can no longer have dominion over me. Set me free from sin's mortal grasp even as You have released me from sin's eternal consequences. Keep me in this life as a child of light that I may be a living witness of your love.

"Thank You Lord Jesus for your wondrous work; with what great love You have loved me! Thank You for dying for me and for the salvation You have so freely given. Thank You for the wondrous gift of eternal life. And, as You arose from the grave, so is my hope in You for my own resurrection from the grave.

"Father, I can see that the door is always open that I may approach your throne of grace. May I come here often to be near to You, praying always and only in the blessed name of Jesus, your Son, and my Lord and Savior.
Amen."

Once we enter past the veil in that first prayer, we begin to experience the grace of God in our lives that we had only read about before in God's Word. It need not be a complex prayer at all, but may

be as simple as "Lord save me" if it is truly expressed from the heart (Mt.8:25; 14:30). From then on we no longer pray to a distant God whom we have only heard about, but our very ***own*** God whom we know personally and intimately as our Father. We then know Him, not merely know about Him. Furthermore, we need no ritual, no talisman, no particular place or time to approach Him. We merely turn to Him in our thoughts and He is always there, ready to hear our prayers and is ready to aid us and comfort us.

Prayer of Confession

A plea to God for mercy must also be accompanied by the full recognition and confession of our guilt. David's prayer, when he cried out to God for mercy because of the great sin he had committed in taking Bathsheba and killing Urias, was accompanied by his full confession of guilt: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps 51:3,4). We must understand that all evil that is done, though the act may harm another man or woman, is actually sin against God. It should be evident that we cannot ***sin*** against another man, since sin by definition is anything we do that is in opposition to ***God's will*** or that offends ***God's*** holiness, not that of our fellow man. It is against God alone that we sin, and it is to God alone that we must confess our sins and from Him alone that we must obtain forgiveness.

Mourning over Sin

However, to merely acknowledge our sins without having a genuine heart-felt sorrow because of them is also of no avail. A matter-of-fact agreement that our sin is sin does nothing at all if we do not have a deep desire to rectify our sinful condition. We must truly be repulsed by the sins that we have committed against a holy and loving God. So much so that we, as King David, must cry out for cleansing: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps 51:7). We also must cry out for his cleansing power against our sinful estate: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps.51:5). We are sinners by birth as well as by perpetration.

Atonement for Sin

Once we have committed sin, we cannot reverse that offence. Could we offer restitution to God in the same way that we could to a mortal man? What could we as sinners, saved or unsaved, possibly offer to satisfy an offence to God's holiness? There is nothing that we own that is worthy of personal sacrifice that we could offer it to Him. Would it suffice if we offer a large donation to a Christian cause? Perhaps some ritual or ceremony would suffice to appease Him? While many may do any or all of those things to salve their own conscience, God is not impressed by such vain attempts at compensation. No effort that we make at restitution could possibly atone for even one of our many sins.

Even when king David began to survey his great wealth to make restitution for his sin, he discovered he had nothing to offer: "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering" (Ps.51:16). None of those things could satisfy God. However David instinctively knew, as should we, that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). When we first come to God as sinners to confess our sins, offering a broken and remorseful heart, God will hear us, accept our prayer of confession, and provide us full redemption in Christ who atoned for all our sins.

Continuous Confession of Sin

Sadly, even after we have received salvation in Christ, we still often stumble and fall into sin. We should not, we must not, but we do, as our old nature continues to drag us down. As Christians, we must not fail to come before God to confess our continuing sins. Yes, it is embarrassing to commit sin after the blood of Jesus has saved us, but we deny the sufficiency of his blood to sanctify us when we do not own up to our miserable failures and lay them bare before Him. Christ died not only for our past sins; He also died for all present and future sins as well. We must realize that all of our personal sins were future to Jesus as He died on the cross nearly two thousand years ago. While

the debt for our sin has been paid in full in advance, the cleansing of our soul from sin must take place over our entire lifetime.

Often, a Christian denies to himself that he any longer sins or is even capable of sin after he is saved. That is dangerous self-deception. The sin, that he wrongly denies is sin, remains, staining his soul, making him miserable, standing between himself and God, and removes all the joy of his salvation. The Apostle John wrote to fellow believers regarding this:

> **"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"** (1Jn.1:8–10).

Therefore, the prayer of confession is not only contained in the first prayer that we utter when we come before Him pleading for his mercy and salvation, but it is a continuing necessity as the "…blood of Jesus Christ [God's] son [keeps on cleansing] us from all sin" (1Jn.1:7).

Prayer of Submission

Too often, we come to pray without acknowledging that it is God's will that must be done and not our own. We must be willing to submit ourselves to God's will for our lives even as we accept his mercy. Jesus epitomized the prayer of submission when He prayed in the Garden at Gethsemane: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt.26:39).

How can we ask for God's help if we do not simultaneously submit ourselves to his will? Perhaps we fear doing so because we assume that God will increase our burden. Perhaps we feel that we, like Job, will lose everything we have! Yet, even Job submitted to God's will ***after*** his loss (Jb.1:20,21). Since every thing ultimately must bend to God's will, why not, then, submit ourselves in prayer to God as our Father, seeking his will as well as his goodness? We know that if we ask for bread, He will not give us a stone, and if we ask for a fish He will not give us a serpent (Mt.7:9,10). Furthermore, if we ask for Truth, He will not give us a lie. "Ask, and it shall be given you;

seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Mt.7:7,8).

It is only through submission to God's will that we can truly receive the best things from Him. What we often do not seem to realize is that the closer we come to accepting the will of God for our lives, the less we will commit the sins for which we must pay the natural consequences that must always follow the acts. Most of the burdens that we bear are not the result of God heaping judgment upon us or even of his chastening, but they are the result of our own stubbornness in not living the way God has created us to live. As some wit once put it, "when you go against the grain of the universe, you get splinters." That is the nature of sin. Sin is not only an offence to God, it is degrading and harmful to man as well, and we must always pay a price in the flesh for those deeds. The nature of sin is such that it can wreck our lives — saved or not. Even so, it must be reiterated that there is no ***eternal condemnation*** for the believer's sins because Jesus paid the sin debt that was owed to the Father in full.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

In receiving abundant blessings from God, we must in turn offer prayers of thanksgiving for his mercy and kindness.

> **"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's"** (Ps.103:2–5).

Most of us would not think of receiving a gift or a kindness from another person without thanking them for their thoughtfulness and consideration. Yet, we too often do not thank God, from whom all earthly blessings come, for the tremendous bounty that He has given each one of us. Just the gift of mortal life itself is a gift beyond measure. On top of that, God has blessed us with the companionship of other people — our friends and relatives.

God has given us a place on this earth, which brings forth both food for the nourishment of our bodies as well as an abundance of beauty to nourish our souls. God did not need to make a flower or a butterfly; He did it for our benefit that we may fully enjoy our physical existence. When we sit down to eat a meal prepared from the abundance of God's providence, we appropriately offer thanks to Him for the food without which our bodies would soon die. However, we should also not forget to thank Him for the time that He has given us to enjoy the many blessings that we receive through his providence. Every day of mortal life is a gift from God.

Furthermore, for us who know God personally through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the bounty of his providence here on earth is only the beginning. We have received a gift far too great ever to be taken for granted or forgotten, a gift by which we live in unbounded joy every minute of every day. We have received redemption from all of our sins, and we have received the full restoration of fellowship with our Benefactor and Creator through which we are continually blessed here on earth. We also know that life will not end when our bodies die and decay in the grave, since we also have received his promise of eternal life and a future glory beyond any of our present dreams. For that especially, we must thank God every moment of every day!

Prayer of Praise

Prayers of praise are brought forth when we meditate on the majesty of God. In prayers of thanksgiving we thank God for all that He has done for us, but we need to ***praise*** God not only for what we have received from Him, but for ***who He is***:

> **"Bless the LORD, O my soul, O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: who laid the foundation of the earth, that it**

should not be removed forever" (Ps.104:1–5).

It is indeed astonishing that we can come before God, who created the entire universe, and contemplate his being. Of course, our finite minds do not allow us to comprehend Him fully while we are yet mortal since our physical senses must fail to see his majesty directly. Yet, when we meditate on all that God must be to have created the physical realm merely by speaking it into existence, and reach out with our spirit to touch the threshold of his throne when we pray, we can understand the thrill of the psalmist when he wrote:

> **"I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD"** (Ps.104:33,34).

Prayer of Communion

The Lord Jesus would often go off by Himself to commune with his Father in prayer (Lu.6:12). Likewise, we also need to talk often with our heavenly Father not to ask anything of Him, not to plead with Him about some weighty matter, but just to contemplate his being and ***rejoice in his nearness***. Man has a deep need to return to the time when God walked with Adam in the cool of the day in the garden (Ge.3:8–10). Even after the fall of man, a thirst remains that only communion with God can quench.

> **"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary"** (Ps.63:1,2).

Our communion is not only with the Father, but with the Son also. We, who are purchased by the blood of Christ, are now his brothers through the Spirit of Adoption. For that reason the door to the Lord Jesus is always open to us, if we will but open our hearts to Him. That deep hunger for companionship with God can only be satisfied when we welcome Christ into our lives. When Christ enters our soul, the door remains open to the very throne room of the Father. Through that open door (the rent veil), we believers can enjoy full communion with God through the discourse of prayer.

Prayer of Supplication

There are times when we must petition God because of events in our lives that seek to do us harm, that cause us confusion, or leave us deeply troubled. At such a time, we find ourselves powerless to fend for ourselves, and we, in all humility, must petition God to intervene and come to our aid. This is referred to as a prayer of supplication, a humble plea for help and comfort.

We need never become anxious about any situation in which we may find ourselves, because God is never unkind to his own nor is He ever fresh out of mercy for those who genuinely seek it. Therefore, we should make every situation in which we find ourselves known to God, and fully place our trust in Him, so that we need not ever fear the outcome. While it is evident that God knows our needs long before we ask, it is only by bringing our cares to the throne of grace that we can leave the heavy burden of them there. Though God continually works on our behalf, we may often hinder his efforts to comfort us by lugging unnecessary worry around with us. We can relieve ourselves of that debilitating burden through prayer, so that "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Ph.4:7).

At times, we may recognize that our immediate personal trouble also has a larger and far-ranging spiritual component standing behind it. Actually, this spiritual factor is universally at the root of all of man's problems. Due to his sin nature, he is a ready target for the "prince of this world" to throw his flaming darts. We are, in ourselves, no match for Satan, but by putting ourselves in full battle-dress (Ep.6:11–17) and "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit…"(Ep 6:18), we can stand against the evil one.[12] It is because we must walk in this world and contend with "spiritual wickedness in high places" that we must continually petition God for his council and intervention on our behalf even when we may perceive that all is going well.

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[12] Spiritual warfare was discussed in chapter 7.5 of Book I of this work.

While the prayer of supplication is the most common prayer of all, many find it unsatisfactory because God most often does not answer us in the direct manner in which we believe that He should. God's ways are so far above our own sensory comprehension of his methods. By failing to seek God's council in our everyday situations and observing the way in which He answers us in them, we are unprepared to receive an answer to a prayer that is offered up during a time of great crisis. Therefore, it would be well to ask ourselves when we last turned to God to learn more about Him and his ways through answers to daily prayers regarding more routine matters. "…But in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Ph.4:6).

Prayer of Intercession

Sometimes we find ourselves concerned or greatly troubled for the burdens and well being of others, not for our own. It is at that time when we are concerned for a sick relative or close friend that we feel the greatest need to approach God's throne, and find ourselves involved in what is referred to as intercessory prayer. It is good and correct that we should do that if we are ourselves right with God, for we know that the fervent prayers of an upright man can avail much with God (cf. Ja.5:16). As James said, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him … and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up…"(Ja.5:14,15).

Our deep anxiety may at times be over our concern for our beloved nation rather than an individual. In his epistle to the Romans, we saw the Apostle Paul's great concern for his Hebrew "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Ro.9:1–3). In the same manner, we should have great concern for our "kinsmen" living about us in this nation of ours — both the saved and unsaved. Moreover, our concern should extend to the lost throughout the world. Oh, how we should pray that God would draw all those who are his lost wandering sheep to Himself!

We have read in Scripture that, in many instances, our failure to pray for others when we should can be equated with sin. Samuel

said regarding his prayers for his peoples' salvation: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you" (1Sa.12:23). The sin in this case is failure to intercede on the behalf of the lost or the needy. As redeemed sinners, saved by grace alone, it would be sinful for us not to consider the plight of others.

Imprecatory Prayer

The imprecatory prayer is not one about which we often hear much today. An imprecatory prayer is one in which we call upon God to bring swift and terrible judgment upon our enemies. The Old Testament is full of such prayers as Israel cried out to God to avenge them of the evil done them by other nations. King David also cried out to God to avenge him of the evil done against him personally such as in the petition that we read in Psalm 35.

God's Old Testament covenant with Israel was one of law in which individuals were to be judged strictly and harshly for their sins. While grace was evident in the sacrificial and ceremonial laws, the Decalogue and the sundry laws arising along side it did not allow for a free exercise of mercy lest the whole nation of Israel should fall into iniquity through the example of a few. In the New Testament, the covenant of grace and mercy is emphasized over harsh judgment. That is made possible because God now rules within the believer's heart through the Holy Spirit not through the externality of law. For that reason, some see imprecatory prayer as being improper for Christians.

However, the imprecatory prayer is found in the New Testament as well as the old. For instance, the Apostle Paul, himself, called upon God in very strong language to condemn any that sought to pervert the Gospel (Ga.1:7–9). In a more personal matter, Paul also prayed that God would judge Alexander, the coppersmith for the evil way he had treated Paul in Ephesus (2Ti.4:14). How can we reconcile this with the words of Jesus who said that we are to pray for our enemies, reward evil with good, and forgive those who trespass against us (Mt.5:44)?

The answer lies in allowing God to handle our enemies in the way He sees fit, remembering that vengeance belongs to the Lord, not to us. (Ro.12:19) That is especially true if we are attacked while we

are going about the Lord's work, as was Paul. We may have been very ill treated, but the ***sin*** within the act is against God alone who has called us to the work. Therefore, when we are hard-pressed by those who seek to do us evil, we should never seek to exact vengeance ourselves, but it is proper that we turn them over to God through our prayers that He may deal with them as He sees fit.

God may choose to deal with our enemies in various ways. He may of course choose to harshly judge them and remove them from the scene. He may also choose to use the good, which they receive in exchange for their evil deeds, to confound them. When He does so, we may no longer be seen as an attractive target, because of our unexpected response. God may also use the firm witness of those whom they persecute to shame them to repent of their evil designs. He may even use the entire experience to convert them and bring them into the body of Christ.

In so doing, our enemy becomes a new brother in Christ, and is no longer an enemy but a newfound friend! That is exactly what He did with the Apostle Paul on the Damascus road (Ac.9:1–16). There were surely many Christians praying to God in that very hour to deal with Saul of Tarsus, who was so viciously and successfully persecuting them at every turn. They would have been pleased to see God judge Saul and remove him from the face of the earth. However, God took care of Saul in his own time and in his own way.

Therefore, when we bring our enemies before God in prayer, we must always be willing to allow God to contend with them in his own way. Too often, we only desire ungodly personal revenge; not knowing of what spirit we are, we want God to "…command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them…" (Lu.9:54). What if God had done that with Saul of Tarsus? There would never have been an Apostle named Paul, and half of the New Testament would be missing — a tremendous loss to us all. Therefore, we observe once again that when we take anything to God in prayer, we must always seek God's will for the answer to our petition and not attempt to impose our own solutions upon Him.

Meditation

We are told in Scripture to meditate on the Word of God (Ps 119:15,23,48,78,148 etc.). This focused contemplation on God's Word is directed toward seeking God's will in our lives. Although meditation is not specifically prayer, it is akin to it. Meditating on God's Word is to study and accept what God has previously said to us, examine ourselves in that light, and apply his Word to our daily lives and circumstances. From the knowledge obtained from Scripture we also meditate on the wonders of God Himself and rejoice in that glory that is ours through Christ. As with prayer, it is important that we set aside time to reflect on what God has said to us. Also as with prayer, it is imperative that there always be a specific worthy object of our meditation. In this instance, it is the Word of God.

Comprehensive Prayer

Of course, we cannot always isolate individual prayers into just one of the classifications that we have listed: confession, submission, thanksgiving, praise, communion, supplication, intercession or imprecatory prayers. We find that we actually engage in many of those types of prayers together in combination when they merge into one as we seek out God in our prayer life. We may engage in one of them more than we do another as the need arises and as the Holy Spirit moves us to do so. Nevertheless, by looking at each type of prayer separately, we soon realize the fantastic scope of the privilege that we have in coming before God through Christ, and the power and comfort that prayer can provide. There is nothing that cannot be taken before God through the torn veil that we may leave it there before his throne.

Chapter 10.5 Unanswered Prayer

Having discussed the various kinds of prayers and the Scriptural principles that apply to proper prayer, it is well that we look at those things that can result in the failure of our prayers. We can, of course, assume that we have ignored one or more of the basic principles involved in correct prayer and in so doing have so offended God that He cannot hear us. However, we must also realize that three other possibilities exist. Those are,

1. We have received an answer to our prayers and have not recognized it as such.
2. We have expected an answer immediately, when God has chosen to prepare us for it over a span of time.
3. We have received an answer to our petition, but the answer was "no," not "yes," and we have failed to accept it.

As we can see, those three are not actually examples of unanswered prayer at all, but of unperceived results. We shall consider them first, and then discuss some of the more subtle obstacles that can defeat us in our efforts at prayer such that God cannot respond to us.

Unrecognized Answers to Prayer

Even if we have prayed rightly, we may not always be able to recognize God's answer when it is given to us. That is because we have already visualized in our own minds how the answer is to come, and we have specifically determined what form it is to take. Quite often, we not only ask God to answer our prayers, we subconsciously presume to tell Him how He is to go about it. We do not merely spread our problem out before Him seeking his counsel, but try to impose our own ill-conceived methods upon Him as well.

As we already know, God's ways differ greatly from our ways. God has his own means for resolving every situation. We can see that in the manner in which the Lord Jesus, who is God in the flesh, failed to bend to the will of mortal men when He walked among them, but took his own path and applied his own methods that was always

exercised in the will of his Father. Most often, this confounded even his immediate followers who had their own ideas about what needed to be done. When Peter rebuked Jesus regarding his coming death and resurrection, Jesus saw this as an attack coming directly from Satan. That is, Peter's response was exactly what Satan wanted him to say. Our Lord said to Peter that he did not understand the ways of God, but only the ways of men (Mt.16:21–23).

Here we find examples of the two means to a desired end: God's way and man's way. In this type of situation, man's obvious response is the avoidance of death at all costs. God's way was that Jesus should taste death for every man. With man's methods, the end rarely if ever justifies the means, springing as it does from man's ignorance and corrupted will. With God's way, however, there is never a conflict because both the end and the means are united by God's perfect knowledge and wisdom.

When James and John sought to "command fire to come down from heaven and consume" the Samaritans, Jesus rebuked them saying, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Lu.9:55,56). Again, when Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest, Jesus said, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Mt.26:51–52).

The text in Matthew does not expressly state that this was Peter, but only one who was with Jesus in the garden. Two of his followers had swords with them (Lu.22:38). The text in the Gospel of John, however, makes it clear that it was indeed Peter (Jn.18:10). That sounds so much like the impulsive nature of Peter who had boldly said just before this event that he would lay down his life for Jesus (Jn.13:37). No doubt Peter's frustration over the incident in the garden where he had attempted to prove his loyalty and was thwarted also inflamed him such that soon after he denied Jesus three times (Jn.13:38).

The Lord Jesus was not brought into the world to die by the sword in a battle, but on the cross as God had preordained. In addition, his disciples were to live on to take the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Peter's action seemed quite reasonable and heroic to him, but

it totally opposed God's will in that situation. Man's method was to fight, but God's method was to submit for the sake of fulfilling his Word (Mt.26:54). Many other examples can be found where Jesus sought and utilized his Father's methods, never the methods of men such as his delay in coming to Lazarus who died during the interim (Jn.11:14).

We find that God's ways may appear to be very strange to us at times. How could Peter have understood the necessity for Jesus' death at that time? Jesus, after all, was the awaited Messiah and the rightful king of Israel. Moreover, how could the rough fisherman understand submission when he was armed and ready to fight to the death for his master (Mt.26:35; Mk.14:31)? Furthermore, how could James and John understand why the Samaritans should not be judged for their rejection of the Son of God? After all, Elijah the prophet had previously called down fire before upon those who rejected God's Word (2Ki.1:10). How could Mary and Martha understand Jesus' delay resulting in Lazarus' death (Jn.11:21)? Because we are so set in our mortal ways, we often fail to see that God is answering our prayers in his own way.

Delayed Answer to Prayer

For his own divine purposes, and ultimately for our benefit as well, God sometimes delays his answers to our prayers. It is not a question of our prayers being delayed "on the way up" since we have the Holy Spirit living within us to ensure delivery. We must also realize that it is not because God is reluctant to respond, or that He just does not get around to supplying answers to our petitions. Even, as regarding our Lord's return and the judgment to follow, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2Pe.3:9). Even as God withholds the Day of Judgment for mankind's benefit (that many may be saved), He often withholds answers to our prayers for a time as well.

Preparation through Providence

Because God often answers prayer through acts of his providence, we find that He frequently takes time to set the stage for the events that must lead up to answered prayer as He utilizes other events and various men and women to accomplish his will. Because that takes time, we often sense a delay when in fact God is already at work on our behalf. We can clearly see that God was working behind the scenes manipulating events to restore David to the throne of Israel even while David could not sense that this effort was taking place.

God, being infinite, experiences no passage of time. However, waiting for answered prayer is never easy for us. As finite beings, we observe the passage of time as an ordeal. As David said, "I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God" (Ps.69:3). "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me" (Ps.119:82). Yet, it is by that very means that God prepares us and teaches us to trust Him.

To Build Patience

By delayed results we are taught patience in all things even in his coming deliverance: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (Ja.5:7). The farmer must be patient. He cannot hurry the fruit from the seed. Expecting the early spring rain, he plants in hope, and again patiently waits through times of drought for the late summer rain that will restore the crop that the harvest will be bountiful. We must learn to exercise patience as well as expectancy in our prayers.

To Build Trust

Often, the delay in answering is used to build our trust and to prove the strength of our faith. David began with "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me" (Ps.13:1). Surely, David desperately desired an immediate answer to his prayers as his enemy sought to destroy him. "But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto

the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me" (Ps.13:5,6). At the conclusion of his prayer, David rested in his faith, the joy of God's salvation, and the firm belief in God's mercy even when the answer to his prayers were not immediately forthcoming.

To Instruct Us

Often the answers to our prayers are delayed to teach us some important truth. We observe that fact by example in the raising of Lazarus (Jn.11:1–45). If the Lord Jesus had immediately responded to the plea of Mary and Martha and had healed Lazarus, their prayers would have been immediately answered, and Lazarus would have been healed from his disease. Our Lord, however, had a greater purpose in mind: this incident would be "…for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby" (Jn.11:4). Therefore, our Lord delayed for two days to answer the petition of Mary and Martha. Lazarus had been in the grave for four days when Jesus finally arrived!

How heartless that at first may seem to us. After all, Jesus could have healed Lazarus even at a distance. Martha said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (Jn.11:21,22).[13] Martha knew that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been there, but she was also convinced that, even with Lazarus dead and buried in the grave, God would not deny his Son the authority to breathe life into him again if Jesus chose to raise him! In spite of the delay in his coming, Martha's faith in the authority of the Lord Jesus had actually increased.

We must not think that Jesus was cold-hearted in that delayed action; He did not fail to weep with those who sorrowed because of the death of Lazarus (Jn.11:33,35,36). God shares our deepest troubles and sorrows even while we must wait. When the answer came, Mary and Martha received an outcome beyond all their hopes as Jesus raised

[13] Astonishingly, this far-reaching faith is evidenced in pragmatic Martha who earlier concerned herself with kitchen duties while her sister Mary was carefully listening to the Words of Jesus (Lu.10:38–42).

Lazarus from the dead! Not only was Lazarus restored, but also the glory of God was fully revealed. The power of death itself was seen submitting to the Son of Man. The hope of the future resurrection of our own bodies is reinforced, for that same Jesus that raised Lazarus is Him whom we trust against the day of our own mortal death (Jn.11:24,27). Often God delays answers that He might teach us and demonstrate his ways.

Failure to Accept "No" for an Answer

The hardest thing for us to accept is the fact that God sometimes flatly answers "no" to our prayers. Instead of feeling that our prayers have been rejected or unheard, we must understand that "no" is a valid answer. Here it is not a matter of being unable to see God's answer to our prayers, nor is it a matter of being prepared to wait for God's answer. God has merely decided, in his great wisdom and sovereignty, not to grant our request. God would not remove the "thorn" in the Apostle Paul's flesh though Paul considered it a great hindrance to his work (2Co.12:7). Only after much soul searching and after praying three times did Paul finally come to understand that God's answer was actually and finally "no" (2Co.12:8,9).

When the aftermath of prayer does not conform to our own desires, we quickly assume that God has not heard us or has chosen not to answer our prayers. We see that this is not true, but we think so only because God's methods are so different from ours. In fact, when we have actually sought to impose our own will upon God, his answer ***must*** be "no." We must be guided by God, not God by us! If we ask very ***specific*** things to be done to accomplish an end — even a just end — we are likely to receive "no" for an answer. God has heard us, but He must always be faithful to his own methods. If God's ways are perfect, we cannot question his methods or seek to substitute our own for his.

Therefore, if we have prayed and it appears that God has not answered us, we must carefully consider if it is in God's will not to grant our request. Here we are assuming that there is no obstacle between God and us, such as sin or disobedience. We also assume that we have not asked God for something that would merely satisfy our

worldly lusts, but believe that we are asking for something that God would ordinarily grant us with divine joy. We are, in all conscience, right with God and we have prayed in confidence, yet our request is not granted. We must understand that, unlike God, we are not able to see the end from the beginning; we are not omniscient. We are often far too shortsighted. Though our request may seem to be consistent with God's will, it may not be right for the present situation in the light of eternity.

Alternative Blessing

Sometimes, when God answers "no" to our request, He opens a door to something far better than we could have possibly asked for. The "no" is appended with "accept this instead." We may not even recognize the better option at the time. Only after a span of time has passed can we look back and realize what God has done for us. Through his alternative blessing, He has often saved us from much anguish, many trials of our faith, and even physical death. When one day all of this suddenly becomes known to us we have cause to thank Him deeply for what He has done to save us from ourselves.

"I asked GOD for strength that I might achieve. I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked God for health that I might do greater things. I was given infirmity that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy. I was given poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men. I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life. I was given life that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything that I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men most richly blessed."
(Written by an unknown Civil War soldier).

At other times, God offers us no alternative; his answer is unconditionally "no." We are left with nothing more than staying the

course that He has set before us. In times of great distress or illness, this answer is the hardest one for us to accept. At that time, we must depend upon the grace of God to sustain us through faith. We should also pray that God would open our understanding. If God has answered "no" to a godly request, there must be a larger reason that we have failed to understand. Even then, we must realize that God's purpose may be completely beyond our mortal comprehension, and we may never fully understand it this side of eternity. We then must humbly accept God's will and cling to Him for the comfort that He provides through his presence. God is God and knows what is best for us.

Subtle Obstacles to Prayer

Many things can so alter our relationship with God such that He will not (and cannot) hear or answer our prayers. We have already discussed various principles of effective prayer, but many of the obstacles that we shall now consider are so subtle that we can easily overlook them. Let us briefly investigate some of those things since any such obstacle can destroy our confidence in prayer.

Covert Sin

First, we must consider the possibility of covert sin in our lives. That is, we have sins that we have not confessed because we have not recognized them as sin. So deeply rooted is covert sin that it is often hidden even from ourselves, but never from God who sees our innermost being. More often than not, it is not the sin of commission but the sin of omission. It is that which we continually fail to do according to God's will for our lives, not that which we do that is a direct violation of God's Holy Law. For that reason, we may not recognize it as sin and can be quite ignorant of its existence on a conscious level. We may sense that something is preventing us from enjoying close fellowship with God, but we are at a loss to understand what it is. Until this covert sin is revealed as sin, we cannot confess it and repent of it.

We often compartmentalize our lives such that certain activities or thoughts are locked away in separate private areas of our

minds that even we do not search. We most often consider those private matters as being ambivalent and having no relationship to our religious lives. Exposing sin in our lives and convicting us of that sin is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to avoid harboring hidden sin, we should not leave any of the compartments of our soul closed to the Holy Spirit, but open all of them wide to his searching eyes that we may confess that which the light of God reveals in us. We should pray as did David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me…" (Ps.139:23,24). We must allow ourselves to be completely filled with the Holy Spirit and we must let Him convict us of those secret sins that so subtly plague us. Only then can we confess those sins before God, committing them to the cross of Christ, and by so doing restore full fellowship with God in prayer.

Procrastination

The second obstacle is more willful than the first. God cannot hear us because we are being openly disobedient to his will through procrastination. As the Israelites rebelled against God and would not go in to possess the land that God had promised them, so we too often ask in stubborn disobedience to that which we have been instructed to do. When the Israelites finally did set their minds to enter the land on their own, after having rejected God's previous command to enter, God's power was no longer with them, and their prayers went unheeded. We, like they, so often set out to do God's work on our own and in our own good time and then we cry out in dismay when our efforts fail and God will not hear us (De.1:21–45). God cannot reward such procrastination with favor just as a human father cannot reward a disobedient child lest he condone that disobedience. If that is so with unrighteous man and his children, how much more must it be with God and his children.

Worldliness

Many things that we allow in our daily walk can build a wall between God and ourselves in such a way that we dare not present ourselves before his throne. That obstruction most often is not

constructed of our covert sins, but from a state of mind that has developed through our living too close to this world. We become so earthly-minded that we are of no heavenly benefit. Our world-view becomes man-centered, not God-centered. That obstruction can be just as real for a child of God as it is for the unsaved sinner. Though saved by grace, this barrier, which ***we*** ourselves erect or permit to be erected, keeps us from appropriating the many blessings that God so willingly desires to supply.

We must not stubbornly cling to our own way when God obviously provides a different path for us to take. We know that the way that seems right to us in the flesh can only lead to death from sin (Pr.14:12). Yet, even after we are saved by grace, we too often obstinately cling to our own worldly ideas, failing to hear the Word of God and failing to bend to his purpose for us. If we refuse to obey Him when He seeks to direct us, how can we expect Him to hear us when we cry out to Him in anguish because of our own disobedience (Zec.7:12,13)?

Lack of Mercy

If we have failed to show mercy to others, how can God hear us when we cry out to Him for mercy? Since God shows us such abundant mercy, shouldn't we pass it along to those with whom we have dealings daily? "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee" (Mt.18:33). "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Pr.21:13).

If we would seek to bring the poor to the bar of judgment in order to vent our own righteous indignation, how can we expect less from God? Rather, we should remember to "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Mt.7:1,2). If we seek to exercise our "rights," as we hear so much about today, may we not prejudge others and fail to show mercy? Don't we actually demand what is ours to the exclusion of the well being of others? Have we forgotten the words of our Lord, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt.5:7)?

Double Mindedness

We must be steadfast believers asking in faith. If we waver in our belief, we will be as one who asks from God, but doubting and expecting nothing, he then receives nothing because he did not really expect it. James said, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (Ja.1:8). We would then become a people that go through the motions of prayer, but lack the confidence that God will actually hear and answer. We have separated our prayers from our daily walk. It is a nice comforting thing to pray for ourselves and for others, but if we really expect nothing real to come of it, it is merely a meaningless ritual. "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (He.11:6). Therefore, we with singleness of mind must seek out God's benefits and gifts that we fully expect and believe that we will receive in Christ Jesus. That is the true exercise of faith in prayer.

Presumption

We must carefully examine our own motives so that we do not fall into a trap in which we think that what we ask for is in God's will when it really stems from our own lust for pleasure or comfort (Ja.4:3). Behind such prayers is the implication that God is an indulgent father who spoils his sons and daughters with expensive and lavish gifts. Those prayers, if one can truly call them that, are actually demands that God give us a "blank check" on which we can write out every conceivable desire and have it "cashed" at the "bank" of a worldly system.

A prevailing false doctrine, espoused by many, presumes that God wants all of his children to be completely free of all physical discomfort and to become materially rich as well. This "prosperity teaching" is not only false, it prevents those who are introduced to Jesus from seeking redemption from sin in Him, from seeing the true wonder of eternal salvation, and from receiving the many spiritual blessings that are in Jesus Christ. Failing to realize any immediate material blessings upon accepting Christ, many then seek to perform

useless works to prove their faith and gain material blessings through that means. That false teaching is nothing but another deadly form of works salvation with an underlying form of materialism that attempts to hide the true benefits of Christianity under a layer of wantonness. Those are the very things that the carnal man desires, while the spiritual man first seeks God's guidance knowing that God will supply all of his physical needs.

While God truly has materially blessed some of his children, He has clearly chosen others to remain in the ranks of the poor. While God has blessed some with a life of comfort, others suffer long hours of physical pain or mental tribulation. That does not mean that God loves one more than the other since we observe that there are both rich and poor among the unsaved as well as the saved. None of Jesus' disciples became rich as a consequence of following Him. As Jesus said to a would-be follower, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Mt.8:20). The Apostle Paul suffered from a physical infirmity that God chose not to remove and suffered much discomfort through imprisonment and various other trials.

It is ***spiritual*** blessings that we uniquely receive in Christ Jesus, not material wealth and physical comfort. Through those spiritual blessings, we are assured that we have eternal life, and that assurance is worth much more than all the material wealth on earth. The trials that we so often suffer in this life shall pale into nothingness when compared with the joys and wonders of the life to come.

Indifference

Perhaps, the most damaging to our prayer lives in the United States today is the sin of indifference that is fueled my many of the other obstacles that we have just discussed. We have access to a quality of life that seems to place nothing beyond our grasp. Even the poorest among us are rich by the standards of those who live in many foreign lands. Even the poorest among us has food to eat, a roof over our head, and clothing to wear thanks to public charities and a generous public welfare system. The affluent have medical insurance

that covers everything from doctor visits to burial and have other insurance to cover catastrophic loss due to storm or other mishaps.

For that reason, we rarely see the need to petition God in prayer since we seem to be getting along quite well without Him! We Christians do not deny the power of prayer, but we have become indifferent to it. Both private and corporate Prayer is still being exercised at home and in our churches, but with indifference as to the outcome. If God does not supply our needs, the government will, or we will merely obtain it somehow for ourselves through more diligent effort.

Will a time come when we must be shaken from our lethargy? Will a time come when we desperately need God's guidance that we have neglected for so long?

> **"Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof"** (Pr.1:28–30).

Indifference in prayer is a slow poison that seeks to destroy a nation by turning it inwardly upon its own material wealth. A nation that is content with the pleasures of its own lusts consumes itself and is blind to its own devouring until it no longer remains (cf. Ja.5:5). One has but to look at individual and national debt to see that the United States is rapidly devouring its prosperity by spending not only its present wealth, but its future wealth as well. Is that not a sign of a lustful people bent on self-destruction by devouring itself? When will we turn to the spiritual wealth in Christ that is inexhaustible and is a healing balm for a sin-sick nation?

We should constantly search within our own souls looking for those things that may separate us from God's council by means of the light given us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. To that end, we must give Him free reign. Then, we must hear God's reproof as a good son hears that of his father — not in rebellion or stubbornness, not in disobedience or indifference, nor of a flighty and unstable mind, but responding with love and trust. We must heed God's call to walk in his will; we must hear his voice and stand solid in his Word. Then will our

prayers be heard and answered, and we shall see the glory of the Lord revealed in our individual lives and in the life of our nation.

Section 11, The Doctrine of the Church

The Kingdom and the Church

Reconciling Israel with the Church

The Temporal Church

Chapter 11.1 The Kingdom and the Church

We find John the Baptist announcing the imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven just prior to the ministry of Jesus (Mt.3:2). That same subject was also the primary message of Jesus as He trod the roads of Galilee and Judaea (Mt.4:17). It is clearly seen in his teaching, healing of the sick, and raising of the dead. Everything that Jesus did during the early part of his three years of ministry was in preparation for the beginning of an eternal Kingdom of which He is the undisputed King. We often become bogged down in the many fascinating details and miracles of Jesus' ministry and in so doing often miss the significance of this greater message. In this chapter, we shall study the implications of the Kingdom of God in this present age and its close relationship to the new covenant Church.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

There has always been much confusion over the use of the two terms "Kingdom of Heaven," and "Kingdom of God" as they are found in the Gospel records. The term "Kingdom of Heaven" (literally, "Kingdom of the Heavens") occurs only in the Gospel of Matthew that was written with the Jew in mind. For that reason, some have thought that Matthew merely used that term in order to avoid using the name of God (YHWH, JHWH or Jehovah) that was considered to be so sacred by the Jew that it was commonly unspoken and replaced with the word "LORD." Moreover, the term "Kingdom of Heaven" is not found elsewhere in the New Testament.[14] To further complicate this situation however, we find that Matthew also uses the term "Kingdom of God" five times in his record as we see in the following verses: Mt.6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31,43. In each of those five verses, Matthew is quoting the words of Jesus, not using the term as part of his own narrative.

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[14]In 2 Timothy 4:18 we do find a reference to "His heavenly Kingdom" though the context is different than that which is found in the Gospels.

Three Aspects of "Kingdom"

We should realize that the word "kingdom" has three distinct meanings or aspects. First, it denotes the "domain" or "realm" that the king governs; secondly, it denotes the subjects of that kingdom; thirdly, it denotes the act of ruling, itself. This last definition is the primary meaning of the Greek word *basileia* that is translated as "kingdom" in English. When we use the term "Kingdom of God," we refer to the absolute and sovereign "rule" of God over all, but when we use the term "Kingdom of Heaven," we refer to a "locality" or "domain" in which the Kingdom is contained, that is, the "realm." Since Heaven is God's abode, we refer to a place that is directly in God's sphere of influence and presence. Jesus referred to that realm as Heaven or his "Father's house" in which there are many dwelling places (Jn.14:2).

The Jew in Matthew's day recognized the term, "Kingdom of Heaven," as the rule of Heaven that would someday be extended to include the nation of Israel on earth. That is what they expected to come about when their Messiah came to earth to occupy the throne of David. That expectation in large part was why they were so angered when Jesus did not directly challenge the rule of Rome to gain political power immediately after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Instead, He challenged the religious rulers of the Temple as he cleansed it of evildoers and then left the city (Mt.21:12–17). That action was beyond the comprehension of his many uninitiated followers. In spite of his many miracles and other proofs of his authority, they soon after forcefully rejected him as their king.

The Kingdom of God

We find that the word "heaven" does not directly equate with "God." One is a place and the other is the Sovereign. That immediately demonstrates that we must make some distinction between the two terms. When we speak of the "Kingdom of God," we speak of the comprehensive sovereign rule of God over all of his creation. This extends from the throne of God to all that is his including this earth and mankind whom He created to inhabit it. There

is no limit to the extent of his domain over all that is physical and over all that is spiritual as well. Nothing thwarts it or impedes it; it is absolute. Though evil presently reigns on earth through the efforts of Satan and because of the fallen nature of man, God still has the ultimate power to end it according to his will.

Therefore, we see that the "Kingdom of God" is all encompassing and is not limited to a specific place or a time. Nor, is it merely limited to believers. The atheist is not excluded from God's authority whether or not he accepts it in his own mind. Whether man submits to God's rule or not cannot affect God's innate sovereignty over everything that exists.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The term "Kingdom of Heaven" speaks of God's rule as it applies to Heaven. At this time, there is quite a difference between the way in which God's will is carried out in Heaven and upon the earth. Jesus acknowledged this distinction when He instructed his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Mt.6:10). While God does rule over earth in the sense that it cannot be excluded from the "Kingdom of God," He presently rules the earth indirectly through his precepts and laws that He has given to men to carry out his will. God has not yet crushed evil opposition to his reign upon earth through sovereign choice to avoid the complete destruction of mankind. God still desires that man submit himself voluntarily to his rule over them because God is "not willing that any should perish" (2Pe.3:9).

If the same rules and laws that are found in the "Kingdom of Heaven" were unreservedly applied to the earth, it would of necessity take on the character of Heaven, and we would find that all on earth must either submit fully to God's authority and laws in every particular or perish in immediate judgment. Such a time is coming in the future when Christ will set up his political reign on earth — a time that is commonly referred to as the "Kingdom Age." In that age, all evil will be put down, and man's sinful acts will be fully under the thumb of God — even as He simultaneously enables mankind to comply through a renewed heart and spirit (Eze.36:26). Peace will

replace warfare as Christ reigns in great power on the throne of this world (Jl.3:10). That time is exactly what Matthew was referring to in his text that was written specifically for the Hebrew believer.

At the time of Jesus' ministry, rumors were rampant regarding the coming Messiah who would put down all opposition to God and establish a true theocracy in Israel. The Romans would be run out (or destroyed) and Israel would have peace as a sovereign nation under God's direct rule.[15] The "Kingdom of Heaven" would have come to earth, and it would be ruled over by the Messiah. As one expositor put it, "the Jews understood the term to be the sum total of all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming of the King from heaven to set up a Kingdom on this earth with Heaven's standard." (J. V. McGee) (cf. Da.2:44; 7:14,27).

Nevertheless, when the Kingdom of Heaven was offered to the Jew, with Jesus as its true King, the Jews rejected it outright. Jesus had predicted his ultimate rejection by them in a parable in these words, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Lu.19:14)! The Jews, though specially chosen by God for his purposes, were no different from the Gentiles in that they possessed a fallen nature that was predisposed to sin. They could not accept that which their sinful nature completely rejected. Of course, their sinful nature was overtly held in check by the Mosaic Law. Outwardly, they could say that they desired to obey God through the keeping of the Mosaic Law that they consistently observed ritually, though consistently failed to keep inwardly. When Jesus put them to the test by putting forward what the Kingdom required of them as citizens, they backed away (Matthew Chapters 5–7). Of course, they would have desired the positive benefits of the Kingdom of Heaven, but they could not live up to the moral responsibilities it required of them.

If the Jew could have accepted the Kingdom of Heaven on earth at that time, it would have come into being. John the Baptist

[15]It is not clear that all Jews understood the coming Kingdom in exactly the same way. This variation in thought probably added to the Jewish nation's confusion regarding the person of Jesus as the Messiah.

would have been Elijah (Mt.11:14), the Gentile would have been put out of Israel, and Israel would have been a true nation ruled directly by God through Christ. The Kingdom age would have begun. However, the Israelites would not, indeed could not, accept it, since it was against their fallen nature to do so. [16]

That brings us, again, to the central and essential purpose of the first advent of Christ, which was to resolve man's sin problem. Man would surely perish in a kingdom where his every sinful thought and action violated divine law and where judgment was both severe and instantaneous. Then, can we still say that the offer to the Jew to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth was a valid offer? Yes, since the problem was not with God's willingness to do so, but with man's sinfulness. That rejection was not a surprise to Jesus or to the Father, nor did God need to switch from plan A to backup plan B as some assert. All this did was prove the inevitability of God's sovereign plan. The long awaited King had come, and He was crucified on a Roman cross to atone for the sins of all his subjects.

Similarity between the Two Terms

Therefore, we find that there is a definite distinction to be made between the two terms the "Kingdom of God" and the "Kingdom of Heaven." The "Kingdom of God" is all encompassing whereas the "Kingdom of Heaven" is much more specific. The "Kingdom of God" has a present application, whereas the "Kingdom of Heaven," especially as the Jew understood the term, is yet future —

[16] The disciples asked Jesus, following his resurrection, if He was going to restore again at that time the kingdom to Israel (Ac.1:6). This was not an ignorant question as some today suggest since they had before been instructed to pray for that very thing (cf. Mt.6:10). After all, Jesus was back on earth in the nation, and the sin question had been resolved in his crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus did not deny that the theocracy would someday be restored, as He most surely would have if it were never to be restituted. He merely answered that it was not for them to know when that would come about, since the Father alone had preordained it at its appointed time yet future (Ac.1:7).

having been inevitably rejected earlier by Israel. Yet, we can see that both represent the sovereign rule of God over his creation and that man is not excluded from involvement in either term. God is the sovereign in both the "Kingdom of God" and in the "Kingdom of Heaven." At times, the two terms could even be used interchangeably for that reason except where a specific reference is being made to the Kingdom on earth offer made to the Jews and to the inevitable Kingdom Age yet future. Even in those instances, we can see that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is incorporated ***within*** the "Kingdom of God."

The Spiritual Aspect of the Kingdom Offer

In reading the four Gospel accounts, we observe that after Jesus' baptism and temptation and after John the Baptist was cast in prison, Jesus took up John's message and began to preach the news of the "Kingdom." "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt.4:17). Jesus' entire earthly ministry was devoted to preaching the news of the Kingdom, and in establishing Himself as its rightful King. It is no wonder, then, that many in that day thought He was gathering a band of followers to establish a political kingdom on the earth at that time. Even his own disciples misunderstood his words regarding the Kingdom. We read in Matthew's account that James and John (see Mt.4:21) actually thought that they could be Jesus' cupbearers in his Kingdom (Mt.20:22) after they had been urged on by their mother.

The necessity for a governing spiritual presence within Kingdom subjects is quite evident in the text commonly referred to as the "Sermon on the Mount" since the precepts mandated by it are all contrary to what we find in fallen human nature. This "sermon" was actually the beginning and peak of a major campaign that offered the Kingdom age to Israel with Jesus as its King. However, unlike a political campaign in the United States, Jesus was already elected — not of men — but of his Father since Jesus was already anointed of God for that office (Ac.10:38). He was not asking for their vote or approval. The term "kingdom" denotes an absolute monarchy wherein the King has absolute authority. It could not be ruled by any natural man, for God alone has the wisdom, knowledge, and unfailing integrity to rule such a kingdom. Furthermore, the "Kingdom of

Heaven" is also not a democracy that could be ruled by its subjects collectively since absolute authority would only corrupt them further.

Therefore, Israel was not faced with a choice of who was to be their King, but only whether or not they would accept the conditions mandated by Jesus' autocratic rule. The choice given to the Jew was acceptance or rejection of the Kingdom platform. The Jews at that time were unable to receive Jesus' proclamation as the law of the land because they lacked the necessary internal spiritual restraint that it required (Matthew, Chapters 5,6,7). Because of their spiritual poverty, Jesus illustrated to his disciples the spiritual aspects of the Kingdom that was not of this age through many parables (Jn.18:36). The Kingdom was not only evident in Jesus' teaching but was also evidenced in the miracles that He performed that were for the express purpose of demonstrating his inviolable authority to rule over it. Jesus stated that his ability to cast out demons was evidence that the "Kingdom of God is come upon you" (Lu.11:20). That is, God Himself was already ruling in their midst within the man, Jesus, who stood before them.

The Kingdom submerged in Grace

The strict adherence to the laws that govern Heaven are not being enforced upon the earth at this time thus allowing Christian believers to be placed fully under God's grace, and not under his divine Law that had already condemned them. The believers' response to God's will in this age is voluntary, not mandatory. Certainly, our hearts should be so overtaken by the love that God has shed upon us through the sacrifice of Christ that we readily respond to the urging of the Holy Spirit within us! Nevertheless, we clearly see that we are not yet governed in the same way that Heaven, itself, is governed. As long as we remain in the flesh, we cannot live up to that strict legal standard.

The Gospel of Matthew is the pivotal text regarding the offer of the "Kingdom of Heaven" to Israel. In the early chapters, Jesus is observed offering the Kingdom to the religious nation. By the time we reach Chapter 13 however, the religious community had already rejected the Kingdom outright. Consequently, in Chapter 13, Jesus

began speaking of the Kingdom in parables whose true meanings are clouded. He began using metaphors to describe a mysterious kingdom as scattered seed, like wheat in which leaven (evil) was hidden, like a net that dredged up both good and evil, and like a hidden treasure. The picture is of kingdom subjects growing like wheat scattered amidst thorns, as good surrounded by evil, as truth surrounded by falsehoods, like a deeply hidden treasure buried below the outward surface. It is a picture of a kingdom that has its strict laws temporarily inactivated, its subjects scattered, and its King not physically present on its throne.

That is the condition of the Kingdom in the age in which we presently live. We see that while the "Kingdom of Heaven" certainly exists today in the heavenly realms, it has not yet been established on earth. Its spiritual elements are present here in principle, but it is not yet physically assembled. The violent rejection of the Kingdom of Heaven by the Jews that brought about the temporary suspension of strict heavenly laws, established a period of grace wherein Kingdom subjects may be sown and grown in the midst of a world teeming with sin and evil. Because strict Kingdom law is not yet put into operation on earth in this age of grace, the Gentile as well as the Jew can presently be redeemed and saved from judgment on the very same terms — not through the obedience of law, but by the acceptance of King Jesus as both their Lord and their Savior.

While the Jews expected a political kingdom to be established upon the earth when their Messiah came, we can now see that the "Kingdom of Heaven" was not intended to become a political kingdom on earth in that age. Its spiritual components presently remain submerged within a worldly culture. Therefore, the significance of that Kingdom today cannot be found in any political organizational existence (that is, in its worldly temporal churches or synagogues), nor in church rules, ordinances, and laws, but by the internal spiritual rule of its subjects. God's rule in this age is within the hearts and minds of God's people as they respond to the indwelling Holy Spirit, not through external laws and forces residing in the physical world. It is presently a spiritual dominion that God exercises in individual subjects that comprise a larger spiritual kingdom on earth.

The Church within the Kingdom of God

We saw previously how the two phrases "Kingdom of God" and "Kingdom of Heaven" go "hand-in-glove" together with the Kingdom of Heaven being the outward workings of the Kingdom of God. However, the word "kingdom" also applies to those who willingly subject themselves to God's sovereign rule. The more common word that is used to describe this particular people is "saints." That term was used in the Old Testament days to refer to the pious believers of Israel who adhered to God's covenant under law (2Chr.6:41; Ps.16:3).

Today, the word "saint" also applies to those who hold fast to the new covenant of grace (Ac.9:13). Peter further refers to Christian saints, as "a royal priesthood, an holy nation which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" (1Pe.2:9,10). Therefore, though we walk on earth, we actually have our citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven that does not yet exist on earth in any political sense. The subjects of the "Kingdom of Heaven" in this age of grace are the "called out assembly" (*ekklesia* in the Greek) "belonging to God" (*kuriakos* in the Greek) that is referred to in the New Testament texts as the Church (1Co.1:2).

Its Invisible Spiritual Attribute

In order to have any hope of understanding our many contemporary churches today, we must first come to an understanding of the Church as a spiritual entity, which is assembled solely by the Holy Spirit and is untouched by man's corrupting influence. While the direction and activities of our temporal churches are often affected by the ploys of Satan and the infiltration of the world, the true spiritual Church cannot be touched. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt.16:18). Her doors are always open to those who love the Lord, and the individual's social standing, personal circumstances, wealth, or geographic location does not restrict her membership in any way. She is never torn by division or strife. She transcends all human error of doctrine and method. It is of Her that was created by "water and the

Word" and purchased with the precious blood of Jesus that we wish to consider more specifically as we continue this study.

The Jews were God's chosen people of the old covenant. They beheld the glory of God in the Temple; they were informed of God's moral requirements for men in the Decalogue; they were exposed to the grace of God through their sacrificial laws; they were guided and often chastened by God's hand upon them. God's purpose in choosing the Jews was to provide a nation within whose religious framework the Messiah could be manifested. A savior would come from that unique assembly: a savior through whom not only the Jews but also people of all nations could be reconciled to God.

Now that the awaited Messiah, the Christ, has come, God has also chosen a new people that once were not his people (Ro.9:25,26; 1Pe.2:10; Jn.10:16). That speaks of the vast Gentile populations of the world. That new assembly is actually made up of both Jew and Gentile though the Jew in large part has rejected their Messiah. Those are the people that believe that "Christ Jesus is the Son of God" and depend entirely upon Him for the redemption of their souls. This is not just a simple verbal confession, for in believing this we must also profess within our hearts the full truth of the Gospel, and submit to God — fully trusting Him for everything that we cannot do for ourselves.

Jesus said that He would build his Church upon "this rock" (Mt.16:18). Many have erroneously considered Peter to have been the "rock" to which Jesus referred, and the Church to be a political organization of this world under the headship of Peter. However, the "rock" is only fully ***revealed*** in the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Son of the living God; further, we see that Peter received that knowledge by revelation directly from the Father (Mt.16:17). Some others have erroneously thought that the "rock" merely referred to the verbal "confession of Peter," and that the Church was built upon an oral repetition of this confession by other believers over time.

It is however important to see that the "rock" supports the entire foundation of apostolic truth written in the Bible of which the source is Jesus Christ, Himself. Peter's confession only served to reveal that fact as the Holy Spirit had opened his mind to the Truth. The foundation of the Christian faith is the ***teaching*** of all the apostles

as well as the earlier old covenant prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone that anchors it all (Ep.2:20; 1Pe.2:6–8). It is important to understand that this firm foundation is not built upon a man or men, not upon Peter or even all of the apostles together. That foundation is built upon the Truth of God that was revealed to all the apostles and is now found written down in Scripture.

Jesus is the cornerstone of the Church that unites and anchors its whole structure into one faith (Mt.21:42). That Church, to which Jesus referred, is a ***spiritual*** assembly of the elect who as "living stones" make up the walls of a "building" to the Father both to reveal his glory and to provide a living Temple in which He may dwell. Peter himself said that we "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house…" (1Pe.2:5). Since spiritual regeneration and belief in Christ is the means by which those "stones" will be placed in this "house," it is rightly said that Jesus is the living cornerstone of that true Temple that unites the entire foundation of revealed Truth (Ep.2:20;1Pe.2:4). In the words of the hymnist:

> **"The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; She is His new creation by water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought Her and for her life He died."**
> (The Church's One Foundation, Samuel J. Stone).

No longer is the Temple that which was made by the hands of man as in the Old Testament type, but it is a supernatural spiritual construction — built by God in Heaven (cf. He.9:11). We see that we become a part of this Temple, this house of God, by faith that is received by the revelation of Jesus Christ to our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. We truly become God's household both as individual members and collectively as the Church. Therefore, we must understand that the true Church is not a temporal worldly organization brought about by man, with its wood, stone or steel buildings, a system of rules and membership roles, but it is completely spiritual in its construction, and it is manifested on earth only in the hearts of men (cf. Jn.4:21,23).

Its Universal Attribute

The invisible Church is also universal in character. By saying that the Church is universal, it is meant to say that its members are not all of one race, nationality, or color. For, we plainly see in the Scriptures how that first many Jews were called and then the Gentiles were brought in, and that no distinction was made because of race, nationality, or color of skin. Nor, is it made up of only the socially acceptable or men of power and wealth. It is universally open to all who come to the knowledge and acceptance of the Truth. When God calls us, it does not matter whether our earthly circumstances have made us rich or have made us a street bum. We are all equally lost in sin and in need of redemption. Therefore, what God has chosen to call clean is clean indeed (Ac.10:15)! Moreover, we find that we are universally joined to all the saints whose bodies rest in their graves awaiting the resurrection as well as the many men and women that God may call into his Church in the future.

Its Singular Attribute

The Church is also universal in the sense that it is singular. That is to say, that there is only ***one*** Church, for there is only ***one*** Christ! We plainly see that we have no difficulty in saying that there is but one Church, because the Church of which we speak is not political. This Church is not organized by men, but by the Holy Spirit of Christ. Jesus personally knows those that are the members of his true Church; they are those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life that resides with the Father in Heaven (Ph.4:3;Re.3:5).

The hymnist again expressed those thoughts of the singular nature of the Church in verses of the same well-known hymn:

> **"Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth, her charter of salvation One Lord, one faith, one birth; One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food, and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued"** (The Church's One Foundation, Samuel J. Stone).

We have seen before that entry into this one and only universal Church is by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit through which

we are born again to a new spiritual life. For, by the inward joining of the Spirit of Christ with our spirit, we become one with Him. Indeed, we are so immersed in the Holy Spirit that we are inseparable from Jesus and fully identified with Him before the Father as well. Need we go on to say that those who are so identified with Christ are automatically members of his Church whether or not they are on the role of a national or local congregation? Of course not, the conclusion is obvious. We are immediately made members of a spiritual fellowship — an assembly made up of individuals that Christ Himself has called out that is his very body, the Church. "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ep.5:30).

Its Visible Attribute

While the spiritual and physical are distinct from each other in the same sense that the body and the spirit of man are distinct, it is impossible to totally separate the two here on earth. That will become more apparent when we begin studying the temporal church in the next two chapters. Notwithstanding that unity, we cannot disregard the failure of our many contemporary churches to live up to their spiritual counterpart. Even as we must carefully examine our own personal lives, we must also examine our corporate religious life to be sure that we are worshiping and engaging in fellowship in a manner consistent with God's will for his Church.

Having said that, it is also apparent that no amount of effort on our part can make an institutionalized local church or denomination that is founded and operated by men conform fully to the ideal. The ideal Church is an unreachable perfection that we constantly strive to achieve politically knowing that we cannot fully attain the culmination. We must understand that we shall always fall short because of our human frailty, our remaining natural bent toward sin, and Satan working through the forces of the world about us. That is why it is so important to be able to cling to the true Church not merely as a standard for temporal churches, but as a substantive, enduring, and present spiritual entity that God has founded for us that we may reside within the glory of its "walls." The visible Church is a pure supernatural structure of which we are each and all members if we

have truly accepted Christ into our hearts totally apart from earthly denominational or local church affiliation.

Chapter 11.2 Reconciling Israel with the Church

What one believes regarding Israel's relationship with the Church is highly dependent upon how one interprets the past and the present with relation to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. For that reason, it is well that we take a little time here to consider the two contemporarily accepted systematic methods by which the Bible may be interpreted. In doing so, we immediately find that a basic conflict develops regarding whether Israel should also be called the Church under the old covenant. Furthermore, we must determine if the Church of the new covenant era actually replaced Israel in the mind of God such that Israel is now forever excluded from God's grace.

Systematic Interpretation Methods

Over the years, various scholars have sought to classify Scripture into certain formal intervals of time based upon how God dealt with man during those periods. One group of scholars is known as Covenantalists and another as Dispensationalists. That has resulted in two major and vastly different systems of overall Bible interpretation that are in common use today.

The Dispensational Interpretation

Dispensationalism, as a system of Bible interpretation is relatively new dating back only to the early nineteenth century. For that reason, many distrust its observations as being opposed to the reformed views developed during the Reformation Era. Covenantalists would argue that Dispensationalists have used an external set of rigid benchmarks based upon conjecture and then forcibly applied them to Scripture. As we shall soon see, however, the beginning of many of those dispensations also coincide with the establishment of a Covenant or include them within the dispensation thus often rendering the basic differences in the two approaches somewhat academic for that same period.

The Dispensationalists however have very strictly divided Scripture into different segments of time (listed below) based upon how God interacted with man during that period. A dispensation can

be defined as "the ordering of events under the divine authority of God within a certain period of time." Within each dispensation, God reveals a specific aspect of his will and spells out man's required obedience to that revelation. A dispensation is only viewed as being effective for a limited period.

As each dispensation ends, the revelation of previous dispensations is not seen as being cast away, but it accumulates as a body of revealed truth within the conscience of man. For instance, though the Christian is no longer under Law (Ga.5:18), the moral imperative revealed in the prior dispensation of Law remains intact. In each dispensation, man's failure to fully comply with the requirements of God's revelation is certain because of his fallen nature. Therefore, man's obedience within a dispensation is not seen as a precondition to salvation, which is based solely upon God's grace through faith in the atoning death of Christ in every age beginning with Adam.[17]

The Dispensationalists generally agree on seven Dispensations that are as follows:

- **Innocence** Ge.1:28 — Adam and Eve in a sinless Eden where man had no knowledge of evil.
- **Individual Conscience** Ge.3:7 — The time after Adam's fall — each man ruled only by his own conscience — the time before the Noachian flood.
- **Human Government** Ge.8:15 — Mankind placed under subordinate human rule to establish order and protect human life in the time after the Noachian flood.
- **Promise** Ge.12:1 — The time of God's calling out of Abraham to form a unique nation out of his chosen descendants based upon the express promise of God
- **Law** Ex.19:1 — The forming of Israel into a national theocracy under the direct law of God through the giving of the Ten Commandments, social regulations, and ceremonial laws.

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[17] For more information regarding this view, see page 3 of *The New Scofield Reference Bible* ,C.I. Scofield,D.D., Oxford University Press, Inc. 1967.

- **Church** Ac.2:1 — The age of God's free grace wherein any who accept by faith the atoning work of Christ for his sin can be reconciled to God and declared righteous before Him.
- **Kingdom** Re.20:4 — The time of the future Kingdom Age on Earth with Jesus Christ Himself reigning on the throne of David as was predicted in the Palestinian Covenant (De.30:3; 2Sa.7:16).

The Covenantal Interpretation

Covenantalists view Scripture as a singular period of time progressing forward through certain specific covenants that God made with men as is found stated directly in Scripture (listed below). A covenant is an agreement or promise made by God. A new covenant does not displace an older one, but merely enhances and builds upon earlier ones. Therefore, all of the covenants entered into by God with mankind from Adam onward still apply to Christians today. We must note that some covenants that God made were conditional upon man's adherence to the terms of the covenant, while others were not. Those unconditional covenants can be referred to as Promissory Covenants. Even in the case of the conditional covenants, there were always certain elements of the covenant that are based upon God's specific promise so that God's purposes are never thwarted by the failures of mankind.

The Covenantal analysis of Scripture is based solely upon the direct proclamations of God in formal covenants. The nine generally accepted covenants by this group are as follows — with a brief comparison to the dispensational interpretation:

- **Covenant of Redemption** — covenant internal to the Godhead regarding the redemption of mankind — only implied by the dispensational approach.
- **Edenic Covenant** Ge.2:16 — corresponding to the dispensation of Innocence
- **Adamic Covenant** Ge.3:15 — corresponding to the dispensation of Individual Conscience
- **Noachian Covenant** Ge.9:16 — corresponding to the dispensation of Human Government

- **Abrahamic Covenant** Ge.12:12 — corresponding to the dispensation of Promise
- **Mosaic Covenant** Ex.19:5 — corresponding to the dispensation of Law
- **Palestinian Covenant** De.30:3 — falling within the dispensation of Law and predictive of the Kingdom Age
- **Davidic Covenant** 2Sa.7:16 — again falling within the dispensation of Law. Predictive of Jesus ruling on the throne of David in the future Kingdom Age.
- **New Covenant** He.8:8 — corresponding to the dispensation of Church

One can see that in the Dispensational approach the Covenant of Redemption is not stated, since the covenant was not made directly with man, though it is most generally implied. In the Covenantal approach, no Kingdom Age on earth is addressed. That omission establishes the basic difference and conflict between the Dispensational and the Covenantal positions regarding the doctrine of the Church to be discussed here as well as Eschatology (doctrines of the last days) that will be discussed in Book III of this work.

The Distinction between Israel and the Church

What about using the word "church" for the old as well as the new covenant body of believers? That is often a cause of disagreement between Covenantalists and Dispensationalists. From the Greek, we find that the word for "church" and "congregation" or "assembly" is actually derived from the same word. That word is *ekklesia*, but the word "church" actually comes from another Greek word *kuriakos* from which came the transliterated word, "kurk," or "church." Those two Greek words when put together mean "a called out assembly belonging to God." Therefore, the believing congregation or assembly that was within the nation of Israel can easily be identified directly with the new covenant assembly or "church."

It can be simply stated that the Covenantalists see Israel of the old covenant as the old covenant Church that flowed through into the new covenant Church — making no great distinction between the two as a people. Conversely, the Dispensationalist sees the two as distinct

and separate bodies of believers to which God administered differently. That is the major conflict between the two interpretations of Scripture. Let us see if we can somehow reconcile the two positions or, at least, better define them.

First, we read in Scripture that Jesus died to redeem two peoples expressed metaphorically as a treasure hidden in a field, and a pearl of great price. Together those two groups of people make up the redeemed in this age.

Redemption of the Jewish Remnant

The treasure hidden in the field represents the believing remnant of Israel, which was the first to enter into the provisional Kingdom by making up the initial population of the new covenant Church. Jesus had hid away and preserved that remnant and died taking upon Himself the sins of his people, giving all that He had, to purchase that treasure (Mt.13:44). From that we must conclude that the ***believing*** Jew has not been discarded — only those who remain in unbelief. In the words of Paul, "God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Ro.11:2). Paul continued, "Even so then at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Ro.11:5).

Even in ***this*** day, "there is [still] a remnant according to the election of grace." We should be greatly encouraged and warmed in our hearts when we encounter a Hebrew Christian, realizing how natural and right it is that a "son of David" should accept the greater Son of David who is their own King and the long awaited Messiah. Such acceptance is natural, perhaps, but certainly not common as most Jews continue in their blindness. It is for that believing remnant in the past, living now, and in the time yet to come, that Jesus died, not those that rejected and continue to reject Him.

Redemption of the Gentile Multitude

The "pearl of great price," which represents the great Gentile population of the new covenant Church, are the multitude taken from among the non-Jews for which Jesus also paid the full price of redemption (Mt.13:45,46 cf. Re.7:9). While the treasure was hidden in

a field, we perceive that a pearl is recovered from the vast "sea" of humanity beyond that field. Pearls were not much valued by the Jew, but were greatly valued by the Gentile. In like manner, the Jew today commonly rejects Christianity as being of no value. Though certainly not as flashy as a gemstone, the pearl represents a purity that has been brought about through suffering.

A pearl is formed in an oyster as a consequence of a speck of sand or pebble that makes its way into the oyster's shell. The distress that the pebble causes the oyster drives it to coat the source of its suffering with a secretion that eventually hardens into a pearl which is a thing of great beauty. While we may rightly wail over the intense suffering of the Jew in their state of unbelief, the Church has also seen its share of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. In many parts of the world, it still suffers greatly. Often, evil men from within its own ranks have inflicted the most terrible suffering just as the Jewish leaders inflicted the believing remnant in Israel. The parallel between the pearl and the suffering of the Gentile church is quite apparent, but we must understand that it is truly **Christ's** suffering, ***not*** the believer's, that has brought the Church forth.

It is through the rejection of the Truth by Israel as a nation that grace has been extended to the Gentile as well. As Paul observed, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Ro.11:25). A large number of the Jews were blinded in order that Gentiles might receive the light that they had rejected. Gentile Christians are, then, ***indebted*** to the Jew not only for the safekeeping of the Old Testament Scriptures, but even for the Jews' stumbling that opened the door to allow them entrance (Ro.11:11)! We must understand that both the true Church and the true Israel are each uniquely precious to God and that neither will be tossed out. Jesus did not give his precious life to possess temporal things such as earthly gems or pearls, but things of immense eternal value, the redemption of the souls of men of which both the believing Jew and the Gentile are beneficiaries.

It can be clearly seen that Israel ***as a nation*** is not the same as the ***physical*** institutionalized church of today. The fact that Israel has been restored as a political nation since 1948 does not equate it with

any church denomination, nor does it equate that nation with the body of believers in general. Israel today is basically the result of an ethnic Zionist movement rather than a return of believing Jews to truly worship God in a land of promise. Modern Israel is a democracy rather than it being a restoration of the theocratic nation of old. That distinction is rather obvious, and most Covenantalists as well as Dispensationalists could generally agree with that distinction.

However, we must realize that both the Church and Israel have a spiritual as well as a physical component. Just as all members of today's churches are not true members of the body of Christ, so it was that not all citizens of Israel were true members of the body of believers. When the Covenantalists speak of Israel being the old covenant church, they can only say that those who trusted God in the old covenant were in the same position as those who trust him in the new covenant today. That is, those saved under the old covenant, such as Abraham, Moses, Aaron, David and many others were saved by grace through faith just as those under the new covenant today.

Israel as a Type of the New Covenant Church

We therefore can consider the nation of Israel under the Old Covenant as a "type" or representation of the New Covenant Church to come. Peter referred to the new covenant Church as a "holy nation" in his writings, a term which reinforces this concept of Israel as a type. There is a believing elect in the temporal church today just as there was a believing elect within the nation of Israel. However, Israel had national boundaries whereas the temporal church has no specific national boundaries. Israel was of ethnic origin being composed of Hebrews whereas the church has no ethnic distinction. Israel had a priestly tribe, the Levites, whereas the visible Church within the temporal church is composed of a "royal priesthood" consisting of all its true believers. (Compare the text of Ex.19:6 with 1Pe.2:9).

The Old Covenant Remnant

At the time that Jesus offered the Kingdom of Heaven to Israel, it was rejected by Israel ***as a nation***. However, the believing remnant that had always been present in that nation ***did*** accept Jesus as their

King and Messiah. Scripture clearly verifies that fact. That remnant can be referred to as the "true Israel," which can also be seen as the old covenant church or assembly. This distinction is very important, since it is ***only that remnant*** that made up the new covenant church in the beginning with few or no non-Jews (Gentiles). The ***nation*** of Israel did ***not*** become the new covenant church; only the believing remnant made the transition as they accepted Jesus as their Messiah.

The New Covenant

It is plain to see that the Bible is divided into the Old and New Testaments both by the way the modern Bible is constructed and because of the four-hundred years of heavenly silence that separate the two texts historically. Furthermore, the Old Testament text was largely written in Hebrew while the New Testament text was written in Greek. The glaring point of separation is, of course, the advent of Jesus Christ on earth, which opens the New Testament. Jesus Christ is also its major subject from beginning to end.

The Old Covenant culminating in the blood of Christ is the ***completed*** foundation upon which the new rests. Nevertheless, Christianity is ***not*** reformed Judaism; it is based on an entirely ***new covenant*** requiring a completely new order or dispensation. As Jesus said, one does not attempt to patch up a very old garment lest the old worn cloth renders the garment useless due to its weakness and the patch falls away to no avail. Christianity is not a patch sewed onto old Judaism. Likewise, one does not put new wine in old wineskins lest when the new wine is mature it burst the old skins thus destroying that which is new and mutilating the purpose of that which was old (cf. Mt.9:16,17; Mk.2:21,22; Lu.5:36,37).

Therefore, we find that the New Testament covenant is unique when compared with the series of Old Testament covenants. Whereas continuity existed between the covenants of the Old Testament as each amplified the previous covenant from Abel on, we find a drastic disruption in that continuity with respect to the new and final covenant now that the promised Messiah had finally come to establish it in his own blood (cf. He.11:4; 12:24). As the author of Hebrews said, this new covenant is a “better covenant” based upon “better promises”

(He.8:6). “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (He.8:13). Notice that he does not say that the old should be built upon, altered, or improved, in someway, but that it will “vanish away.” His words were fulfilled in A.D. 70 as any practice of the ceremonial law by the Jews came to an abrupt end.

One would wonder then why Gentile believers in the church would attempt to continue in those things with which the Hebrew believers were admonished to be forever done away. Nevertheless, human nature is such that old ways steeped in long-standing tradition are hard to put away when their purpose is ended (cf. Lu.5:39). We often find Christians today mistakenly trying to live in the old “wineskins” of Judaism while wearing the patched up rags of ritual tradition that is associated with it. That is particularly true regarding various ritual practices of Judaism that the church altered somewhat and then retained over the centuries in an attempt to spice up the profound simplicity of the Christian faith (Jn.3:16).

The Church Made over into a Gentile Institution

As time passed, more and more Gentiles came into the new covenant church such that the church today has only a very small number of "true Israel" believers within its congregation. Over time, they became indistinguishable from each other inasmuch as a Hebrew Christian is a Christian in every sense leaving behind all Jewish traditions in order to embrace Christ. Eventually, the church re-defined itself as a strictly Gentile construct, particularly as it became more formalized in the Roman church era. Most of the people of the nation of Israel that rejected Christ continued in a modified form of Judaism that denied their own Messiah, and that we see today is quite distinct from Christianity. It is even distinct from old covenant Judaism since there is no more sacrificial system and no Temple in Jerusalem in which to conduct the services. [18]

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[18] When the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, Judaism having lost the means to observe the ceremonial law transitioned into a Pharisaic model of the synagogue, that was prevalent during the Babylonian captivity, and eventually over time into the

Therefore, the church today is considered a Gentile institution, and a sharper distinction is made between Israel and the church. The Dispensationalist is primarily looking at this physical component of Israel while the Covenantalists largely look at the spiritual component. Not surprisingly, neither is too anxious to look at the Church today as having both a physical and spiritual component, but that is a fact that cannot be dismissed.

Transfer of Spiritual Blessings

The Dispensationalist sees the need for God to yet fulfill his promises to Israel ***as a nation*** and the Covenantalists see God as already fulfilling those promises made to the believing remnant today in the temporal church. It is clear that God still fulfills his promises to his own people, which are now in the new covenant Church — both Gentile and Jew. Those are by and large the same promises that He had promised earlier to his people of the old covenant assembly. All ***spiritual*** blessings were transferred along with and through the believing remnant of Israel into the new covenant church. Where we must make an important distinction is in those specific promises that God made to Israel as a ***political and theocratic nation***. The believers in the new covenant church cannot appropriate those promises today since they are an entirely different physical entity having no national boundaries.

Errors of Hyper-Covenantalism

While Covenantalism is most certainly a valid means of interpreting old testament Scripture and of defining the new covenant Church, it can be carried to extremes much as can everything else that man can spin and twist about. We shall now discuss several of those extremes.

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rabbinical Judaism of the Talmud that we find today.

Anti-Semitism

Many Christians have an irrational prejudice against the Jew.[19] In the time of Hitler's Germany, many Roman Catholic Germans easily rationalized the persecution and even systematic extermination of the Jew because they viewed them as inferior rejects of the human race. They saw them as the murderer of Jesus Christ and therefore deserving of punishment and elimination. As we have seen in this work, this whole notion of the Jew's sole responsibility in this regard is based upon a misunderstanding of the facts and significance of the crucifixion of Christ. No true Christian can be an anti-Semite lest he deny the grace of God for himself as well.

We also see that this view is in conflict with the Apostle Paul's observation and hope expressed in Romans Chapters 9 through 11. Paul said that God had not cast his people away (Ro.11:1). Paul went on to say, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Ro.11:5). Few Christians would deny that individual Jews could come to Christ for salvation; it is a wonder, then, that they think it impossible for a whole nation of Jews to embrace their king and savior in a future age that God has ordained to be established for that express purpose.

Claim on Promises made to Israel as a Nation

The Covenantalists' system of interpretation in its failure to address the issue of a Kingdom Age, effectively denies the existence of a future physical kingdom age on earth altogether by that omission. The repercussion of that position is the assumption that God has forever discarded the nation of Israel in favor of the institutionalized church because of the Jews having rejected Jesus as their savior and king. Therefore, ***all*** of the promises that were made to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament can now be seen as promises that have been inherited by the church because of Israel's failure.

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[19] This prejudice is more prevalent among Covenantalists, but is also present among certain Hyper-dispensationalists as well, as is discussed later in this chapter.

Carrying that thinking to the extreme, it means that even the land that Israel occupied under the old covenant now belongs by divine title to the institutionalized church as well. This extreme interpretation in part led to the Crusades at which time many Christians were killed in a faulty attempt to wrest the land from the domination of Islam in the early second millennium A.D.[20]

Carryover of Old Covenant Ceremonial Practices

The carryover of old covenant ritual practices that were part of the ceremonial law contributed heavily to the establishment of the priesthood in the Roman church as a continuation of the Levitical priesthood. As we have discussed before, Jesus fulfilled the sole purpose of the ceremonial law (inasmuch as it had pointed to him as the ultimate sacrifice for man's sins) such that any continuing practice of the ceremonial portion of the Law of Moses necessarily ended when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Nonetheless, even reformed Protestants today still see the temporal church existing as a hierarchy of bishops and priests in much the same way as did the old Roman church thus attempting to perpetuate the Mosaic Law that was completely fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ. That we should not be continuing in the past shadows of the ceremonial Law is conveyed exhaustively by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Almost all Covenantalists believe in the baptism of infants as a matter of covenant promise replacing Jewish circumcision in the old covenant church. Covenantalists practice affusion (sprinkling or pouring) replacing yet symbolizing the blood rite of circumcision. Still other Covenantalists practice baptism by the emersion of adults only, yet still claim a covenantal relationship that requires ritual baptism in order to receive salvation thus embracing the age-old error of baptismal regeneration. Just as omission of the rite of circumcision cut off that person from the nation of Israel, the omission of the rite of

[20] The Crusades are discussed in historical context in Chapter 17.10 of Book III of this work.

baptism is seen as cutting off that person from the fellowship of the temporal church.[21]

Error of Hyper-Dispensationalism

Extremes of the dispensational approach result in what we refer to as Hyper-dispensationalism. Dispensationalists do not ordinarily emphasize the extremely strict division of the dispensations such that they affect the overall flow of Scripture or affect man's responsibility to adhere to all of God's dictates. The Hyper-dispensationalists however divide Scripture into extremely sharp dispensations that have little or no relationship one to the other thus destroying the overall covenant of grace found flowing throughout Scripture. It is almost as if the God of one dispensation was not the same God that administers in the next.

Those that segregate Scripture into very strict dispensations see God as constantly changing how He dispenses his will to man from one time to the next such that God appears to be erratic in dealing with his creation. That breaks up the continuity of the Bible and creates a false concept of God being changeable, unreliable, unpredictable, and even a respecter of persons in one age over another. That, of course, flies directly in the face of an abundance of Scripture that says that God never changes in his essential being and purposes, nor is He a respecter of persons (Ac.10:34; see Chapter 2.1 of Book I).

Hyper-dispensationalists therefore see the difference in administration, arrangement, and order between the way God dealt with man in the Old Testament and the New Testament as if a wall existed between the two. That "wall" has the effect of severing the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in such a way that salvation under the old dispensation (the Jewish dispensation) was arrived at through the Law of Moses, and salvation under the new dispensation (Christian dispensation) is arrived at through Christ.

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[21] Misunderstandings and abuse surrounding the tradition of ritual baptism are discussed fully in later sections and chapters of this book. See especially: Sacramentalism, page 204, and Chapter 15.1 Baptism, page 394

Therefore, Hyper-dispensationalists would say that anything stated in the Old Testament applied only to the Jews in their day, and only that which is stated in the New Testament applies to Christians today. The text of the Old Testament can be effectively ignored in that case. Even the Decalogue is seen as being given directly and only to Israel thus rendering it ineffective for today's Christian — or perhaps replaced with the Sermon on the Mount.[22] That view only leads to antinomianism (moral lawlessness), not adherence to grace.

In regard to their general view of national Israel's lack of ultimate redemption, the position of the Hyper-dispensationalist is much like the anti-Semitism of the Hyper-Covenantalists. Hyper-dispensationalists would see God as forsaking the Jews and Israel forever, ***discarding all*** of his Old Testament promises to Israel, and establishing entirely ***new*** blessings for the new covenant church. Strangely, others of the Hyper-dispensationalists choose to make much of the Old Testament promises that were made to Israel and allegorize them to apply to the church of this age rather than discarding them. Again, this interpretation relates them similarly to the Hyper-Covenantalists as ***material*** blessings promised to Israel are misconstrued into blessings for the temporal church. That approach allegorizes text of the Old Testament Scripture instead of accepting a literal reading as Dispensationalists almost universally insist upon doing. The Old Testament is read and studied, but a pseudo-spiritual application of the text is made to the temporal church in this age.

The Church Erroneously Viewed as a Parenthetical Construct

We clearly see that God did ***not*** go from plan A to plan B when Israel as a nation rejected their messiah as king. God knew exactly what Israel would do. Israel's presence in a future Kingdom age is based upon a Promissory Covenant with Israel as a nation and as

[22] As we discovered in Chapter 9.1, the Sermon on the Mount is but a very strict reiteration of the Decalogue by Jesus Himself to the Jews, not some new set of rules of conduct for Christian living.

such is not subject to cancellation by Israel's rejection of their Messiah (Christ). Nor was the new covenant church an afterthought in the mind of God. Both Israel and the predominantly Gentile assembly are both part and parcel of the same plan of redemption of mankind from the beginning to the end.

The Church is often referred to by many Dispensationalists as a "parenthetical construct" that was kept hidden from man in the Old Testament times to be revealed in this age of grace (cf. Mk.4:11; Ro.11:25; 16:25; 1Co.2:7–8; Ep.3:4,6; 3:9).[23] By "parenthetical construct," however, it is implied that the Church Age is a period of time that has been hastily inserted between the rejection of the Kingdom of Heaven by the Jews at Christ's first advent and the eventual establishment of that Kingdom on earth at Christ's second advent. That view seems to belittle the significance of the new covenant church as only being an afterthought on God's part that was forced upon Him by Israel's rejection. Such, of course, is not possible.

The believing remnant of Israel and believers within the new covenant Church are all a part of God's continuing plan for the redemption of his people. Therefore, we find that no parenthesis exists. The main difference in dispensation is actually that the old covenant believers lived before the cross, while the new covenant believers live after the cross. Old covenant believers looked forward to Christ's day, often without clear understanding, while we as Christians look back on a finished work with fuller knowledge of those events from the writings of New Testament Scripture. The hope and basis for redemption of both Jew and Gentile were and are the same.

The Jew's Stumbling, the Gentiles' Opportunity

In the days of the Apostle Paul, only a remnant of Israel was saved because they accepted Jesus, and the others were cast aside. However, Paul asks, "I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall [stumble] salvation is

[23] Even John Calvin stated that "the Church is in the Old concealed and in the New revealed."

come to the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Ro.11:11). Why would the Jew be jealous of the Gentile? Primarily because Christians enjoy the blessings of the long-awaited Messiah that the Jews cannot embrace: Israel is blind for our sakes! Though the Jew may be in a state of bitter envy, that same envy may also draw some of them to accept Christ. "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness" (Ro.11:12)? Rather, as did Paul, we should see that "if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead" (Ro.11:15)?

Grace Available Today for Gentile and Jew Alike

All, both believing Jew and Gentile, are saved by God's grace. "Even so, have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all" (Ro.11:31,32). In as much, then, as even the godless Gentiles have received mercy, because of the Jews unbelief, God can have mercy on both Jew and Gentile. Salvation for the Jew in this age of grace is to be found in Jesus ***their*** Messiah who fulfilled the purpose of the Old Testament ceremonies thus opening the door to the New Covenant of grace. By grace, God can now reconcile all to Himself. It is not merely the Gentile that falls under the covenant of grace, but the Jew as well.

Just as when a godless Gentile accepts Christ as their savior and they become a new creature in Christ Jesus such that they put their past behind them (2Co.5:17), so it is that when a rebellious Jew accepts Christ as his Messiah and savior he also becomes a new creature of the same order. The "middle wall of partition" no longer separates the Jew and Gentile inasmuch as they are made one in Christ Jesus (Ep.2:14). The term "Christian Jew" is an oxymoron inasmuch as it is impossible to continue in the traditions of rabbinical pharisaic Judaism, which denies Christ, and still profess to be a Christian without holding up Christ to scorn (He.6:4–6). A truly converted Jew cannot continue to worship in the Synagogue on Saturday and worship Jesus Christ on Sunday lest he crucify Him afresh each time.

Importance of Attaining Unity in Truth

We find that it is not possible to study Scripture for long without seeing one over-riding covenant of God's grace from beginning to end. That should always be remembered whatever system of Bible interpretation one may choose to follow. While covenants are internal benchmarks to be found in the biblical text to be sure, it is far from clear that God who established those covenants — many given exclusively and directly to Israel as a nation rather than the world at large — did so as a means of dividing up or benchmarking Scripture for a future systematic interpretation of the entire Bible by a largely Gentile church.

While just the acceptance of the finished work of Christ by the individual believer is sufficient for his salvation, accurate interpretation of Scripture is very important in enabling us to see God's overall plan for his people. Inaccurate interpretation adversely affects church doctrine, our fellowship with other believers, and the way in which we worship and serve God. It has also impeded further Protestant reform, that had begun so well with the early reformers out of the pagan errors of Roman Catholicism. It unnecessarily divides Christendom into denominations and factions based upon various interpretations and practices. It affects how we interact with other believers and the world of the unsaved to the extent that the simple Gospel message is often obstructed.

Jesus in his high priestly prayer desired that all his followers would be fully united in the one true faith, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn.17:21). The Roman church arrogantly attempted to accomplish that goal in the past by the use of temporal force, which only brought the unconverted masses into the church. We must always struggle for unity in the Truth not in mere temporal organizational unity in which our hearts and minds remain divided. To that exalted end, we must first seek to accurately interpret the Bible, which is God's express Word to us, without prejudicial sectarian bias.

Chapter 11.3 The Temporal Church

As we disclosed in Chapter 11.1, the Church in its pure form is not an earthly political institution. It is a living organism assembled and ordered by God through the Holy Spirit and is made up of those He has chosen, not those that men have gathered together through their own efforts. Thus, there is but one universal Church. Nevertheless, we find in Scripture that the Apostle Paul referred to local gatherings of believers as *ekklesia* or "churches" in the many epistles he sent to them (Ro.16:4; 1Co.7:17 etc.). We could properly determine that he was only referring to those who had accepted Christ apart from any manner of human organization. Indeed, he was.

However, the first letter to Timothy, and the letter to Titus are filled with instructions regarding the organization of a local assembly of believers, the qualification of officers, and instruction as to the duties of both members and officers. Indeed, to ignore the visible attribute of the invisible supernatural Church would be to ignore a large portion of the New Testament. That organization and oversight was necessary to maintain order in meetings, and to prevent the confusion of doctrine and anarchy that so disastrously characterized the young Corinthian church.

The Formation of Visible Churches

How and why, then, did the first visible Churches come into existence? Going back to the Jerusalem church we see that it was made up entirely of Jews. Those Jews had already shared a religious, social, and national relationship in the state of Israel. However, because of their belief in Jesus as the risen Messiah, they soon found themselves separated from their fellow countrymen and from the synagogues. In response, they banded together and began meeting in various homes thus forming the very first visible Church on earth.

The Apostle Paul most often did not speak to individuals on his missionary journeys (though he did do so at times of course), but to groups of individuals — often in a public forum such as a Jewish synagogue or Gentile auditorium. That is to say, those that came to

believe the Gospel were most often not isolated geographically from others that also had heard and believed. We observe in Scripture that the Spirit of God went before Paul so that a great many Gentiles believed in those early days.

In pagan Gentile cities, those that came to believe in the Gospel of Christ realized that they had become uniquely different from others of their society. That immediately excluded them from engaging in various pagan ceremonies and traditions in which they had participated before their conversions (Ep.2:3). Many of their old friends and even family members had abandoned them, and conversely, many of their old relationships had to be discontinued through their own initiative because of their new relationship with Christ. At the same time, they recognized that a spiritual bond had already been established between themselves and other believers in their common faith. Inasmuch as they had all become one within Christ, they were also united in thought and purpose with each other as well. New friendships and relationships developed among those new believers.

While we remain in the flesh, our spirit is not separable from our bodies. The spiritual and the physical are merged together into one soul. In like manner, it was normal, and indeed proper, that those early Christians meet together to share their common spiritual bond in Christ. Transformed by the Holy Spirit, those men and women naturally desired to have fellowship with other believers. They at all times shared spiritual fellowship by the common bond of the Spirit of Christ even when they were apart; but, to put it simply, they also wished to associate and converse with each other face to face. All of that is a quite normal and a reasonable outgrowth of common faith.

There is little question that this is how visible Churches began — it was spontaneous and inevitable, but we must keep in mind that this does not change the nature of the true Church. The magnitude of the celestial body is far higher than that of the terrestrial body (cf. 1Co.15:40). Moreover, those early believers were not making any effort to establish a political institution or an organization of men, but were merely acknowledging a common bond that already existed between them as the children of God within the body of Christ.

Therefore, in the early visible Church, Christ was truly the head of the body, and the visible Church grew in size as the Holy Spirit continued to move forth in the world.

Distinction between the Visible and Temporal Church

The subordinate visible attribute of the true Church can be properly referred to as the "visible Church," inasmuch as members of the true invisible Church are real flesh-and-blood people that live in this age (many others now being asleep in Christ, and still others yet to be born). In this work, however, we have most often used the term "temporal church" when it applies to political church organizations, whether we mean an independent local assembly, or a large denomination composed of local assemblies.[24] The term "temporal church" is a more appropriate term to use than "visible Church" when describing our earth-bound and time-bound institutions that contain large numbers of persons who are not members of the invisible Church.

That distinction is important inasmuch as the visible Church is exclusively a group of elect people that have been born again and in whom the Holy Spirit lives and directs. While many members of the visible Church attend and even become members of various temporal churches, they most often do not make up the majority and in some churches they are even in the extreme minority. Therefore, the worldly infiltration by the pseudo-believer into the physical church on earth makes that distinction imperative.

One of the common criticisms of making this distinction between the visible Church and temporal churches is a general concern that those who see themselves only as members of the visible Church may make themselves invisible (i.e. absent) on the Lord's Day in local temporal church congregations. Or, that such a distinction will even foster such separatist thoughts as was so often expressed in Reformation times, "Jesus — yes, the church — no!" We must admit

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[24] At other times we have only used the word "church" beginning it with a lower-case "c" when referring to the temporal church.

that it is impossible to find fault with the true believers of the visible Church who made the break with the corrupted Roman Catholic Church of that day. Thank God that they did, or there would have been no Protestant Reformation.

Yet, while there even may be times today when we must break away from temporal denominations and local congregations over doctrinal and even severe procedural error, it should soon become apparent that we must not advocate that believers deliberately seek to separate themselves from fellowship with any of those institutions at all. Quite the contrary, it is largely because members of the visible Church are so often absent (or silent) in our many local church congregations that neglect of sound doctrine and attending error has gained such a strong foothold in temporal churches over time. The elect are to be salt and light not only as a witness to the world at large, but also to preserve and inspire the Truth within temporal churches as well.

Functions of the Temporal Church

Most certainly, the physical gathering of the elect who make up the visible Church offers many benefits and advantages for its elect members as it attempts to embrace the purity of the universal invisible Church. The closer that goal is realized, the greater the benefits. Unfortunately, such purity is severely corroded by our persistent fallen nature and the infiltration of worldliness such that we find that the visible Church must work within and through various temporal institutional churches. The mandate of the elect is to guide the temporal church such that it emulates as closely as possible the goals and purpose of the visible Church that in turn reflects the purity of the invisible Church. In that regard, we find that we must set certain limits and standards for the temporal church both as to goals and as to its functions.

Storehouse of the Truth

The temporal church should be a storehouse of Truth to be held inviolate and apart from human opinion. The church should provide a scholarly forum for ascertaining, revalidating, and

maintaining Scriptural Truth without error and without compromise. In doing so, it must also apply Truth to the society in which it is planted and in keeping with that goal, Truth must be kept properly synchronized with the period of time that the church occupies.

The temporal church must not only seek to hold to Truth as a corporate institution, it must provide for sound doctrinal instruction to aid new believers that enter into its midst to attain maturity in the faith. Beginning with the simple milk of the Truth in the Gospel for the young and the novice, it must be willing to explore the extreme depths of God's Word to satisfy the mature believer's continual thirst for greater knowledge of Him — all the more so as the day approaches when they will meet Christ face-to-face.

By applying Truth to day-to-day living, the church should provide a means to assure accountability to Christ among its members that they may be aided in living a godly life in accord with biblical principles. When a wayward brother or sister is found to have fallen into sin, every effort must be made to restore that one whole to the fold through loving rebuke along with the assurance that Christ has forgiven all our sins, past, present, and future. Only if the member continually refuses to repent should he or she be cast out as reprobate in order to maintain the purity of the church.

Provide a Unified Witness to the World

The integrity of the church must be such that it provides its own witness to the glory of God through its own unique position and through its actions. The church must continually strive to maintain its purity in the midst of a sin tainted world. To that end, the church must ensure that its methods as well as its doctrines are morally sound and in keeping with the high calling of the invisible Church that it attempts to emulate. Let no man be able to say that the church is hypocritical in professing Jesus Christ while emulating the world through various pastimes that do not honor Him. We must not allow a church to become a religious country club.

Even as the local church must be integral in the Truth, it must reach out to the lost peoples of the world in keeping with the great commission (Mt.28:19,20) that Christ has placed upon us all. Every

member must realize that they are a personal evangelist of the Gospel to all those in their locality as occasion provides the opportunity to bear witness of it both in word and deed. To that end, they must learn to engage a lost world without compromising their own integrity in doing so (cf. Jude 23). Because it is not possible for one believer to reach everyone in the world, it is important that the church provide for corporate outreach beyond its immediate jurisdiction by sending forth emissaries of the Gospel into remote regions of the world at large.

Provide for Christian Fellowship

The church primarily must maintain fellowship with God through corporate worship as it assembles itself together as the visible body of Christ. Though we have many opportunities to worship God individually, corporate worship expresses our unity with the Godhead and with others of the faith. A church that does not worship God as the Supreme Being only worships itself, and its prayers become nothing but wishful thinking.

The church must provide mutual encouragement in times of trials and adversity such that no member could believe that they must suffer in isolation. The church must provide an opportunity for offering up collective prayer for the infirm among us not only for their encouragement, but also to unleash the power of God in their behalf. Having done so, the church must realize that they are quite often the hands and feet that God may choose to utilize in providing an answer to that prayer.

In addition, prayers should be continually offered up for the sound leadership of church officers that they may not fall into a snare set by the evil one, but instead exercise their authority justly and in accordance with the will of God. We likewise must offer up prayers for our civil magistrates, and leaders of the country in which the church resides that they rule justly and provide the aura of peace in which the church can thrive. In response, the church must strive to maintain purity and peace among God's people throughout the world so much as that is possible.

Lastly, the church is the ideal place to properly administer various Christian rites: specifically, baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism should be recognized as a means of personal witness of our rebirth and identity in Christ, not merely as an initiation rite into a local church or denomination. The Lord's Supper demonstrates our unity within or own congregation and in our sharing the body and blood of Christ in common fellowship with all believers throughout the world. In addition to baptism and the Lord's Supper, the local church should also provide for Christian witness of other great events in our lives such as marriage, the birth and dedication of children, and our final witness of faith when we depart from this life into life eternal.

Foundational Declarations of Faith

All institutionalized churches must have some form of foundational statement in order to maintain reasonable doctrinal consistency and unity in thought among its members. That foundational statement may merely be the Gospel, as it was in the early first-century churches, a simple formal written basis or document of faith such as the *Apostles Creed*, or it may be a quite elaborate creed that defines the core and limits of the faith in greater detail. In Book III, we shall have the opportunity to examine various creeds from the simple to the elaborate within their historical settings.

While it may be argued that the Bible constitutes such a document of faith in itself, the church basis or creed goes to the heart of how the Bible is to be ***interpreted***. Even the elect frequently disagree on detailed interpretations, and the unbeliever in the temporal church would make interpretation over into license. That variation in Bible interpretation from creed to creed forms the basis for various denominational distinctions that are prevalent throughout Christendom.

Not surprisingly, the severe dogmatism that is found in many of the more elaborate creeds contributes to institutional Churchianity. When ancient creeds are rigidly adhered to without critical periodic reexamination, stagnation of Scriptural reform is the inevitable consequence. Soon the creed begins to replace Scriptural authority in much the same way as the institutional church has a strong propensity to replace Christ, who working through the Holy Spirit builds and governs his church from on high. Sound interpretations, though often

useful, must never be allowed to replace God's written Word in the Holy Bible nor the convictions of the Holy Spirit working through the enlightened conscience of the devout believer.

Church Governments

In addition to creedal statements that define how the Bible is to be interpreted, some form of constitution is required to define the human political organization of a temporal church or denomination. Those political structures are commonly extrapolated from accepted foundational documents of faith. Without some form of organizational structure or government, which includes various offices, churches could not even be identified as tangible entities. That is true even if we speak of the many local churches that do not openly acknowledge any formal organization or structure,[25] since even those churches usually have one man who presides at regular meetings and sets goals and agendas. Still others may take up other unofficial positions to satisfy certain needs of the church.

The most common forms of recognizable church governments are Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational. We usually relate the first two directly with a denomination of a similar name that defines the form.[26] However, what we are interested in here is how churches govern themselves through those forms, not with the doctrinal beliefs of particular Christian denominations or groups.

Episcopal Form

The Episcopal form is a rigid hierarchy (like a triangle) with a high bishop (or in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, a Pope) at its apex. It is ruled through a descending succession of bishops. A concept of an apostolic succession of bishops is envisioned as having originated from New Testament times. The power to ordinate and appoint ministers lies within the relevant level of bishops. Episcopal

[25] Those include but are not limited to various independent, community, and various Apostolic churches.

[26] Baptist churches are most often related to the Congregational form.

governments also have the office of deacon and some further have the spuriously added office of priest (to be discussed below). Local congregations are at the base of such a structure, and usually have little say regarding the appointment of the bishops who exercise authority over them. As can be seen, one man in a high position can either ensure the purity of the church or, over even a short time, completely destroy it. The human nature of man, fallen as it is, almost ensures the eventual corruption of the government as well as the doctrine of the church.

Presbyterian Form

The Presbyterian form consists of local congregations that are governed by elders (presbyters) who are elected by the congregation. Deacons are also chosen by the local congregation to see to more temporal matters of the local church. Unlike the Episcopal form of government, laity may also be elected as elders in local churches. Rather than a downward succession of bishops as in the Episcopal form, the church hierarchy is formed as an ascending succession of church bodies or courts. Pastors and elected representatives of several local congregations form a presbytery. The presbytery alone has the authority to ordain ministers in local churches in an attempt to maintain doctrinal purity. Presbyteries in turn belong to regional assemblies called synods, which are under a general assembly (general synod) that is the ruling body for the entire denomination.

Though initially formed upward from local congregations, after such a hierarchy develops the flow of command regarding policy and doctrinal matters again begins to come from the top down just as with the Episcopal form. However, the purity of doctrine and practice in this type of government rests with the character of a larger number of individuals. While church officers are elected within local churches, in reality their election may only consist of an acknowledgment by the congregation of a decision that has already been made earlier by a board or individual. This form is generally considered a blending of the Episcopal and congregational forms, and is essentially a representative form of government.

Congregational Form

The third major form, the congregational form, in its purest sense means that the local church is ruled completely by all of the individuals of the congregation itself. This form arises out of the Puritan movement in England. The Puritans formed their own local congregations, which were separate of the Church of England. They believed that all church authority is in Christ who acts through individual members who are in turn governed by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Each local congregational church reserves the right to ordinate its own ministers and govern their own affairs. Each congregation has the authority to hire (call) their own minister, and in theory, they vote on all matters as a body of individual believers. They vigorously reject any attempt by larger church bodies or secular government to dictate to them in any way.

In practice, boards are usually elected to perform certain official functions in the local church while the ordained minister exercises considerable persuasive authority. Many independent community churches have adopted this form. Congregational churches of similar doctrinal persuasion often do form larger bodies in which they hold membership. Such groups are organized primarily to make unified public statements, and to gain an umbrella of protection in the secular world for their local autonomy. However, such groups also tend to set policy and establish doctrinal standards to which all of its member churches are expected to adhere.

While it is generally true that oppression by a single person or group of persons, such as could occur in an Episcopal or Presbyterian hierarchy, can not develop officially, it is still possible for a single man to gain considerable influence over others in a congregational church. Often, groups of men and/or women gain control in an unofficial way in local churches unimpeded by firm oversight. That de facto or "clique" dictatorship is often far worse than that of an individual since a power struggle often simultaneously takes place within the clique for its leadership as well as a struggle between cliques for control.

We should also be aware that there could be much variation within the three types of governments that we have discussed. Some

independent local churches may have various combinations of the three, so that it may be quite difficult to identify a single type of government in some churches. Certain forms may be narrowly applied only to specific functions or tasks. For instance, individual members of some congregational churches may have considerable say in the day to day running of the church, but no real say at all in matters of doctrine. Some churches may claim one form, while actually functioning, unofficially, under another.

We must agree that some kind of organization is necessary for a local church body to function in today's world. At the same time, we see that there is no perfect type of organization that can fully guarantee that abuse of power will not take place; Churchianity can be fostered in all three forms. Nor can the type of political government insure sound doctrine and meaningful service to Christ. It requires a diligent effort on the part of spiritually awakened congregations to disclose and root out falsehood and hypocrisy at all levels of authority, in that of their leaders, their peers, and in their own personal worship and service as well. In the Congregational form, the congregation has that full responsibility, while in the Presbyterian form they have much less through the election of their representatives to various courts and offices. In the Episcopal form, the individual church member has no recourse at all save to vote with his feet as in Reformation times.

Church Offices

Through various gifts that Christ bestowed upon individual men in abundance following his ascension, He also gifted the visible Church through the function of their individual ministries.

> **"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. … And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ…"** (Ep.4:8–12).

On the day of Pentecost, we first see an assembly of those in whom the Holy Spirit indwelled. It was also on this date that we see God pouring out special gifts upon men who themselves would in turn

become living gifts to the visible Church. This began with the apostles (Mt.18:20) who were presented to the church in order to establish sound foundational doctrine. We must also consider evangelists who spread the Gospel abroad and those pastors and teachers who truly care for and instruct other men as being special gifts that Christ has presented to the visible Church. Nevertheless, to satisfy the form of political government that a church adopts, various church titles or offices are established that need to be filled. A common failing that we find in churches today is a lack of understanding of the purpose of various church offices and the high calling required of those who would fill them. First, let us discuss the offices themselves, leaving a discussion of the high qualifications to later.

Ministers

At the outset, let us briefly consider the word "minister." In context, the word "minister" originally meant "servant" or one who ministers to another. The "minister," subjects himself freely to serve his master. Aaron was a minister to God through his office as priest (Ex.28:4). We also find in Scripture that Joshua was a personal minister or assistant to Moses (Ex.24:13). In First Thessalonians 3:2, Timothy is called a brother and "minister of God" by the Apostle Paul. In Ephesians 6:21, Tychicus (messenger to Paul from the church at Ephesus) is referred to as a "beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord."

However, even civil authorities can be referred to as "ministers of God" when they seek to enforce God's moral law through civil laws and a civil office (Ro.13:4). Therefore, "minister" is a general term that could be applied to anyone who freely serves God or others in any capacity. We see that a Christian minister, in fact, could hold any office in the temporal church or none at all, as long as he is a devoted servant of Christ. This is, indeed, such a general term that it says nothing of the specific role of the minister; for that reason, we must resort to titles that are more exact.

The Ad Hock Office of Evangelist

Paul, the Apostle, was an evangelist of the first order. In addition, Philip, a deacon, also was an evangelist (Ac.21:8), and Paul exhorted Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2Ti.4:5). Evangelism refers to a natural function arising out of being a Christian. All believers (men and women alike) have received the same holy mandate for broadcasting the Gospel abroad as the opportunity arises from the very day they were born anew in Christ. That personal responsibility cannot be delegated to another person nor is it only limited to a select few. Therefore, an evangelist need not hold any particular church office in order to accomplish his work. In fact, he may not even be a member of any particular temporal church inasmuch as his work is commonly done in the fallow field outside the established boundaries of Christendom.

Having said that, there are those among us who have such a strong propensity for evangelism that we commonly refer to them with that loose title. Because of their extraordinary success, we often support their efforts with our prayers and with the necessary money to expand their field of endeavor. However, many of the unsaved that need to hear the Gospel are actually found lodging within the backwaters of the temporal church such that the church itself needs to be evangelized from within. The office of evangelist is therefore often considered an appended office of the temporal church — though there is no sound Scriptural basis for doing so.

Elders

While in today's society the tendency is to honor the energy of youth, the Hebrew honored the wisdom of age. The words of elder members of a family were held in high regard as having wisdom resulting from many years of experience. The word "elder," (Greek = *presbyteros*) as an office or position, was applied in Hebrew Scripture to the older men of a city or tribe who made all of the major decisions regarding the welfare of the community. In general, "elders" were men of experience, having a good reputation and personal dignity that were chosen to rule a town or community within the Hebrew nation. The

Sanhedrin, mentioned in the New Testament, was just such a ruling body that was made up of "elders." Since the Hebrew nation was created as a theocracy (a nation ruled directly by God in all matters), those elders were also the religious leaders of the nation.

When Christian assemblies began in Jerusalem, and the followers of Christ were excluded from partaking of any of the Hebrew commonwealth, a sub-community was established. It was natural that those believers, who were yet Jews, would follow tradition and establish their own leaders from their own members to instill order. We must remember that the apostles were with the first elders of the visible Church (Acts 15:2), and were, in fact, themselves the earliest elders of the visible Church (1 Peter 5:1). When the Church spread beyond the Hebrew boundaries, several elders were chosen as each new local assembly was established (Titus 1:5). The word "presbytery" (Gr. *presbuterion)* means council of elders (1 Tim 4:14).

Bishops

In some verses of Scripture, the more official title of "bishop" is used (Ph.1:1). The word "bishop" (Gr. *episkopos)* means "overseer." That was the principle office in the early visible Church, and it was filled by an elder who was found to be suitable for the office. The purpose of the bishop was to oversee the spiritual integrity of the visible Church. The first bishops were actually the apostles who initially established a sound doctrinal foundation for the visible Church to build upon. The bishops that followed them were to teach and defend that established doctrine as an absolute against any who would falsely come into their midst and attempt to corrupt it.

We see from Philippians 1:1 that there were several bishops in the church at Philippi and that they were mentioned in this verse along with deacons as a separate office. We cannot assume, then, that the office of bishop was a singular one, even within one particular local visible Church assembly. For the most part, the word "elder" and "bishop" were interchangeable: "elder" pertained to their age and wisdom, and the title "bishop" applied specifically to their "office" as one of a council of spiritual overseers.

Pastors

What of the title "pastor?" This word is found in one book of the Old Testament (Jeremiah), and it is found only once in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11) as a church position. The word "pastor" (Gr. *poimen)* means literally "shepherd," or one who tends and feeds a flock. Therefore, a pastor is one who "feeds" (i.e. teaches) and leads a "flock" (i.e. congregation) in spiritual matters. It is, in many ways synonymous with the words "bishop" and "minister" in the sense that a shepherd both oversees and serves the needs of his flock. Where the shepherd walks, the sheep follow. Therefore, the pastor is to be an elder who is capable of leading by personal example and is skillful in teaching Truth to others for their spiritual sustenance. His duty is to advise them and to protect them from doctrinal missteps and from the "wolf" of this world that is Satan in his many guises.

By logical progression, one can see that the pastor is, in effect, a "shepherd" of a portion of the greater flock in the fold that he tends. That, however, can become a dangerous analogy if carried too far. The danger exists in using the word "shepherd" because we must not at any time substitute in our thinking the quite human "pastor" for the "one great Shepherd" that is Jesus Christ. Sometimes the term "under-shepherd" is used for a pastor to imply that there is a "chief-shepherd" yet above him, which is Christ. Even that is dangerous because it implies that we must go through the under-shepherd to reach the High Shepherd. In effect, the under-shepherd becomes an intermediary between the flock and the true Shepherd.

That is why the pastor is often asked to pray for a member of the congregation by one who feels inadequate to launch his own prayer. We must not ever allow the word "pastor" to become synonymous with the word "priest" which this latter analogy implies. In doing so, we would ascribe to the human pastor those attributes and power that are exclusively those of our one intermediary and High Priest — Jesus Christ. It is, in fact, the pastor's primary purpose to point out that Christ is the ***one*** mediator that we all can come to in time of need, and that He alone is the way to the Father.

The Levitical priesthood was eliminated forever by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the altar of the cross. Therefore, we no longer have any need of a human intercessor, or priest, before God. In fact, to establish human priests would be to suggest that Jesus is not an adequate intercessor, or that He is unapproachable for all but a celibate few who in turn must act as intercessors for others. This is just not Scriptural. Jesus has opened the way to the throne of grace forever to all that believe in Him; we may always seek God's will directly through Him and through Him alone. The veil is rent (Mk.15:38)!

The office of priest has been erroneously perpetuated as a tradition by the Roman Catholic Church, and it continues on in some Protestant churches as well. It is obvious that this office has been carried-over from the Levitical priesthood that has been eliminated because its purpose has been fulfilled in Christ. This office also has its roots deep in the various pagan religions that rushed into the church during the fourth century.[27]

The word "priest" is never mentioned anywhere in Scripture as a church office. However, we do find that Peter refers to the entire body of believers as being a "holy priesthood" which offers "spiritual sacrifices" to God (1Pe.2:5). That is because ***every*** believer in Christ has the same access to God through Christ that was once reserved, under the Levitical priesthood, only for the office of priest. In fact, we now have even greater access because we have the Holy Spirit, living within us, who encourages us and aids us in coming to Him.

Deacons

Deacons were appointed quite early to take care of temporal necessities and the limited material holdings of the infant church body (Acts 6:3). Today, that includes seeing to the upkeep of physical church buildings and grounds as well as seeing to the physical welfare of the poor and needy in our congregations. The Greek word *diakonos* that is translated "deacon" is found thirty times in the New Testament. However, it is not always rendered "deacon," but is often translated

[27] This pagan inrush shall be discussed historically in Book III.

"servant" in an unofficial way. That would imply that deacons were often those who served in an unofficial capacity out of a sincere willingness to serve others. That deacons were not unique to the church at Jerusalem can be seen in Paul's letter to the Philippians (Ph.1:1). While seven deacons were appointed at Jerusalem, there appears to be no direct mandate for that number in Scripture.

Qualifications for Bishops and Elders

Qualifications set forth for bishops and elders, as written in Scripture, is found beginning at First Timothy 3:1 and Titus 1:6. Paul first states as a truth that, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." That is because he desires to serve God, not because he desires a position of honor or authority. It is the *labor* of the office that is good, not the title.

Ability to Rule over Others with Integrity

"For, a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;"(1Ti.3:2,3). That is, a bishop must be of excellent reputation so that no one can hold him to blame for any wrong doing, so that he may be an able servant of God and not "fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1Ti.3:7).

Nor should he be stubborn in his own ways; yet, he must hold diligently to the will of God (Tit.1:9). He must be patient and not one who quickly becomes angry (1Ti.3:3). He must not be addicted to alcohol; nor would the spirit of this statement allow any other physical addiction, for it would discredit and hamper his office (1Ti.3:3). He should not be one who strikes another in anger, or engages in brawls just for the fun of it. Nor should he be a practical joker (1Ti.3:3). He must not have a desire for money or wealth (1Ti.3:3). Rather, the bishop must be "a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate..." (Tit.1:8).

"He must be the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly" (1Ti.3:2; Tit.1:6). "One wife" likely referred to the fact that polygamy was a common practice among many in the pagan societies of that day. Moreover, serial polygamy

wherein a man engages in one divorce after another on unscriptural grounds should be cause for his rejection as well.[28] It demonstrates his inability to govern his own life in a pure and disciplined way and therefore excludes him from overseeing order and purity in the visible Church.

A gray area of interpretation comes about when a candidate has been divorced by an earlier wife for reasons that are clearly not of his own desire or failing. That should not be held against him, but since his innocence is often so difficult to prove openly, many churches automatically reject any man who has been previously divorced regardless of the circumstances.

"One wife" and "children" also strongly implies that the candidate ***must*** be married with children in his charge so as to have attained the demonstrated experience of ruling soundly within the sphere of his own household. In a society wherein children are treated like delicate flowers that must be nurtured but never chastened, the unruliness of youth runs rampant today such that it infiltrates every household to some extent. It is a rare man indeed who can control his own household through reasonable chastening that is administered in such a way that he retains the love and respect of his charges. Certainly, with the high divorce rates, and the rebellion of youth today against their parents, such a man is rather unique in those attributes alone! Yet, those are the requirements that Paul set forth for this office in the Greek world that was certainly as morally degenerate as our own world today.

Ability to Exhort and to Teach

Finally, the bishop must hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit.1:9). Paul was concerned particularly about the Jews in those days that sought to deceive the church, in order to line their own pockets. Surely, that activity should sound familiar! Today, many men use religion to gain material wealth! Paul goes on to

[28] Divorce is discussed in some detail in Chapter 16.1, page 482

say that their "mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Tit.1:11). Furthermore, the bishop should "rebuke them so that they may be sound in the faith." (Tit.1:13). The bishop, then, must keep his congregation secure in the Truth. "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience" (Tit.2:1,2).

Moreover, to do all of that, the bishop must not be a novice — not a beginner — in the Word (1Ti.3:6). Bishops, in particular, must have sound and extensive knowledge of the Bible and its principles and precepts. He must have been a Christian for many years so that he understands very well the many traps and pitfalls that line the path of faith. Not only must he be well grounded in the Truth, he must also be on guard against being lifted up with pride by the honor of the office that he holds, or by his own accomplishments, so that he does not "fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1Ti.3:6).

Certainly, the ability both to rule and to teach as set forth in Scripture is a tall order for any one man, yesterday or today. For that reason, some churches today divide the single office of elders into that of "ruling elders" and "teaching elders." Admittedly, some men excel more in one qualification than they do in the other. However, it must be clear that the requirements of men who hold either of the "sub-offices" must meet the comprehensive standards for an elder in both the ruling and the teaching qualifications.

Good sound spiritual leadership is imperative in any church. Such leadership by men who are inspired of God benefits the church as a whole. However, in this day of so much doctrinal error and secular infiltration, such men are very difficult to find. Strong leaders are often quite carnal-minded. Spiritual men are often reluctant to exercise authority over others — perhaps because they are aware of their own fallen nature so well. If they do take a firm stand, they are quickly censored or ousted by a worldly congregation. In this day, godly leaders are often misunderstood as being mean-spirited "kill-joys," or they are seen as just plain "intolerant" of the opinion of others when they make an effort to reinstate the absolutes of God's Word for the congregation's own benefit. Efforts to maintain the

integrity of the church are often seen by most church members as an effort to curtail the enjoyment and fun of church community.

How lightly offices are filled in many of our contemporary churches! Often, men who have questionable moral integrity rule over the church, and those who have no real Bible knowledge are chosen to teach others. Apostasy readily falls on that church that will not guard the Truth. The office of bishop or elder should not be considered as merely an honor bestowed upon a member in good standing, but rather a terrible responsibility taken on by a man who gives himself fully to be a servant of God regardless of any personal cost or loss.

Qualifications for Deacons

If we look at the qualifications that Paul set forth for deacons, we see that they do not vary significantly from the qualifications for a bishop.

> **"Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus"** (1Ti.3:8-13).

Deacons must, then, have proven ability in administration of secular matters, but not exclusively so to the omission of their spiritual qualifications. Certainly, we also see the necessity for the wives of deacons being sober-minded and not given over to gossip! Here we see the woman's character being considered in the man's qualifications for church office. By virtue of marriage, the wife shares in her husband's responsibility as his "help-meet" in all matters. The supportive role of a godly wife is extremely important. Without her support, he would be greatly hindered in performing the service of his office.

The qualifications given in Scripture do not state that deacons must be as well grounded in the Scriptures as bishops, nor is it stated that they must have the ability to teach. Deacons were at first chosen to oversee secular matters thus relieving the elders (apostles) of that responsibility so that they could study Scripture and teach others (Ac.6:2-4). It is true that teaching is not the deacon's primary purpose yet, we have but to look at the witness of Stephen (Ac.7:2-53) to realize that deacons are exemplary Christians both knowing the Word of God and having the ability to express it well when necessity calls for it in the regular performance of their duties.

Though the Scriptures expressly state the criteria for the selection of men to church leadership offices, too often, they are only considered an ideal that is far too strict to be adhered to when making contemporary church appointments. In other instances, they are ignored as being totally irrelevant for today's churches.

The Role of Women in Church government

The texts in First Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 excludes, by strong implication, any woman from holding an official title of bishop and the text of First Timothy 3:12 from holding the office of deacon. A woman "elder" is a contradiction in terms, since by implication an elder is a man. In fact, the Greek word *presbuteros* can be loosely translated as "bearded one." In 1Co.14:35, Paul prohibited women from making any prophetic utterances in the church. Moreover, Paul said that he did not see fit that women should ever be placed in a position to teach men or exercise authority over men in the church (1Ti.2:12).

Context is very important when interpreting both of these verses. The prohibition of prophetic utterance is closely related to the unrestrained glossolalia that was being practiced by some women in the young Corinthian church resulting in doctrinal confusion and wild disorder in worship. Likewise, the prohibition of women from holding positions of teaching or exercising authority over men was obviously put forth in the limited context of spiritual matters and the corporate worship of God. That prohibition specifically forbade them from holding the official office of elder or deacon within the church.

However, it is unreasonable to contend that this prohibition should be applied to women holding positions of authority in businesses, holding elected government office, or exercising authority over men in the secular legal courts as some erroneously state.

We do in fact find examples in Scripture of various women serving in the early new covenant church — though there is absolutely no evidence that they were ever given an official title. While it is not proper for women to hold an official church title, including that of deacon (or deaconess), where they would be in a position to exercise any authority in spiritual matters over men, it is not improper for a woman to serve God in her own unique capacity as a woman in the situation in which she finds herself. That service, in fact, should be greatly encouraged.

Women may not only serve in temporal matters, but may also bear witness to others concerning their faith as the opportunity warrants — especially so to other women and to children. Many of the women who serve in that way are also the wives of men who were appointed or elected as elders or deacons where their wives act in a supportive role to their leadership. This is reasonable and right; however, their service should never be allowed to overshadow or obscure the natural God-given relationship between God and men and between men and women lest it disrupt the integrity of both the family unit and the church (Ge.3:16;Ep.5:23-24).

The push today by many women to attain ordination to an official church position is based upon a false (perhaps hypocritical) premise that such an office is necessary in order for them to fully serve God. That is just not so; God has made each of us as He has for his own glory and purpose. Every believer must and can serve God by fulfilling the purpose and position in which God has placed him or her. In fact, it is often possible to accomplish much more for God out of office than when holding an official office because the burden of human responsibility is far less. Many women know this and are able servants of God and a great credit to their churches.

It is unfortunate that many other women do not understand this fact or they merely seek church offices in order to liberalize church doctrine to suit their own feminist inclination. Most women seeking

church offices have no regard for spiritual matters or for biblical authority. They do not seek the heavy responsibility of the office in order to serve God, but the authority to further a secular agenda under the banner of "women's rights." This is not a godly desire and only further disqualifies them as falling far short of the moral requirements set forth in Scripture for church offices. For those reasons, the ordination of women inevitably liberalizes church doctrine and only pushes the church further into the growing darkness of spiritual apostasy.

Respect of Office

Instead of merely picking men who have demonstrated talents of leadership in the secular community to fill church offices, we should be sure that they are first and foremost men of great spiritual integrity, having knowledge of the Scriptures from which they also hold to sound doctrine. Men that held the office of bishop or deacon in the early church were not to be chosen lightly. Rather, they were to be men of excellent reputation — not only regarding secular matters, but in spiritual matters as well. Those men were chosen to be willing servants. Inasmuch as ministers cannot be forced to serve against their will and remain faithful, those men first aspired to hold the office. It was, then, necessary that those men be chosen carefully, for men desiring personal wealth or power must not ever be allowed to hold those offices. A man holding high personal ambition could not well be a servant of God since all personal ambition must be completely sacrificed to the preeminent authority of Christ.

That bishops and deacons are to receive a double portion of honor as is befitting servants of God is correct and right. When we honor God's servant, we honor God. We must first consider that those officials are our "brothers" in Christ Jesus, but we must also understand that their ***responsibility*** before God is greater than is ours. We should therefore stand with them shoulder-to-shoulder as brothers both in the times of their success and in the times of their troubles. Otherwise, by abusing God's servant we trespass against God.

However, we must not ever consider them to be elevated above other men so that we believe they can not error or do not have

human faults and failings even as we do. The temptation of men and women is to consider ordained church officials more highly than they should. We should not consider them with awe or consider them as nobility. For that reason, we should not consider the word "reverend" appropriate in the title of church ministers as is quite common in today's society. This word means, "to instill terror as a consequence of supreme majesty." This word should be carefully reserved only for God; it is to Him alone that we must bow in reverence. Therefore, elders or deacons deserve our respect, our assistance, and our prayers, and so much as they honor God our obedience, but never our reverence. To God alone be the glory.

Section 12, Spiritual Gifts to the Church

Gift of the Holy Spirit

Keeping Gifts in Proper Perspective

Maintaining Order in the Assembly

Chapter 12.1 The Gift of the Holy Spirit

"Pentecost" means "the fiftieth day" in the Greek. That was a Hebrew festival referred to variously as the Feast of Weeks (Ex.34:22; De.16:9–11), the Feast of Harvest (Ex.23:16), and the Day of First Fruits (Nu.28:26). Pentecost fell on the fiftieth day after Passover, but there is some question about the exact method of its computation at the time of Christ. There is an obvious correlation between the first fruits of the grain harvest, and the "first fruits" of believers brought forth by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension.

Coming of the Holy Spirit

The events leading up to and including the Day of Pentecost that followed Christ's ascension is found recorded by Luke in Acts Chapters 1 and 2. Before Jesus' ascension He,

> **"Being assembled together with them [the apostles; cf. Ac.1:2], commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence"** (Ac.1:4,5; cf. Mt.3:11).

Therefore, the apostles were told that in a very few days, they were to receive the "baptism of the Holy Ghost." That is, they were to receive the gift that was the Holy Spirit, Himself. They were to be immersed and permeated (i.e. baptized) with the Holy Spirit, who would remain within them as a permanent gift of God (He.13:5; cf. Jn.14:16–20).

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Next, we shall analyze an amazing event that has caused so much confusion and controversy over the years. If we begin with a presumption that a gift of tongues was given only as a sign that the Holy Spirit had been received, or as an evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence to others, we would completely miss the significance of this passage. Therefore, let us see if we can look afresh at those verses in

the context in which they are given and with some help from the Greek text. The text we must look at most closely is found packed into three verses in Acts Chapter 2.

> **"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance"** (Ac.2:2–4).

The Mighty Rushing Wind

The first sentence (verse 2) says that a sound came from heaven. This sound came to them "as of" a rushing mighty wind. Therefore, it was not a mighty rushing wind, but was similar in sound. It was this supernatural ***sound*** that filled the house where the apostles were sitting, not a tornado or some other natural phenomena. The word *aphno* translated "suddenly" implies not only the fact that the sound appeared suddenly, but that it was completely unexpected by the apostles. The sound would have been such as to startle them.

The Confusion of Voices

"Sound" comes from the Greek word *echos*, which means a loud, confused noise. There is a suggestion in that word of an echoing murmur or roar. We may well ask ourselves what it was that the apostles actually heard if not merely the sound of a wind blowing. In context, we know that "spoken languages" or "tongues" is the subject that follows those verses. We may then reasonably assume that the roar that they heard could have been the confused moaning of many voices.

There is an interesting parallel to this event on the day of Pentecost and another historical event that took place much earlier that ended in a "roar of voices or language." We, of course, are referring to the dispersion of all the people of the earth at the time of the building of the tower on the plain of Shinar (Ge.11:1–9). At that time, the people were dispersed by a confusion of tongues to prevent them from

uniting their efforts against God. After Christ's ascension however, the division of tongues became an obstacle to the universal preaching of the Gospel. Many Jews had been dispersed among many nations, and they no longer shared a common dialect with other Jews. Later, that language barrier would need to be broken down still further in order to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

This "sound", as interpreted from the Greek text, was brought to them as if it were "borne" upon a mighty wind from heaven (see *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Alfred Marshall,). Therefore, what the apostles heard was not a natural sound that could be readily explained, but was a sound that they heard supernaturally. This sound was "breathed" as if by a great wind into them so that they could comprehend it. As we have read, the Holy Spirit moves from one place to another like the wind, invisibly and with power (Jn.3:8).

It is difficult to know whether the supernatural sound was heard by other than the apostles, though this sound was said to fill the entire house in which they were sitting (Ac.2:2). We are not actually told whether other than the apostles were in the house and heard the sound or not. It is highly unlikely that all 120 disciples were crowded into one house, and certainly not into one room.

It was not the sound of a mighty rushing wind that attracted the multitude, as is believed by some. Only afterward, when the word spread that those Galileans were prophesying in many languages about the man who had been crucified did a crowd gather. Word had spread that this man not only claimed to be the Messiah, but also was said to have risen from the dead. Only then did the crowds gather, since each man wanted to hear what the apostles had to say about that directly for themselves (Ac.2:6).

The Vision

It is as we begin to examine the next sentence (Ac.2:3) that we realize that the apostles not only ***heard***, but ***saw*** this event as well. Therefore, this event should rightly be considered a vision that was accompanied by sound. Peter as much as said so when he later referred to the prophet Joel's prediction that "…your young men shall see visions…" (Ac.2:17). To call this event a vision does not do violence

in any way to the text, because a vision is a real occurrence, not a dream. Visions are events supernaturally disclosed by God, during which the recipient is fully awake and conscious with his eyes, ears, and mind fully functional.

In verse three, the word "appeared" is used. We may merely think that this meant that since they were sitting there with their eyes open to their surroundings they merely observed what happened. However, the Greek word *optanomai* means that they were gazing with wide-open eyes at something quite remarkable. Their eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit to see with clarity and understanding the vision that was unveiled before them.

The Cloven Tongues

Having heard the voices of many tongues that had been borne to them, the apostles actually saw the source of the sound. There appeared to them "cloven tongues." The Greek for "cloven" is *diamerizo*, which means partitioned, thoroughly divided, or distributed. What they heard is what they also saw. They heard the partitioning of languages that was the cause of the confusion of voices. They saw those that were separated by language resulting in a confusion of sound and thought, and that the confusion was a hindrance to the spread of the Gospel they had been commissioned to preach.

Moreover, those languages were "like as of fire." It was obviously not literal fire in their house, but very much like a fire. A "fire" of judgment had resulted in the division of the multitude into various tongues on the plain of Shinar, but now the diversity of languages must grow back into a single blaze, as the barriers must be broken down by the Holy Spirit acting through the apostles. Here we view the "great commission" placed in its universal emphasis. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk.16:15). Even as the apostles realized the obstacle to that mission caused by language, a specific tongue (i.e. a language) came to rest upon each of them, and they were moved to compassion for the people of that language to know the Good News. Christ had

died for all, and the Gospel of Christ burned within them desiring to be released.

Who Received the Gift of Tongues?

Beginning with Acts Chapter 2, verse 1, we read that "they" were all with one accord in one place. We must first determine who "they" were. Many have interpreted "they" to mean all of the disciples, which numbered one hundred twenty (Ac.1:15). However, the pronoun "they" as properly used in English refers to the last noun previously used. If we merely look at the previous verse (Ac.1:26), we notice that "they" are the "apostles." (Remembering that chapter divisions are not in the original Greek text). We cannot stretch that to mean all of the one hundred twenty disciples without doing violence to the text.

It is not reasonable to assume that Matthias was excluded from this gift since from the day of his selection onward Matthias was numbered with the other apostles (Ac.1:26) bringing the total back to twelve.[29] It is further obvious that on Pentecost, exactly twelve apostles were required — one representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel to witness to foreign Jews who had arrived for the feast. Verse 1 of Acts Chapter 2 states "all" clearly meaning the original eleven and Matthias.

We noted earlier that in Acts Chapter 1 verses 2–5 that only the apostles were promised the baptism of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Luke was not referring to other than the apostles in those verses as is seen by the use of the word "apostles" in verse 2 and the

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[29] There are those who have concluded that Matthias was chosen impulsively by the other apostles to replace Judas Iscariot and that the Apostle Paul actually received God's true appointment. However, the Apostle Paul was not present with the other apostles on the Day of Pentecost, but was later appointed by the Lord Jesus along the Damascus road. His mission was to be an apostle to the ***Gentiles*** not Jews and therefore was never numbered among the twelve at all. Though Paul did consult with the other apostles on rare occasions, he did not commonly associate with them. As Paul said, he was "as of one born out of due time"(1Co.15:8).

pronoun "them" in verses 3 and 4. Nevertheless, we do see that all of the disciples were gathered together in nominating Justus and Matthias and when Matthias was chosen by lot (Ac.1:15–26). However, a time is seen as having passed in verse 1 of Chapter 2 by the phrase, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come…" There is most certainly no indication that Matthias was chosen on the day of Pentecost, but was chosen at a larger meeting of the disciples several days before. Looking ahead, we observe in Acts Chapter 2 verse 14 that only "the eleven" were "standing" (presumably to speak), and that Peter stood up with them. That is a total of twelve, and twelve only.

Immersion in the Holy Spirit

"And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost…" (Ac.2:4). We must realize that, though the vision they saw was opened to them by the Holy Spirit, they were not actually filled with the Holy Spirit through the vision itself. Men of the Old Testament, the prophets in particular, often saw visions that God had granted them. The Holy Spirit would move and motivate them, but it was never stated that the Holy Spirit actually dwelled ***within*** them for any length of time. The Holy Spirit would come and go to and from them as He saw fit. On the day of Pentecost, however, the Holy Spirit, for the first time, actually took up permanent residence within those who accepted the finished work of Jesus Christ for their salvation.

Immediately after the vision, the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the apostles to ready them for the service God required, which was evangelism of a magnitude not seen since. The apostles had been told by Jesus before his ascension not to depart from Jerusalem with an evangelistic effort in their own strength, but to wait for an enabling by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ac.1:4,8). The infant new covenant Church in the very beginning needed this supernatural vitality to get it firmly rooted in the twelve apostles and then to disperse the Gospel abroad as rapidly as possible. As history attests, the Good News truly spread like wild fire from Jerusalem to Samaria, and then later throughout the entire Roman world (Ac.1:8).

Thus, on the day of Pentecost, we find that the apostles were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in three different senses

supernaturally. First, they were enabled to preach the Gospel in a plain and clear way by speaking Truth inspired by the Holy Spirit. Such is the meaning of the Greek word for "utterance." *Apophtheggomai* means to enunciate plainly, or to speak forth (Ac.2:4). We can plainly see that Peter, who was often impulsive and not known for his well thought out oratory, clearly stated the Gospel to all those who were within the sound of his voice (Ac.2:22–36). Secondly, the apostles were enabled to speak in other tongues (i.e. languages) as the Holy Spirit enabled them to convey the Truth regarding Jesus Christ. Lastly, we see that the apostles spoke openly and with boldness having total disregard for their own personal safety.

The Purpose of the Gift of Tongues

Now that we have a better understanding of what happened to the apostles in the house on Pentecost, we are about to examine the express purpose for the gift of tongues and the manner in which it was used, though we have already alluded to that. In Acts, verse 5 of Chapter 2, the people who were represented by the "cloven tongues" are seen not in a vision, but in flesh and blood. "And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven." Here we see those who would be the specific targets of the many tongues that the apostles had received.

When the Jews of foreign tongues heard that the apostles could speak in their own native dialects, they all came together as a multitude to hear them, "…and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language" [30] (Ac.2:6). The apostles not only spoke in their native tongues, but also were as fluent as the natives themselves! The foreign Jews were astonished because the uneducated Galileans could speak in their native tongue with such perfection (Ac.2:7,8). When those same Jews returned home the "flame" of the Gospel, which had been spoken in their own tongue, was carried with them to Phrygia, Pamphylia, Lybia, Rome, Crete, and

[30] "Language" here is translated from the Greek word "dialektos" meaning "dialect."

Arabia (Ac.2:9–11). We also observe that it was by that means that Christianity first arrived in Rome (Ac.2:10).[31]

Tongues as a Witness to Foreign Jews

The foreign Jews wondered at the meaning of all this since they were hearing of the "wonderful works of God" in their own native tongues. "And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this" (Ac.2:12)? The foreign Jews were the Jews of the Diaspora who did not live in the Roman province of Israel. Jews had been taken to Babylon when Israel was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C. and then dispersed throughout various nations. In those nations, new generations had been reared speaking various languages other than the common Hebrew language of Israel. Many of the more devout of them annually visited Jerusalem for the Passover and the Day of Pentecost as on this occasion.

Tongues a Rejected Sign to Unbelieving Jews

The supernatural gift of languages and dialects most certainly added emphasis and drew attention to the Gospel message. However, some of the local Jews accused the apostles of drinking too much wine (Ac.2:13). From that we cannot determine nor could we believe that the apostles were acting in a drunken manner. Those that could not understand them merely mocked them saying that their unusual and confident speech in many foreign tongues was brought on by too much wine. We also cannot assume that the apostles were falling down, throwing up their hands, were in a trance-like state, or were babbling with an uncontrolled tongue like a drunken man. That would defy all reason. On the contrary, we must assume, from what we now understand was the purpose of the gift, that they were conveying the Gospel message in a clear and precise manner albeit in various foreign dialects.

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[31]Roman Catholic tradition aside, there is no evidence that Peter ever traveled to Rome in person. Also from the text of the epistle to the Romans, it is apparent that Christians were in Rome long before Paul was able to go there himself with the Gospel as a Roman prisoner (Ro.1:10-15; Ac.19:21; 23:11).

Some have thought to explain the breaking down of the language barrier by saying that the miracle was not that the apostles were speaking in foreign tongues, but that the foreign Jews miraculously understood them in their own tongues. However, the fact that the local Jews could ***not*** understand them, with the consequence that they mocked them, suggests the falsehood of that notion. The sign of foreign tongues was given to Hebrew speaking Jews living in Jerusalem in the early days of the new covenant Church and was rejected by the vast majority. The Apostle Paul said regarding the unbelieving Jews of his day,

> **"In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not…"** (1Co.14:21,22).

Therefore, supernatural tongues was utilized as a sign to unbelievers that they might be induced to hear and therefore come to believe the Gospel. It was not a sign at all to believers who had already heard and had responded to it. Believers need no sign to point them to that which they already have and understand. To the unbelieving Jew, it was a valid sign of the fulfillment of prophecy, but as we can see, it was largely rejected by them.

Therefore, that leads us to conclude that there were three valid purposes for the exercise of the gift of tongues each exemplified by one of the three major Pentecostal events.

1. A sign to the Jews indicating fulfilled prophecy (Ac.2:6-12)
2. A witness to the Jew drawing attention to the universality of the Gospel (Ac.10:44-46)
3. A language tool for extended evangelism to foreign Jews (Ac.19:6-7)[32]

[32] There is no indication that the gift of tongues was used as a sign to Gentile unbelievers.

The Prophecy of Joel

Peter went on to explain the speaking abilities of the apostles in a tongue that the local Jews could clearly understand, most likely in Aramaic. Peter first put off the mockers by saying that the apostles had not been drinking; after all, it was only the third hour of the day or about 9 o'clock in the morning (Ac.2:14,15).

> **"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams"** (verse 16 & 17; cf. Jl.2:28).

By saying this, Peter inferred that a new age had begun, during which God's Spirit would be poured out upon all peoples (i.e. all flesh regardless of their native tongue or nationality). The apostles had been the recipients of a vision and had been given the power of prophecy. Peter was not stating that the day of judgment was about to fall upon the earth, which is the full extent of Joel's prophecy, but only that the Jews should not presently be mocking men who were speaking under the power of the Holy Spirit who had been poured into them. Pentecost was a turning point in the way that God would tabernacle with men in the future by permanently dwelling within them.

We can clearly see that not ***all individuals*** immediately received the outpouring of God's Spirit on the day of Pentecost, but that the beginning of the universal evangel was there with the speaking of God's Word in all known languages and dialects. God's chosen people would no longer dwell within a national boundary, as did his people He knew before in the nation of Israel. The Holy Spirit would soon be poured out on all ***nations*** on Earth as the Gospel was spread abroad thus creating a new people speaking many tongues, which would make up the new covenant Church (Mt.28:19).

Having made his point about not referring to the apostles' ability to speak in various tongues as merely coming about as the result of excessive drinking, Peter continues reciting the prophecy of Joel:

> **"And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable [terrible, cf. Jl.2:31] day of the Lord come: And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"** (Ac.2:18–21; cf. Jl.2:29–32).

This portion of the prophecy was ***not*** fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The sun did not go dark, and the moon did not turn to blood. Why then is Peter reciting it? Some have assumed that the supernatural darkness and earthquake that occurred earlier at the time of Jesus' crucifixion fulfilled this prophecy, but there was no mention of the moon "turning to blood" at that time. Nor is there any mention in the account of the crucifixion concerning "fire, and vapor of smoke." We also see that it was not immediately followed by the great and terrible "Day of the Lord" in which God's judgment must fall upon the earth, but instead opened into a wondrous period of grace.

This prophecy most surely speaks of a ***future*** Day of Judgment as described in the book of Revelation (Re.6:12) and immediately following a time that Jesus referred to as a time of "great tribulation" for the Jew (Mt.24:21). However, God has presently granted all men an age of grace, before that terrible day comes, wherein He freely pours out his Spirit upon all men without regard to their ethnic origin or language (Ps.72:6). Whosoever, in this age of grace, shall call on the name of Jesus shall be saved from the final judgment to come (Ps.72:12–14). That is the point that Peter was making by reciting this prophecy.

We must clearly understand the true meaning of the event that took place on Pentecost apart from just getting mesmerized over the gift of tongues.[33] The evangelistic commission became a "burning

[33] We shall discuss the present tongues movement later in various chapters of this book. See: Childish Abuse of Gifts, page 190; Chapter 12.3 Maintaining Order in the Assembly, page 191; Glossolalia, page 324, etc.

fire" in the hearts of the apostles as a door was opened to evangelize the entire world with the wondrous Gospel of grace. We behold in the event that took place on Pentecost the ushering in of a new era wherein those that believe in Christ are not only saved from future judgment, but indwelled by his Spirit. That era is the Church age in which we presently live.

Chapter 12.2 Keeping Gifts in Proper Perspective

The masterful discussion of Spiritual gifts as the Apostle Paul wrote about them in Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of his first epistle to the Corinthians is so astonishingly clear when merely read through objectively from beginning to end that it would seem almost unnecessary to comment on its text. We shall discuss First Corinthians Chapters 12 and 13 in this chapter, and Chapter 14 in the next. Since this entire discussion largely paraphrases and amplifies the Scripture text in order to further clarify it, the reader is greatly encouraged to follow along in the text of his own Bible.

Paul's Purpose in Discussing Gifts

Beginning in Chapter 12, verse 1, Paul says that he does not want them to become confused or misled by spiritual gifts, since due to their previous lack of knowledge about spiritual gifts they had previously been led to worship idols. We should realize that many, before they came to Christ, thought they had received certain "spiritual gifts" from the worship of various idols. Seeing various satanic "signs and wonders," they were led to believe that those idols (or the gods they represented) actually had supernatural power in themselves. Because the Corinthians had once had their eyes fixed upon signs, ritual healings, and various lying miracles, they were quite vulnerable to further satanic deception, and Paul did not want them to be overcome again.

Importance of Testing Gifts

Paul then stated quite clearly that all who profess Jesus Christ as Lord has received that knowledge by the Holy Spirit while, conversely, anyone who curses Jesus cannot have the Spirit of God living within him (cf. 1Co.12:3). Paul may have been referring to various pseudo-Christians who, still being held in the clutches of paganism, were cursing Christ through enraptured utterances while in a mindless trance-like state of abandonment. If so, the origin of the

blasphemous utterances was obviously satanic and was a carry-over from earlier paganism. Only Paul and the Corinthians to whom he was speaking could have known that for fact of course leaving us to speculate on why Paul made this statement about cursing Christ in this text about gifts.

Furthermore, if we seek after sign gifts for tangible evidence of salvation over and above the historic fact of the finished work of Christ on the cross, we would in effect be "cursing Jesus." That is because we would be saying that we do not recognize the sacrificial shedding of Jesus' blood as being sufficient to save us, and that we need something more than that. Rather than accepting the plain evidence of faith, physical tangible evidence is being sought through the conjuring up of highly visible "gifts." In so doing, we would actually be rejecting grace and saying that Jesus failed to complete his atoning work leaving us to earn our own way to salvation. Who could say this about Christ and truly have the Holy Spirit within him?

Every ***true*** Christian has the Holy Spirit living in him, because that knowledge of Christ has actually come to him through the indwelling Holy Spirit. That and that alone, is the reconciling bond joining all of God's elect. That our spiritual abilities and senses differ should not overly concern us, for "there are diversities [different kinds] of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1Co.12:4). Individual believers are intended to serve God in different ways, and the function of one believer may be quite different from that of another (diversities of operations), but it is the one God who brings forth the works in all men (cf. 1Co.12:5,6).

All Gifts Intended for the Common Good

In 1Corinthians 12, verse 7, Paul said that the visible sign gifts of the Holy Spirit were given for the ***common good of the elect*** (i.e. "profit withal"). Then, Paul listed those gifts that were given in that day which were wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing abilities, miraculous powers, prophecy, discerning of spirits, ability to speak in different tongues (i.e. languages), and the ability to interpret different tongues. All of those gifts, though quite different, are nonetheless the works of the ***same*** Spirit. In addition, different believers could have

received one or more of them in what ever portions the Holy Spirit determined (cf. 1Co.12:7–11). God does not ask us what gifts we want, need, or desire. He is not indwelling us in order to serve our desires, but we are indwelt to serve his purposes. It is up to the Holy Spirit to gift us if and as He sees fit in order to use us to build up and sustain the Church on earth in the place and age in which we live.

Allegory of the Human Body

Paul demonstrates through an allegory that the Body of Christ (the Church) is much like the human body. Though it is one body, it is made up of various parts. Rather than it being an organization made up of discrete and unrelated individuals, it is a living organism in which all individuals function together as one. Since we are all baptized into Christ by one and the same Holy Spirit, we are all, therefore, members of one body and are not divisible though we are quite different people with different characteristics and abilities (cf. 1Co.12:12,13).

All Parts Necessary

Paul demonstrates in verses 15 through 21 of Chapter 12 that those with different gifts of the Spirit can not say either: "because I have this gift I am not part of the body of Christ," or "because I alone have this gift all others must not be of the same body as am I." Since we are unique parts of the same body of Christ, we cannot say to our brother that we don't need him because the function (gift) that he has been given is different from ours. We are so joined together in the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit that we should also see ourselves adjoined to all other believers as well.

Unity of the Body

Christ has put together his Church such that its total structure is complex and diverse. Jesus said regarding the work of Satan, "…if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mk.3:25). Satan and his legions are most certainly not divided in their attack upon the Church. In the face of that attack, we would be insane to direct our efforts against other believers. Therefore, we should not only join hands, as we are joined together in the same Spirit, but we

should also show benevolent concern for our various parts who are our brothers in Christ. "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1Co.12:26). Anything that brings honor to another member of the Church should bring us joy, and anything that causes a member of the Church of Christ to suffer should bring us sorrow as well since we all share the same body. We are not Spiritual islands who act on our own and only for ourselves. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and [each one of you] members in particular" (i.e. each an important part of it) (1Co.12:27).

Diversity of Function

In verse 28 of Chapter 12, Paul lists the men given to the early Church: ***first*** apostles, ***second*** prophets, ***third*** teachers, ***after that*** workers of miracles, also those with gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with administrative gifts, and those who speak in various tongues (cf. 1Co.12:28). Then, he asks a series of questions:

> **"Are all apostles, are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret"** (1Co.12:29,30)?

Those obviously rhetorical questions require an answer of yes or no. However, the obvious implied answer to each of those questions given the context is, no, of course not! Since we have no control over what sign gift, if any, we are to receive from the Holy Spirit, Paul says we should all set our sights on boundless gifts that are even greater than mere sign gifts, "the best gifts" (1Co.12:31a).

Love, the Excellent Way

Paul then says he will show them a "…more excellent way" (1Co.12:31b). Chapter 13 is an amazing chapter, it stands on its own as a thing of beauty, but more than that, it should set our hearts and minds straight concerning the significance of spiritual gifts. It is well that we immediately state that the English word "charity," as found in the King James Authorized rendering, comes from the Greek word *agape* which means "love" in a very high social and moral sense. Perhaps a better definition is "benevolent spiritual concern." The word

"charity," as it is used today is connected to alms-giving or "charitable donations." That meaning is derived from *agape*, but it is not synonymous with it. To assume that "charity" here merely means to give money to a worthwhile social cause is to ***subvert*** the intent of this text whose true focus is love.

Necessity of Love in Giving

Giving without love is valueless, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned [for the benefit of others] and have not [love], it profiteth me nothing" (1Co.13:3). Money or goods that are given grudgingly out of a sense of duty are not truly being given at all; they are actually extorted, and for that reason, their value is severely diminished. There is no joy in such "giving." Agape love is not something that we have marshaled up through works to meet the challenge of Christian living. All of our forced efforts become useless works if they are not accomplished through the love of God. Outward material gifts are nothing without the inward gift of love that is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit to others.

Purity of Love

Paul went on to describe the untarnished purity of agape love. Without the love of God, we are nothing as we have many times discussed before; for, only through love do we fulfill the Law of Christ (cf. Mt.22:37–39). This love, itself, is a wonderful gift of the Spirit of Christ who is living within us (cf. 1Co.13:1–7). Christ is pouring out his love for his Church, who are fellow believers with us, through each of us. It is therefore love on the highest plane akin to that only to be found in the Godhead.

Sign Gifts Will Someday Pass Away

Paul then said that the gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge would one day pass away, vanish, or be abolished, and the Holy Spirit would no longer gift individual believers with them.

> **"Charity [love] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they**

shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away" (1Co.13:8).

While the fact that gifts will eventually cease is clear, we must ask ourselves why, when, and how. Paul says that for now, "we know in part, and we prophesy in part" (1Co.13:9). Here is the answer to why the gifts must eventually cease; it is because we cannot utilize those gifts in perfection because of our human limitations. Though the gifts are necessarily perfect, since they are imparted by the Holy Spirit, the mortal vessels into which they are placed are not. In the flesh, we are neither able to speak fully for God without the possibility of introducing error, nor do we have a complete knowledge of all things imparted to us. We are neither yet complete in our knowledge of the Truth nor fully mature in the things of God (Ph.3:11,13) rendering what we say subject to error. Moreover, we are unable to accurately express our thoughts with the human tongue to others with perfection even in our own language, since all mortal communication is essentially inadequate to express spiritual Truth.

When Sign Gifts Will Pass Away

Paul anticipates a time in the future when all human limitations will pass away and we shall become fully mature in the knowledge of God. "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1Co.13:10). When we receive immortality and come to perfect knowledge and conformity with God, the mortal activities that we do now in the flesh must cease to exist, because we can presently only hold a partial understanding of the Truth. That future perfection can only be achieved at the time of our resurrection from the dead in new sinless bodies.

Many having studied this verse conclude that sign gifts have already been abolished in favor of a completed New Testament (the New Testament being interpreted as "that which is perfect"). Perhaps the wild and erotic abuse and counterfeiting of various alleged gifts, tongues in particular, by many of our churches and individuals today have forced that interpretation. However, a careful examination of the text simply will not bear that out. There is no specific direct mention

of a written "New Testament" here of course, nor does it even appear to fit the larger context of Paul's discussion.

Certainly, the New Testament Scriptures do represent a complete or perfect knowledge and they do fully speak for God to the extent He wishes to inform us. Yet, that is true only to the degree that the life we live in the flesh will allow us to comprehend it. Though the Scriptures are complete and perfect in all respects, we are not! We could, of course, go on to speak more about our depravity, but shall refrain because a completed New Testament is clearly not within the context of Paul's argument.

Paul is not speaking about the abolition of sign gifts in the earthly Church at all, but the fact that we are quite limited in our ability to utilize them subjecting them to considerable abuse. Sign gifts are not Truth itself, but merely have the purpose of promoting or advertising Truth. Paul's argument has the intent of demonstrating that placing a primary emphasis on the fleshly exercise of the sign gifts over the Truth that they should signify only illustrates ignorance of important major doctrines and reveals extreme Spiritual immaturity.

We must be aware that we cannot have perfect knowledge in this life. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face-to-face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1Co.13:12). Was that time to come about when the Scriptures were completed about fifty years hence? No, Paul refers to that time, as he clearly says, when we shall see God "face to face." Then, the Truth will be fully revealed to us, and we shall know God fully, even as God knows us. This is what all Christians hope for as we look forward to future glory. Of what significance at that time will be a gift of prophecy, or of our limited mortal knowledge, or even inspired speech. We shall ***all*** perfectly know and enjoy the Lord God in every detail of his being!

How Sign Gifts Will Pass Away

Here, then, we also find the answer as to how. The sign gifts will vanish in the promised perfection of believers that will one day be fully realized in the presence of Christ Jesus. The NIV translation renders verse 10 of 1Corinthians 13 as follows, "but when perfection

comes, the imperfect disappears." That is the sense in which we must interpret this verse. Paul is not so much talking about the gifts, as he is the mortal vessels that contain and exercise them. He is not saying that those gifts must be immediately prohibited and never under any circumstances be exercised after a certain cut-off date within the Church. What he is saying is that perfection when it comes always renders the imperfect to a state of oblivion and that mature knowledge always eliminates the purpose of the early indicators (signs) that drew attention to it. When our state of perfection comes about through our resurrection from the dead in immortal bodies, the imperfect mortal sign gifts must disappear along with our mortality.

Permanence of Love

Therefore, Paul said that prophecies will eventually cease, tongues will be stilled, knowledge will pass away; for we who employ and know those things will certainly not live in this life forever. What are all of those things in the light of eternity? Yet, love will ***never*** fail us! In this present life, the most important gifts that remain available to us are faith, hope, and love. Of course, the most desired and precious gift of the Holy Spirit is love because it will endure forever (cf. 1Co.13:13)!

When we see God face to face, even faith, which has so nobly sustained us in this life, will be unnecessary because we will then know everything fully. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (He.11:1), but how can we in that wondrous day continue to hope for that which is fully and tangibly ours in substance? Furthermore, how can we find any need of evidential faith for that which we can then fully see with opened eyes?

What of love, however? Will it also flee away from us when we see the Lord face to face? Certainly not, it will remain with us much stronger than we could ever have experienced it in our earthly lives as we become absorbed in the perfect love of Christ! Therefore, "…the greatest of these [gifts] is love" (1Co.13:13) since love will remain strong within us even in that glorious day.

Childish Abuse of Gifts

The Corinthian believers were, in a real sense, "playing with toys" rather than seeking a mature understanding of the Truth. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1Co.13:11). The words "spake," "understood," and "thought" in this verse relate directly to the three gifts mentioned in 1Co.13:8. Thought relates to the gift of prophecies, understanding relates to the gift of knowledge, and speaking relates to the gift of tongues.

Paul was saying that human predictive prophecies are childish in relationship to God's complete knowledge of past, present and future. Our knowledge is childish in relationship to God's full and perfect knowledge of all things. Furthermore, our speech is like childish gibberish in relationship to a full articulation and expression of Truth. Considering the more specific error of the Corinthian Church with regard to tongues, Paul was clearly making a point of this to them here. They likely had been making prophecies that were foolish predictions and not of God; they may have been claiming special knowledge of God's larger Truth that were actually products of their own minds and pagan background; they very likely had been "speaking" in ecstatic babbling and claiming it as inspired speech. Paul addressed this latter problem at length in First Corinthians Chapter 14 and we therefore address it in the next chapter of this work.

Chapter 12.3 Maintaining Order in the Assembly

As we continue on in Paul's discourse on spiritual gifts, it may at first seem strange that Paul considered it necessary to devote a large portion of his letter to the single gift of tongues in as much as he apparently valued it the least in Chapter 12 verse 28 where it was at the end of the list. Paul has already demonstrated to us that ***none*** of the outward gifts should be desired for ourselves, and for them to be useful, they must be applied to important situations and used to strengthen the Church as a body.

It is quite apparent from the context of Chapter 14 in Paul's epistle that many of the Corinthian believers were boasting about having the gift of tongues, disturbing the assembly, and even denying unity with other believers by seeing themselves as being superior because of that gift. Whether the gift of languages (ecstatic, earthly, or ethereal) was being feigned or was real is of no consequence to this immediate discussion since the Corinthian believers were not using that ability in such a way as to build up the Church, but to divide it! Thus, we found Paul's beautiful dissertation on love in Chapter 13 of his epistle just before he began this firm rebuke. Paul began the text of Chapter 14 by saying that they should follow the way of ***love*** and only then desire to have outward spiritual gifts in order to exercise that love.

The Message More Important than the Language

Paul then made a direct comparison of prophecy with tongues. Prophecy is not necessarily predictive of future events, but it more generally means restating God's Word in a human vernacular to facilitate human understanding. When a man speaks in a language or utterance (tongue) that is not known to his brothers in Christ he cannot benefit them in any way and any expression of love fails. Therefore, the gift of prophecy is more to be desired than a mere gift of language. He who speaks in tongues without communicating any truth to others only serves to build up himself in his own mind. However, he who

prophesies, strengthens, encourages and comforts others has a true expression of love (cf. 1Co.14:2–4).

"I would that ye all spake with tongues"… (1Co.14:5). If taken out of context, it would seem that Paul, in this verse, openly endorsed the ecstatic "tongues movement" of today. However, lets take a close look at the context. A great division had come upon the church at Corinth because some spoke in various tongues and some did not. Those who had this gift (whether real, feigned, or acquired by years of practice) were using it to establish their own importance in the local assembly. Those who did not have a gift of tongues were left out and were rejected by those who did. Surely, all strife would be ended if all had the ***same*** gift, but even that is ***not*** what Paul is articulating here.

If each really had a gift of tongues (inspired speech in another's language), and the gift was used properly, the Gospel could be more easily spoken to all men with clear understanding. The language barrier would be broken down and the Gospel would have spread more rapidly over the known world. We plainly see that Paul is not exalting tongues as an isolated gift if we continue to read the same verse where he concluded "…but rather that ye prophesied" (1Co.14:5). Then Paul flatly stated, "He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues" (cf. 1Co.14:5). That is to say that the message is much more important than the language in which it is being conveyed.

Paul did not mince any words as he continued, "Now brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine [teaching]" (1Co.14:6)? The supposition that some in the Corinthian church were engaging in useless babbling in a monotonous chant and were falsely claiming spiritual inspiration for it is further confirmed by this and the next verses. Paul goes on to say that even musical instruments are not beneficial unless they are played so as to produce a harmonious melody that has a particular meaning (cf. 1Co.14:7). If a trumpet is blown for battle, and no one can tell that it is a call to advance will anyone get ready to do battle (cf. 1Co.14:8)? Then, said Paul, "So likewise ye, except ye utter by the

tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air" (1Co.14:9).

Of course, there are many languages in the world and all of them have meaning for those who understand them (cf. 1Co.14:10). Nevertheless, if a foreigner speaks to you in his language that you have not acquired can you understand him, or if you speak to a foreigner in your own language, which he has not acquired, can he understand you? In either case, the one who speaks will seem just like an unlearned idiot (barbarian) to the one who hears him (cf. 1Co.14:11). We know in our minds that the speaker may be quite intelligent, but we cannot ascertain that fact if we cannot communicate with him. Therefore, if "…ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church" (1Co.14:12).

Praying in an Unknown Tongue

If a man should ever find himself speaking or praying in a language that he himself cannot understand, as some in Corinth must have claimed they were doing, he should pray that he could be enabled to interpret it for himself and for others as well in a communicable tongue (cf. 1Co.14:13). Even if we are praying silently, we must seek to understand our prayer in our own thought language, but if we pray publicly, we should interpret our thoughts and pray audibly in the natural tongue of those who hear us so that they may also understand us.

"For ***if*** I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful" (1Co.14:14; emphasis added). Paul often uses the word "if" as the "if" of argument.[34] That is, he is not expressly saying here that we can, or do, pray in an unknown tongue but is

[34] We must understand the frequent use of the conjunction "if" in many of Paul's logical arguments. It is referred to as the argumentative "if" or the "if" of argument. The person using "if" in this way does not mean to say that that which follows the "if" is true. We use the conjunction today in such phrases as, "if" I were rich, "if" I were king, "if" I were twelve-foot tall, or even "if" I were you, etcetera.

merely stating it for the sake of argument to show that we must have understanding in our prayers for them to be effective. Therefore, we should always seek to pray not only with groanings in our spirit, but also with our minds. As we can see, Paul most certainly did not say that we should pray aloud in the spirit through empty babbling. Prayer is meaningful only if the person praying understands his own prayer.

Moreover, if one who does not understand you hears you praying aloud how can he join with you in your prayer since he does not have any idea what you are saying? Can he say Amen? Can our empty sounds help in any way to build him up unto faith in Christ (cf. 1Co.14:16,17)? Paul spoke in many languages as is evidenced by his many travels where he spoke to people of many tongues on the topic of the Gospel. Paul truly spoke in tongues more than did them all (cf. 1Co.14:18), but Paul said, "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (that is, in a language unknown in the individual assembly) (1Co.14:19). Can anyone imagine the Apostle Paul, whose mandate was to take the Gospel message to the Gentiles, walking into an assembly and babbling in an ecstatic voice so that no one could understand him? That defies all reason since it would have defeated his purpose and mission!

Mindless Singing

Likewise, when we sing we should also sing with our minds, not just vocalize a mindless melody with our tongues. Otherwise, a psalm, hymn or spiritual song becomes unbeneficial to our understanding and to others. Particularly with familiar hymns, there is a danger that we will sing them mechanically without actually paying attention to the words we utter, especially during congregational singing. The familiar music often has a way of overriding the message contained in the hymn. We could be saying anything and never know it, if it is but put to music![35] That is why it is sometimes beneficial to

[35] Much of the contemporary music introduced in today's church services is often filled with senseless repetition of words devoid of any real meaning thus allowing the

speak aloud certain verses of hymns, giving words the proper inflection, rather than singing them. In our worship services, all music should be used as a vehicle for the words that must contain a message of value that glorifies God and benefits the Church. Surely, that is why Paul linked prayer, singing, and tongues together here in his epistle (1Co.14:15).

Paul Exhorts to Maturity

We should "stop thinking like children," said Paul, and begin thinking like spiritual adults (1Co.14:20). The Old Testament tells of future Jews that would be spoken to by foreigners speaking the Word of God in the Hebrew tongue and in still other tongues that were not native to the Jew at that time, and still the people would not listen (cf. 1Co.14:21). "Wherefore, tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe" (1Co.14:22).

The Sign gift of tongues is not of any benefit to believers who have already responded to the Gospel, while the sound teaching of God's Word does not benefit the unbeliever since he cannot comprehend it. What Paul is referring to here, as "prophecy" is substantial doctrine that is beyond what the unbeliever can comprehend since it must be spiritually discerned. Essential doctrine can only be received and understood by the mature believer in Christ. Therefore, the unbeliever constantly looks for supernatural signs before he will believe anything, while the believer seeks after sound doctrine that he may mature in the faith.

Witnessing to the Unsaved

Paul then described what must have been going on in the Corinthian church and what could very well exemplify a meeting in many of our present-day charismatic church assemblies as he asks,

"If therefore the whole church be come together into one

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rhythmic beat of the music to mesmerize the worshiper into mindless participation much in the same way as glossolalia.

place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad" (1Co.14:23)?

We must realize that self-imposed insanity will never attract rational men and women to Christ. Many of the unsaved are already convinced that Christians are not only hypocrites, but deranged as well. The news media today delights in displaying Christians as right-wing crazies. The cross of Christ itself is a necessary offence, an obstacle, to the unbeliever because they cannot understand the vile nature of their sin that made such a sacrifice essential. Why should we try further to convince them that to become a Christian, they must act as if they are mentally unhinged? Will they be convinced of their sin nature and see their need for the Savior by such strange activities?

"But if all prophesy [clearly state God's Word], and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all [because he hears and understands], he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest[because he sees his sinful nature]; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1Co.14:24,25, text amplified).

Exhortation to Maintain Order

We must always strive to maintain order in our assemblies. When we come together for worship, everyone has something to share with other believers. Perhaps, one has a hymn, or a word of instruction, or a personal revelation to share. Still others may even have an ability to speak in other languages or to interpret other languages (cf. 1Co.14:26). That does not mean that we should all immediately and continually exercise our gifts to the distraction of everyone else. We should only use those insights and gifts when they are useful for the building up of God's elect (cf. 1Co.14:26). By studying the context of verse 26, we can see that the word "tongue" in verses 26 and 27 is best interpreted as "language." Paul is addressing the larger matter of overall order in the assembly, not just the sign gift of tongues (cf. 1Co.14:33).

Language Interpretation

If any persons seek to speak in their native language that is foreign to the assembly, only two or three should speak at a time in turn and someone must interpret what they say for those present (cf. 1Co.14:27). If however there is no one present to interpret the foreign (unknown) tongue for others, such a person should remain silent and speak to their own minds and to God with their thoughts (cf. 1Co.14:28). Certainly, that man can pray silently in his own language that is known both to him and to God. His mind and spirit ***both*** pray and understand, though others in the assembly could not understand him. Therefore, his speaking or praying aloud would not be beneficial in any way to the assembly.

"Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues" (1Co.14:39). Paul is merely making clear by this last statement that we should not bar anyone from our worship services just because they cannot speak our language. If they are one with Christ, they are also one with us! He is merely exhorting us to "let all things be done decently and in order" (1Co.14:40).

Women's Behavior in the Church

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also sayeth the law" (1Co.14:34). Again, it is necessary that we observe the context in which this statement is found. Verses 34 and 35 are bracketed by other verses regarding "tongue-speaking." It is indeed likely that many of the offenders in the Corinthian church were women, who were imitating the priestesses of the pagan temple in Corinth to Aphrodite (Astarte). In various pagan religions, women were often in charge of the proceedings, both babbling useless incantations and seducing men to their worship of sex and debauchery. It is surely in that context that those verses were written.

Today as well, women should refrain from emotional and ecstatic speaking in the congregations. Nor should they get into emotional outbursts or disputations in the church assemblies, but should discuss any matters of misunderstanding or disagreement with

their husbands at home (cf. 1Co.14:35). Likewise, unmarried women should seek the council of their own parents at home. It is, indeed, a "…shame for women to speak in the church" (1Co.14:35). That is, women should not ***preside*** over worship for the congregation, exhorting others to join in with them.

That is shameful both because of its association with earlier pagan worship and because of its reversal of the God-mandated roles of men and women (Ge.3:16b). Nevertheless, godly women should not be barred from giving necessary reports and occasional testimonies in the church prior to or following worship in a modest and reverent way because of this text. To do so is to lift Paul's statement out of its original context and, in doing so, lose valuable edification for the Church.

In Conclusion

We must realize that not one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is expressly excluded by Scripture today, even the sign gifts. Yet, we make a serious error if we think that the manner in which the Corinthian Church exercised those gifts constituted Spirituality. Instead, it only demonstrated their extreme immaturity in the faith (1Co.3:1–3). Therefore, we must see that those gifts, if still present, must be exercised in a more mature form today — if at all — and only when they are truly imperative to the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ. None have yet "passed away" such that the Holy Spirit is now prohibited from bestowing them as He will, but many are no longer found to be useful to the Church in the same way they were two-thousand years ago.

Contemporary man is not impressed by physical phenomenon, as were men in the days of the early Church. Technology in the twentieth century has made many so-called miracles commonplace. Most physical phenomena can be explained, and to some extent duplicated by science so that our senses are dulled to "miracles," and are discounted by the unbeliever as mere fabrications of science or technology through natural laws. The healing of the sick is most often credited to medical advancements rather than the will of God. A "gift of healing" is automatically discredited as clever manipulation.

Knowledge is credited to scholarship rather than Spiritual inspiration. Furthermore, genuine spiritual wisdom is often discounted altogether as foolishness! Would anyone today take serious notice of the Gospel merely because a foreigner can speak to him in his own language, and why should any at all take notice of one who says that he is speaking in a tongue that no one can understand? In today's world, sign gifts are not very useful in witnessing to the lost in the hope that they may embrace the Gospel of Christ.

Nor should we ever allow any gift to bolster our personal pride since we did nothing to earn or deserve them.

> **"For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it"** (1Co.4:7)?

We are held accountable for the use of all gifts that may be imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. We are to use them within the bounds of love and dispense their benefits as faithful stewards in full accord with other believers. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1Pe.4:10). Every gift must be used in harmony with others to build up the body of Christ, not flaunted in order to tear it apart! Any genuine gift of the Holy Spirit would never be a cause for division between believers (1Co.1:10) among whom God desires unity. Some may have a particular gift in more or less measure (1Co.12:11). Some may possess a higher gift, some a lower one (1Co.12:22). Some may possess a gift in mature Spiritual understanding, others in a more immature or primitive state (1Co.12:23,24). Yet, all believers are necessary for the overall health of the Church, and all gifts have been provided by the very same Spirit (1Co.12:4).

Section 13, Churchianity

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Institutional Churchianity

Sacramentalism

The Sabbath and the Lord's Day

Observance of Other Days

Institutionalized Church Tithing

Fund Raising Methods

Paid Ministers

The Search for a Church Home

Chapter 13.1 Institutional Churchianity

It would indeed be wonderful if we could relate how our modern churches had progressed through the two thousand years since Pentecost such that they were now closely united in thought and were free of all earthly entanglements. Unfortunately, that is not a true statement of the case; the converse is true. The elect today are divided up within various temporal churches and denominations that are so hardened in their doctrine that a positive progression toward unity in the Truth through biblical reform is impossible to achieve.

Most often, that determined separatism is based upon ignorance inherited through tradition rather than coming forth from a careful study and analysis of the Scriptures. Instead of Christianity, we find in its place institutionalized Churchianity wherein each temporal church dogmatically sets itself up as the ultimate authority for interpreting all of Scripture as it sees fit. That determined dogmatism, though quite often different in perspective, has been inherited by Protestantism from the early Roman church, as we shall relate historically in Book III of this work.

The Principle of Evil Present within the temporal Church

There were many in time past who thought the efforts of the institutional church in the age of grace would be such a perfect influence upon the people of the earth that it would completely convert the world to Christianity and so bring in the perfect kingdom age. The many atrocities committed by men in the last two millennia, some even perpetrated in the name of Christianity, and the two global wars in recent times had fairly well silenced the post-millennial[36] theorists until more recent years.

What those men stubbornly refuse to acknowledge is that the temporal church is greatly infested with those who are not Christians and that the churches are largely controlled by them. Moreover, they fail to realize that even the best efforts of "good men" cannot change

[36] Millennialism is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 20.2 of Book III of this work.

the hearts of the reprobate even through the workings of a powerful earthly institution; only God can do that. The best that man can do is to suppress evil through the formulation of various laws that are backed up by civil justice. Even then, the fallen nature of all men limits the genuine effectiveness of such efforts. Man's laws are often unjust and their enforcement is most often detrimental to true justice.

Parable of the Mustard Seed

The effect of evil within the present state of the Kingdom, of which the earthly church is the major institution, is demonstrated in two of Jesus' parables. The first of those is known as the parable of the mustard seed (Mt.13:31,32). Each grain of the mustard seed is filled with thousands of tiny seeds barely visible to the naked eye. When that nearly invisible seed is deliberately sown in the world (the field) by fallen man, it is with a desire to use a spiritual condiment to spice up good and wholesome Truth to make it more palatable to the natural man.

From their inception, early churches were plagued with internal difficulties. Most of those had to do with the formalities and trappings of religion instituted by unredeemed men. The simple Gospel message was made subject to having various "enhancements" added to it. Some tried to impose the formalities and rituals of the Hebrew ceremonial law on them, while still others attempted to introduce various pagan practices into their corporate worship.

A little error sown to make the Gospel more attractive to the fallen masses eventually overwhelms the Truth rendering it tasteless and invisible under the tangy error. The temporal church today has grown from its humble beginnings as the visible Church into a large tree with many denominations or branches in which the "birds," or as it should more correctly be translated "vultures," lodge. The birds are those that eat the good seed and represent the evil men that always "roost" in the temporal church to live off the fruit and flesh of the children of God. They attempt to smother and consume the Truth wherever it comes into fruition and their appetite is voracious (cf. Mt.13:4).

Parable of the Leaven

Our Lord also demonstrated the proliferation of evil in the Institutional church on the earth with the parable of the leaven (Mt.13:33). Leaven is ***always*** representative of evil, sin, and pride when we read of it in the Scriptures whether in the Old or New Testament; there is no reason to believe that this particular mention of leaven is any exception. Some have erroneously likened the leaven here to the Gospel that has been hidden in the world. (The Gospel is not hidden except to those who refuse to hear it). This is the post-millennial viewpoint that expects perfection of the temporal church in this age and through that perfection over-powering the evil of the world with institutionalized Christianity. Both church history and the fallen nature of man deny that erroneous assumption.

As Jesus demonstrated in this parable, a small amount of evil, sin, and pride would actually be hidden ***within*** the temporal church to grow and overwhelm knowledge of the Truth. After a time, that evil will expand until the whole church is completely "leavened" or corrupted. Bread is leavened to improve the taste. In the same way, religion is leavened to improve its general appeal to the unsaved. If leaven in bread continues unchecked, the bread will soon become so corrupted that it must be thrown away. Such has been and still is the effect of fallen man's corrupting influence upon the worldly churches.

Traditional Churchianity

Religion is defined by one modern dictionary as: "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances and often having a moral code for the conduct of human affairs" (*Random House College Dictionary*). From this rather lengthy definition, we observe that religion is an all-encompassing word that equally defines the basest of falsehoods as well as the embracing of God's Truth as revealed in the Holy Bible.

For that reason, the mere exercise of religion cannot bring forth salvation. Baal worshipers in the days of Israel's kings were very

religious. Similarly, the early Egyptians were religious in worshiping every conceivable creation as their gods. The Pharisees in Jesus' time on the earth were extremely religious in all matters of external form to a fault. Their external and hypocritical sense of religious piety blinded them to the Truth and brought forth the consistent rebuke of Jesus (Mt.23:13-39).

Likewise, many people today are more interested in instituting and maintaining religious formalism than they are in knowing the person of Jesus Christ. They are concerned only with maintaining an outward legalistic facade of religiosity through formal attitudes and simulated piousness in their actions. Those are the very ones that insist upon perpetuating the strict adherence to certain rituals, sacraments, and rules in the practice of religion that are so often based upon faulty traditions of the past, not upon Scriptural Truth. Most often, that religious legalism actually stands between them and a genuine personal relationship and trust in Christ, who alone brings redemption from our sins, thus leaving their souls desolate. Rather than coming to that fountain of cleansing, they instead choose to set up their own "cleansing fountain" in a man-made reservoir of rules, rituals, and practices. Instead of embracing the sacred things of God, they exalt the treasured things of man's invention disguised as the things of God through empty religious forms.

Sacramentalism

As early as the beginning of the second century A.D. the temporal church began its relentless march toward Formal Churchianity by laying exclusive claim to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Table. Engaging in either of those practices outside formal Churchianity was soon forbidden and declared invalid. Those two simple acts, which were to be the privilege and encouragement of all believers, were soon being used to coerce believers into accepting the authority of the temporal church or risk the declared loss of salvation.

Furthermore, the terrible error of baptismal regeneration, upon which Churchianity established its false claim of authority, allowed the temporal church to declare rank unbelievers to be regenerated

Christians — thus rendering the practices meaningless. So complex and important is this matter concerning the sacraments that we have devoted the next chapter of this section to a study of Sacramentalism. This matter is also discussed in various contexts throughout this book and discussed in its historical context in Book III of this work. For that reason we shall not go into more detail here.

The Church Falsely Seen as our Mother

It is inevitable that Christian believers should desire to meet together to form temporal bonds that parallel the spiritual bonds that they received when they were born anew in Christ. As they banded together, visible Churches were formed. Churches allow us to better exercise our spiritual gifts and stewardship in Christ collectively in one body as our faith requires of us. In all of this, our ties to Christ must remain paramount as the only reason and purpose for the existence of the assembly.

However, as infant Churches begin to grow in prominence, they affiliate themselves with still other churches and over time grow into massive temporal institutions or denominations that seek to promote their own existence and expansion through certain exclusive doctrines that may or may not be Scriptural. Through that strictly human effort, they exalt themselves as "high churches" that extol their own intrinsic worth. Thus, the sole authority of Christ is not only denied but also supplanted.

Unfortunately, just and legitimate functions of the visible Church[37] on earth have been twisted by evil men who gain control over the church in order to sway it away from its godly purpose toward a worldlier goal that proclaims the leadership of fallible men over the headship of Christ. By that process, Christianity is soon replaced by formal Churchianity wherein the institutional church is actually worshiped instead of Christ. Love and obedience becomes due to the temporal church, its ordnances and teaching, not to Christ through

[37] The just and legitimate functions of the temporal church were discussed in Chapter 11.3 of this book.

whom the church should rightly claim its very existence. Redemption is no longer seen as the exclusive right of God to administer as He sees fit, but a functional ability of the church itself through various formalities, ceremonies and rituals.

Many Protestant churches still hold to numerous "high-church" notions that have their origin in old Romanism — ideas that seek to elevate the temporal church to a position of equal authority with Christ. One such idea that dies hard is the assumption that as we have God as our Father, so we should have the church as our Mother. The false teaching of "the church as our mother" had its beginnings in the sub-apostolic church fathers as the church began to grow in monolithic power and stature. It was expressed by the early theologian, Augustine,[38] and was even reiterated by the great reformer, John Calvin,[39] in his venerable "*Institutes of the Christian Religion*" (Book 4, Chapter 1, Topic 4).

If true biblical reform is to continue, however, we must break with this unscriptural nonsense, for Scripture clearly teaches that the true Church, made up of all believers collectively, is the body and bride of Christ (1Co.12:27; Ep.1:22,23; 5:28–32). Therefore, to also believe that the Church is our "mother" is to make ourselves our own mother such that through our own works in and through the temporal church we may give new birth to others and ourselves! Certainly, we must see that this is actually a reiteration of the false doctrine of salvation by faulty human works not the true doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone.

As we have previously discussed in Chapter 11.1, the visible Church is indeed in the Kingdom of God, and it may be properly referred to as "the Kingdom of Christ" as long as we recognize Jesus Christ as its only head ruling in Heaven through the Holy Spirit who indwells individual believers who make up the visible Church body.

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[38] Augustine and his teachings will be discussed in Chapter 17.8 of Book III of this work.

[39] John Calvin, the reformer, shall be discussed in Chapter 18.2 of Book III of this work.

However, the temporal church is not the manifestation of the future Kingdom of Heaven[40] on earth wherein Jesus Christ Himself will rule temporally and in person. Failure to acknowledge that fact has resulted in the oppression of believers by church leaders, who falsely lay claim to being the "vice regents" of Christ on earth in His absence, as they attempt to enforce their own faulty concepts of kingdom-age law through the presumptive exercise of human authority.

Even in the early days of the visible Church, many falsely claiming the name of Jesus entered their midst (cf. Ac.20:29). Instead of elevating Christ, those churches began to elevate themselves as being a "holy church" that claimed inherent worth and authority in itself. The power that it gained by doing so began to corrupt the resulting institution from the inside. It was not too long before the institutionalized church on earth began to supplant Christ as the sole means of salvation aided by the false doctrine of baptismal regeneration that we shall discuss in the topic Persistent Error of Baptismal Regeneration, on page 423 of this book.

It makes no difference whether a person calls himself a pope, bishop, elder, pastor, evangelist, or any other title, the physical manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven is not to be found on earth in any man or in any temporal church organization. Christ Himself rules his visible Church today from the throne of God, and the Holy Spirit convicts and directs believers as individual members of his visible Church to carry out his will in this age.

Empty Shell of Ceremony and Ritual

Many genuine Christians are bogged down in the elaborate ceremony and ritual of Churchianity, and having that, they are satisfied in the flesh while their soul still starves for the true manna and thirsts for the living water. Mankind today is on a mad guilt trip because of his inability to atone for his sins. Deep down, he knows the error of his ways but feels that he can make things right through his own efforts in

[40] The Kingdom of Heaven was properly discussed in Chapter 11.1 page 116 of this book.

the trappings of ceremonial ritual. Perhaps, some do find ***temporary*** relief from a guilty conscience in the stark design of religious form, as is evidenced by their compulsive repetition of those worthless acts. Apparently, they seek nothing more. Through those vain attempts of self-atonement, they actually perpetuate their sin in the very acts themselves.

They are much like a hungry and thirsty man in the desert, who when he is given food and water, through the blindness of his eyes, and the baking of his brain, observes the container itself as something wonderful, even God-sent. Incomprehensively, he then feasts his eyes on the wrappings; sets it up on a barren rock and in great excitement continues to watch it and toy with it. He dies from thirst and hunger while sustenance is just inside the package he worships with such wonderment.

This absurd illustration accurately pictures the spiritual condition of many today, sad to say. We must not merely consider our faith in Jesus Christ as an empty box wrapped in pretty ceremony. We must not think that outward ritual is the substance of faith. We must not allow the outward form of the gift to become all we ever know. We must tear aside all the wrappings of ritual and ceremony and partake of that wondrous life-giving manna. When we finally do so, we will no longer hunger and no longer thirst, for that living bread and that living water within gives eternal life (Jn.6:35,40).

Who could be satisfied with mere ritual and ceremony if he can have Christ? Who is interested in legalism when God has already freely given us everything we need to satisfy the spirit of his divine Law by grace alone through simple faith? What should be our response to this wondrous grace except to fully trust Him, worship Him, and seek his will continually in prayer for our lives? All religious ritual and ceremony is cold and dead, but the tree of life is warm and green.

That does not mean that we should toss out all ceremony and ritual as being totally unbeneficial and improper once the box of manna is opened. The Christian having received the grace of God finds that he must exemplify the gift through his flesh as well as through his spirit. For that reason, the true Christian finds expression

in certain ceremonies and activities such as the Lord's Supper, ritual baptism, group prayer, group Bible readings, corporate worship, and singing. If the Christian engages in this as an outward ***expression*** of the salvation that he has received, we should not find fault in it. In this case, ceremony merely demonstrates outwardly the believer's inward resolve. As a wise man once said, "if the heart is right, the ritual is right."

Conversely, we must realize that if the heart is misdirected, ritual is an affront to Christ since it sets about to supplant Him. What we must recognize and unequivocally reject is the unbeliever and pseudo-Christian who points to church activity, ceremony, and ritual as the wide door to salvation. By merely imitating the activities of other Christians, he falsely assumes that he has attained the substance. Not only does he deceive himself, he also deceives others who are drawn into the same trap.

Reformed Churchianity

One would have thought that Churchianity could not have survived the force of the Reformation Movement once the Pauline doctrine of the grace of God was finally restored. However, since the movement was also motivated by a strong nationalistic undercurrent, much of the false tradition that should have been eradicated continued on in state sponsored temporal churches of the early reformation era. While some old traditions where exposed as false and done away with, newer traditions soon took their place along side those old ones that had survived and found their way into formal written creeds.

As state churches later gave way to independent churches, church creeds were often considered to be too restrictive on continued reform. Older faulty church traditions were mostly eliminated, but specific codes of conduct in the form of church ordinances soon replaced them. The faulty Roman tradition of Sacramentalism was revised and remained in a modified form. Sabbatarianism mandated that all believers worship within a church body each Sunday, and the old tithing system remained deeply entrenched to support the reformed temporal church in its physical expansion efforts.

Petty Ethics

Rather than recognizing the simple restraints that God has written in their hearts to come to know and worship Him, the fallen nature of men causes them to set up external rules and formal moral codes that satisfies their own sense of proper religious conduct. Churchianity requires laws and rules to which the legalist is more than happy to oblige. Rather than accepting the universal and perfect moral law of God as the high but unreachable standard, they instead choose to invent their own moral codes as the occasion dictates. Such codes are most often rather trivial ones that one can more easily adhere to such as a particular manner of dress, dietary restrictions, physical gestures, initiation rituals, or other such external compliance to satisfy religious form. In complying with petty ethics, they see themselves as being absolved from the weightier matters of God's perfect Law that is found in the Decalogue. Rather than search out the deep things of God, they instead become satisfied with make-believe and worldly substitutes that they or other men have devised to perpetuate their own specific form of Churchianity.

Liberal Churchianity

Due to the dictation of doctrine and the real and supposed oppression that emanates from religious formalism in traditional Churchianity and the imbedded ordinances of reformed Churchianity enforced through authoritarian offices in the temporal church, it was inevitable that both would eventually be challenged by the repressed masses. During the time of the Reformation Movement, temporal church authoritarianism was challenged by men who utilized Scripture to expose erroneous dogma that had perpetuated its existence.

This time, however, Scripture would be thrown to the wind. It is all too easy to observe the many radical changes taking place in many church denominations today regarding matters of doctrine and practice that actually oppose true biblical reform. One only need read the newspaper or watch television news to observe sea changes that include among many others the ordination of women to positions of authority over men and the acceptance of homosexuality by temporal

church members as a valid alternative lifestyle in total opposition to the clear teaching of Scripture.

Those are determined steps being made toward the adulteration of sound biblical doctrine and proper Christian practice; they cannot be construed in any way to be the result of efforts being made toward positive biblical reform. In fact, many old faulty traditions and ritual practices often remain behind long after sound doctrine has been completely dispensed with through liberalization efforts. While many church members are dogmatically concentrating on preserving what is often unimportant or insignificant tradition and ritual, the ground of Truth is being shifted out from under them. We must never be confused into thinking that neglecting sound biblical doctrine in exchange for maintaining or reinstating faulty tradition is somehow a continuation of desirable reform.

Influx of the Unsaved

We surely realize that church doors are wide open to anyone who will enter through them, and that membership is being unwisely offered to all who wish to join with out any real regard to their true spiritual condition. Because of widespread liberalized Churchianity, many unbelievers find the social activities of the temporal church desirable. It is quite rare to see a church reject ***anyone*** for membership who appears to be sufficiently sophisticated and affluent and is willing to go through his or her initiation rituals. Some church leaders incorrectly believe they can mold them into Christians after they are members, not realizing that the converse is true. That is, the unsaved will mold the church to their own liking.

Accordingly, most people join a church today for the secular benefits that they hope to receive through membership, not out of a desire to worship and serve God. They hope to find both social and business contacts that will enrich their lives materially. The church is only an exclusive religious club to them — a place to go to relax and enjoy themselves. No wonder they are so interested in introducing banquets, parties, games, gambling, and various sporting activities into the church. While believers should not be opposed to having a good time when the occasion warrants it, the visible Church whenever it

convenes should be reserved as a time to study the Word and to corporately worship God through common fellowship with Him. The world offers more than enough opportunities to have fun — often even to the vexing of our souls.

Even as some are holding on to dead religious form through ceremony and ritual, or imposing strict ordinances, still others are in the process of liberalizing the church such that its main tenants of belief are tolerance of sin, acceptance of any lifestyle, and open-mindedness regarding the purpose and existence of God. If God indeed exists, they think, He is most certainly a god of love and is not willing that we should be bound by any kind of absolute moral ethic.

The Enemy Within

Immediately after he spoke the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus quickly quelled any thoughts that the kingdom would grow in its present form to dominate the earth in order to bring in an age of Truth and justice. When Jesus returns will He find the true faith upon the earth, or will it have been corrupted into something far less? That is the question that Jesus Himself rhetorically posed in Luke 18:8 with the obvious conclusion from the context that the true faith will no longer exist at that time. Therefore, it is not the external enemies of the visible Church (who have no power to change internal doctrine) that should bring the greatest concern to the child of God. Satan's strategy is that of infiltration which is much more effective than a direct attack from without.

While it may sound revolutionary to state so obvious a truth, churches are intended only for believers, ***not*** unbelievers. Initial evangelism should take place ***outside*** the walls, not within; the ***world*** is the field, ***not*** the church sanctuary. That may sound far too harsh a statement to the evangelical who is so bent upon "saving the lost" that he would consider it sinful not to drag the unconverted in so that they can be preached to and overcome by hearing the Gospel in the church. While we should not deny unsaved persons who earnestly desire to hear the Truth the opportunity, we must also protect the church against evil worldly influence so that the gospel that is taught is still ***the*** Gospel and not some psychological counterfeit!

When we encourage the lost to enter and become members of a church, we only corrupt it by bringing in worldliness and evil influence. Those churches in "reaching out to the world" have actually brought the world inside! It is no wonder that the unsaved, because of their worldly abilities, most often are quickly elevated to hold church offices. Just as leaven makes bread taste better, so it is that evil principles often spice up church worship services and activities. Many churches today are in fact already fully leavened! Jesus did not give his life for a corrupted earthly institution. Such corrupt churches actually dishonor Him and, more often than not, declare null and void his sacrifice for our redemption. It is the remnant for which He died that will remain after the evil is "cast into a furnace of fire" (Mt.13:42,43). Jesus died that good might prevail, not that evil might continue to be coddled and unpunished. Evil is Satan's work, not God's.

The elect in our temporal churches must not only have their eyes wide open for any subtle infiltration and adoption of worldly methods within the congregation in which they reside, they must stand firm in the doctrine of Christ with their ears to the ground for any approach of false teaching. At first, there may be no detectible changes in doctrinal teaching from the pulpit as worldliness begins to take hold, but there will be noticeable changes in methods as the church's approach to solving problems and even toward evangelism becomes more secular in form.

Worldliness is a most insidious enemy of the church that comes in gradually over time with each step barely discernable. Only after worldliness plows sound doctrine under a layer of worldly sophistication does the false teacher find the environment suitable for planting false notions. Only then do we begin to hear various psychological desecrations replacing sound biblical teaching from the pulpit. Unfortunately, by that time, most church members are so enamored by the great fun they are having through the adoption of worldly practice and activities into their church, they will rarely if ever notice or care that biblical Truth has been supplanted by false teaching. While attacks on the faith from outside the church are usually quite visible, liberal alterations from within are far more dangerous since

they are often not even recognized as such until they are quite well advanced.

Cultic Churchianity

Many churches today place an overemphasis on one single pet doctrine to the extent that all other teachings of Scripture are excluded. That neglect can degenerate into radical fanaticism if not in fact separatist cultism. Cultic Churchianity can come out of any of the other forms of Churchianity, and may even exist in parallel with them. Thus, we can find various forms of traditional cultism, reformed cultism, and even liberal cultism. The church must always be balanced in its doctrines so that it teaches the whole council of God from the entire Bible. That prevents ignorance of important basic truths in concert with each other and therefore prevents the extreme interpretations of Scripture that can result from constantly "harping on one single note."

Overemphasis of a single doctrine or practice is commonly used to differentiate one church from another so that the believer must judge one particular doctrine to be more important than are all others. In commercial advertising, the goal is to differentiate one product showing how it is unique to all others, and then selling the importance of those peculiar features to the public. In the same way, today's temporal churches compete with each other and seek out ways to make their church different from all others in order to attract members away from other churches.

As the competition heats up, churches tend to become increasingly extreme in both their doctrines and practices. Much of the differences between our churches today are based upon ***intentional*** deception to increase their membership. Worldliness and biblical ignorance further separates churches as they fall farther and farther away from the true faith and toward the abyss of total apostasy.

Guarding the Truth

It is no wonder that many believing Christians today have been so disappointed with the hypocrisy of churches so as to abandon them all as being hopeless. A Bible-grounded believer often finds that he is

out of place in most churches today because of prevailing gross errors in Christian doctrine, worldly methods, and because of an undue emphasis being placed on certain specific rituals and ceremonies.

We must be aware that our only safe guide in these times of growing renunciation of the faith through worldly sophistication is the Holy Spirit within us as He teaches us from the Word of God that is written in the Holy Bible. Our understanding, perceived from the Spirit within us, must be constantly tested against the Word of God, and the Word Itself must be validated by the indwelling Holy Spirit to our minds. Those two together must be our compass and map in these confusing times. To depend upon any other sources for Truth is to court disaster. Particularly so since the message from many of our pulpits have already become corrupted by worldly error and are no longer trustworthy.

If believers had only tested the oratory coming from church pulpits in the past against God's Word as an exact and unvarying standard, the defection of our churches from the true faith would still be far off instead of at the door. We, as true believers in the pews, have largely abdicated our responsibility and have left Scriptures to the clergy to interpret for us. The growing ignorance of major Bible doctrines by rank and file Christians has left churches open to the external worldly influence that has rushed in to fill the void created by biblical ignorance. As a consequence of that ignorance, the false prophet of the antichrist already occupies many of our temporal church pulpits.

Therefore, the believer must be very careful not to neglect his own individual study of God's Word. Only individual study allows the Holy Spirit to speak to us personally through his Word in the quiet place of our heart. Creeping worldliness, worldly methods and false teaching will not easily fool a well-studied and informed congregation. Some have rightly said that the greatest sin of church members today is their personal ignorance of the Word of God.

Despite many Bible studies and Sunday-school classes, too often the teacher of such classes overwhelms the voice of the Holy Spirit with their own personal bias, ignorance, or sophisticated agenda. Instead of a critical study of Scripture text, Bible studies often break

down to the recitation of creeds in various reformed churches. In liberal churches, everyone is allowed to express their personal opinion about some topic without regard to what God is really trying to say to us in his Word. Eventually erroneous worldly applications of verses and passages permanently replace true interpretations of the text, negatively impacting overall church doctrine. Even a true believer, who is not into God's Word for himself, may miss the point and could accept falsehood for a time unless the Holy Spirit reins him in through private Bible study.

The Narrow and the Wide Gates

It is for that reason that we must emphasize that the seeker of Truth must first enter through that narrow door, which is the person of Jesus Christ Himself, not through the wide gate of mere religion or Churchianity in any of its forms. May God forbid that any who seeks out Truth may think that he has obtained the salvation of God through engaging in a ceremony or ritual or by joining a temporal church. Even the heathen and false religions have their ceremonies and rituals that promise what they cannot deliver and they also have their solemn assemblies where their religious inclination is vented.

Why then is Christianity any better than are those? Chiefly, because it is not a mere ceremonial façade that is rooted in the faulty tradition of men, but it has bed-rock substance in Truth obtained through objective faith in the person of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mt.7:13,14).

Many have erroneously thought that the narrow gate is the Churchianity of the institutionalized church, while the wide gate is the world at large that is outside Churchianity. However, it is apparent that the narrow gate is the person of Jesus Himself, and that the wide gate is actually institutionalized religion in all its forms. Those that follow the ways of the world seek no gate at all since they do not thirst after God or desire to understand his Truth (cf. Ro.3:11).

Many who have not seen the narrow gate have only fallen into an outward form of worship without inward love. This is one of Satan's traps. We have seen that God desires us to worship Him ***not*** in religious form nor in some particular place, but "…in Spirit and in Truth" (Jn.4:23). We who believe have seen the significance of the spiritual nature of this present age of grace, and for that reason we should no longer be fooled by stone edifices and earthly organizations nor should we be misled by the words of the false teachers. We know that salvation comes only from God through his grace, and that it cannot be obtained by means of religious form, ritual, or ceremonial observance that becomes meaningless works to those who have not been redeemed by the Lamb of God. Those to whom God has shown mercy have come to trust the person of Jesus Christ for their every hope, and have come to love Him for his marvelous works on the cross.

The Difficult Paradox

How could we consider all of the institutions that call themselves a church, today, the body of Christ? We would even need to include obvious cults that arrogantly claim the name "Christian" or "church." We would do Christ great dishonor to directly associate Him with all such organizations. To state that a worldly, corrupt assembly is, in fact, the "body of Christ" merely because its organizers choose, in ignorance or arrogance, to call themselves "The Church" is nothing short of blasphemy!

We must remember that the true Church belongs to the Lord Jesus and is exclusively composed of his Father's chosen or "called out" members. The church is also a called out assembly of believers many of whom are also members of the visible Church on earth, but we must be equally aware that the temporal churches also have many members that are not Christians at all. Rather, sad to say, churches in general are mostly made up of constituents of a secular society that do not truly know Jesus as their savior — nor do they really care to know Him.

Therefore, we find ourselves faced with a difficult paradox. When we speak of the purity of the Church, and refer to her as the

"bride of Christ" and the "body of Christ," all of which is true to Scripture, we must somehow reconcile in our minds how that can be true considering the corruption and defection from the faith that we see to a greater or lesser degree in all of our churches today — as well as in the past. Even the best of our temporal churches have congregations whose members' lives individually and collectively fall far short of the standards necessary to live up to the high requirements required of the body of Christ. If that is so with the best, the worst of those churches surely must cause us to cringe at referring to them as the spotless "bride of Christ!"

How then can we ever reconcile this paradox? How can a corrupted temporal church be considered a physical attribute of the true Church that is free from all corruption, and how can the far from perfect churches be equated with the purity of Christ's own body and the beauty of his spotless bride? In fact, they cannot. Only the visible Church that lives within the greater temporal church can do so. Even then, we must realize that Christians on earth are still in the flesh even though they should make every effort to walk in the Spirit. That is, the visible Church as it exists in this age is made up of quite visible people who are not yet completely free of their old nature.

Though we have been declared sanctified in Christ as to our position before God, we yet lack complete sanctification on a practical level. It therefore follows that Christians themselves are also a paradox until we are taken out of this physical realm. We, like the Church itself, are already declared pure in the spiritual sense yet still lack purity in the physical sense. As is true of we ourselves, the visible Church will fully exhibit the purity that God has declared only when the dross is discarded from it at the time that it is taken out of this world.

Chapter 13.2 Sacramentalism

It is most unfortunate that the simple tradition of baptism and the privilege of the Lord's Supper became the instruments of traditional formalized Churchianity almost as soon as the apostles left the earthly scene. Their true meaning was distorted and embellished through added formalism and mysticism. Since that time, those rituals have been repeatedly abused from century-to-century to ensure the perpetuation of institutional Churchianity over elemental first-century Christianity. The primary substance of this abuse is the insistence that those rituals must be carried out only within the religious framework of a temporal church surrounded by formally ordained clergy in a prescribed manner. Thus, ownership of those two rituals became claimed by the temporal church, and it was seen as its own exclusive property to give out or to withhold as it saw fit.

Origin of the word "Sacrament"

Theologians have always sought to find a single comprehensive word to express a complex doctrine in order to avoid becoming swamped in voluminous repetition such as the word "Trinity" when describing the Godhead as we saw earlier in Book I of this work. No exception, the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper and all that they involve have often been reduced to a single word that purports to represent both. The most common word used over the centuries is "sacraments." The Latin word *sacrament* is not found in the *King James* (Authorized) translation or for that matter in any other English translation of the Bible and, like "Trinity," it is not a word used or coined by any of the New Testament writers.

The primary meaning of the word *sacrament* is a "solemn pledge or oath." We can understand that both ritual baptism and the Lord's Supper can be viewed as God's solemn pledge and oath (or seal) given to his elect. As long as we understand the word *sacrament* in this way and use it in that sense, it is a reasonable word to describe those rituals. However, we must be very clear that it is ***not*** our promise

or our oath given to God. It is we who receive the promises and God who graciously provides them.

Unfortunately, the word *sacrament* carries with it additional baggage suggesting that it is "something regarded as possessing an intrinsic sacred character or mysterious significance." The Greek word *musterion* was translated *sacrament* in the Latin Vulgate and that is the origin of the anglicized word that is in use today. In English texts, the Greek word *musterion* was directly translated as "secret," "mystery," or "hidden things." It is in the sense of mystery that the word "sacrament" begins to deviate from it being an acceptable term. While there are many places in Scripture where the Greek word *musterion* is found, it is not found anywhere in connection with either ritual baptism or the Lord's Supper. (Ep.1:9; 3:3; Col.1:26; 1Ti.3:16 etc.). Consequently, there is no ***Scriptural*** reason why either *musterion* or *sacrament* should be used in connection with either the tradition of ritual baptism or the Lord's Supper.

The Latin word *sacrament* was first applied to those ritual practices during the Roman Catholic Church era. Using words like "sacred," "mystery," or "hidden" tended to put a supernatural cloak of obscurity around ritual baptism and the Lord's Supper that, in the Roman church, could only be penetrated by ordained priests. The laity could engage in either practice only as a third party through the bishops of the Roman church who alone "held the keys" to the "mystery" (Lu.11:52). That, restriction in effect, separates the believer from the body and blood of Christ by a wall of clergy. This most likely emulates the hated practice of the Nicolaitans that Jesus mentioned in his letters to the seven churches found in the book of the Revelation (Re.2:6,15).

We find the mysterious aspect of the word *sacrament* demonstrated in the Roman Catholic "celebration of the Mass" to this very day. The Roman Catholic Mass is a supposed sacrifice of the Eucharist[41] (bread and wine) that has been mysteriously transformed

[41] The word Eucharist is derived from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving.

into the actual body and blood of Christ.[42] The Mass is still recited in most countries in Latin further adding to the enigma. Exactly how the word "mass" relates to the ritual of the Lord's Supper is difficult to determine in as much as the Latin word, *maesse*, merely means "dismissal." It is not clear whether "mass" could refer to the dismissal of sin, the dismissal of Christ in the sacrifice, or the final dismissal of the congregation afterward. However, the root word *missa* (meaning "sent") suggests that it probably is derived from the early custom of sending forth bread from the bishop's Mass to other churches in Rome in order to symbolically cement their political alliance with the universal bishop.

Through the error of the Mass and by further shrouding both ritual baptism and the Lord's Supper in a cloud of mystery, their true significant meanings are kept hidden from the believer. That relegates the sacraments to mere superstitious ceremonies in which the participants can respond only in religious ignorance. That should not ever be, and accordingly it is the intent of Section 15 of this work to penetrate and dissolve that supposed mystery through the careful study of Scripture.

Church Ordinances

Since the word "sacrament" carries so much Roman baggage with it, many Protestant churches choose to refer to both baptism and the Lord's Supper as "ordinances." This term effectively refutes the mysticism associated with the Roman Mass. Again however, we find that the word "ordinance" though found in various places in Scripture has no direct connection with either ritual baptism or the Lord's Supper. That is quite true, although some say that it is implied indirectly by the Apostle Paul's words in his first epistle to the Corinthians: "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you" (1Co.11:2). Nevertheless, there is no immediate context to support that

[42] We shall take up the error of transubstantiation in Chapter 15.5 page 450 of this book.

view, as examining surrounding passages will make quite clear. The proper translation from the Greek in this verse should be rendered "traditions" rather than "ordinances." It most probably was used only in the context of Paul providing them a personal example for individual Christian conduct through his teaching.

The word "ordinance" implies a "law," a "command," or a "decree." It is something that must be obeyed to the letter and backed up by force. If a believer has not submitted to the ritual of baptism, he is seen to be disobedient to Christ. To see either ritual baptism or the Lord's Supper in the context of a law, a command, or decree is to give in to a form of legalism at the very moment we are invited to participate in an expression of utmost grace. The implication of the term "ordinance," is that we must initially receive grace through submission to baptism and the maintenance of our salvation by engaging in the Lord's Supper under the force of law through the physical medium of a ritual. The practices then become a matter of ritualistic works. In the Roman Catholic view, saving grace is actually distributed directly and only through the sacraments as the organized church administers them. By redefining the term "sacraments" as "ordinances" to be administered exclusively by the church, we could still find ourselves in close agreement with this serious error.

The term, "ordinance," as it is usually interpreted requires the believer to submit to the rules (laws or ordinances) of a particular Protestant denomination or temporal church in order to engage in fellowship with other believers and be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. In many Protestant churches, ritual baptism is actually seen to separate the believer from the unbeliever. That is, those who have not received baptism in their church are in effect treated as unbelievers or at best "seekers." Membership is almost universally denied unless the believer submits to the church's own rules regarding the time and mode of ritual baptism. In some churches, this rule prevails regardless of any baptismal ritual to which the believer may have earlier submitted.

Either term, sacrament or ordinance, attempts to position a mere ritual between man and God in an attempt to block grace as a free unconditional gift bestowed directly by God. The church seeks to

place itself in Christ's stead to administer grace as it sees fit thus denying the Holy Spirit's role in doing so. Instead of the local church providing the opportunity to celebrate the gift of grace in fellowship with other believers, more often the church arrogantly denies it to them.

Christian Privilege

Either of the words, sacrament or ordnance, only reinforces modern-day Churchianity. We must be very clear about the fact that there is now no more intervening substance, temple, temporal church, or ritual, between the believer and the grace of God; Jesus Christ has provided an open door to all that believe in Him (Mt.27:51)!

Therefore, a word to be preferred over using either "sacrament" or "ordinance" is "privilege," since it is the God given privilege of Christians to engage in those two practices because of their newfound spiritual identity in Jesus Christ. Who can testify and identify himself with Christ through the mere outward cleansing of water if he has not already been fully immersed in Christ by the workings of the Holy Spirit? Can bathing in water bring down God's Spirit to dwell within him? Furthermore, who, by his own actions, can identify himself with the body and blood of Christ by merely drinking the fruit of the vine and eating bread if we are not already spiritually identified with Christ in his atoning death? Do various acts of ritual bathing, eating, or drinking in any way exalt us in the eyes of God? He who engages in those rituals for that reason only brings more judgment upon himself (cf. 1Co.11:27–29) because of his false testimony and the partaking of that that is the privilege of true believers, not make-believers.

Those practices are not something that we must do in obedience to Christ to earn or maintain our salvation; we are not ever commanded to do them. Nor should they be made over into something that we must do in order to join ourselves to or maintain our membership in a local church. They are something that God has given us the privilege to participate in to provide the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to aid us in confirming our faith in Christ. We are lovingly ***invited*** to identify ourselves with Christ through those simple rituals

because we are still in the weakness of human flesh and need those tangible acts to encourage us.

Rituals Do Not Convey Saving Grace

In no way do those two practices, themselves, provide a means of salvation. In fact, to participate in those rituals before we receive salvation, would only serve to condemn us (1Co.11:27). We have seen that our salvation is to be founded totally in the redemptive power of the atoning blood of Christ. Our redemption rests solely upon the ***objective fact*** that Jesus offered Himself a living sacrifice for our sins. To believe in the efficacy of those rituals in and of themselves is to give a foot-hold to evil men who would use those very practices, which were given as a tangible means to aid us in the assurance of our faith, to place believers under both civil and religious bondage to them through legalism.

Since our salvation is totally secure apart from those practices, some may ask why we should engage in them at all. The chief answer to this question is that we can see that ritual baptism and the Lord's Supper are both reasonable responses for a believing Christian as long as we view them as a privilege through which we can more intimately identify ourselves in the flesh with the Holy Spirit in the new birth and with Christ in his death. Though they are not in themselves a conveyance of grace, they are a means by which we can ***subjectively*** confirm the grace of God, which we have already received, in a tangible way. They are something that we can do out of an open heart filled with love to serve our faith before God and provide a testimony before men as God Himself makes provision for our fleshly weaknesses.

Roman Multiplication of Sacraments

The Roman church expanded their list of "sacraments" from two to seven in order to increase the political hold of the church upon both believers and unbelievers alike. The seven "sacred things" of the Roman church were baptism and the Eucharist (that had become a distortion of the Lord's Supper in the "Mass"), to which were added confirmation, penance, extreme unction, orders, and even marriage. In

that way, the temporal church sought to completely control the lives of all the people under their domination from cradle to grave in all personal and social as well as religious realms. Though Christian marriage is a wonderful Christian tradition, it should be made quite clear that there is no biblical mandate for the additional five church "sacraments."

By wielding the "sacraments" like a sword and declaring them as the exclusive means of receiving God's grace, all people, even including powerful monarchs, were forced to yield to the demands of the powerful imperial Roman church of that day. The "sacraments" were also used to obtain and retain political power by threatening to withhold spiritual grace from any who would disagree with the edicts of the Roman church hierarchy. Not only did the church threaten to withhold grace, they also threatened and directed physical punishment up to and including death for any infraction of various church ordinances.

Contemporary Proprietary Abuse

Today's Protestant churches have variously moderated their hold on the lives of individuals in their congregations, but most still insist that baptism and the Lord's Supper must be exercised exclusively within the confines of a local church institution. The common reason given for this insistence is that the rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper would be abused and degraded if not properly supervised by clergy. There is, no doubt, some truth in that assumption. However, within the Corinthian church so much error was prevalent in the ritual of the Lord's Supper that the Apostle Paul had to rebuke them in the first letter he sent to them (1Co.11:17–34). Since Paul saw that elders were appointed wherever churches were founded, it would appear that the laity held no singular claim on this error (Tit.1:5). Even today, well-supervised churches have continued to introduce erroneous notions into those practices. Many churches seem to be even more involved with introducing error surrounding the significance and restriction of those practices and claiming exclusive administrative rights to them than reaching the lost for Christ.

We must certainly agree that reverence and guidance is not only reasonable and proper, it is imperative any time or place that baptism is administered or the Lord's Supper is celebrated and is not something ever to be taken lightly. Therefore, the meeting of the local church should provide the ***ideal*** occasion for the exercise of those rites as long as they are supervised without dictating arbitrary rules and imposing unreasonable extra-biblical constraints upon believers.

Nevertheless, to say that a church with an ordained clergy is the ***only*** way that those rites can ***ever*** be exercised is entrapment of the same sort, if not magnitude, that the Roman church exercised them. In some foreign lands, small groups of believers gather in home churches to worship and therefore quite often have no formal church structure or ordained clergy to guide them. Should their members be denied the privilege of participating in baptism and the Lord's Supper just because they have no accredited church hierarchy to authenticate them? Why should we as Christians add to their persecution by denying them the free exercise of the very grace that is the cause of their persecution by the ungodly?

Some years ago, a well known and highly respected retired minister sought to provide comfort to shut-ins and others, whose circumstances resulted in them being found outside local churches, with an audio tape that guided them through the Lord's Supper ritual in a reverent and proper way. The tapes were offered without any monetary obligation whatsoever over a radio broadcast that had consistently supported local church attendance. Yet, there was an immense cry of outrage from organized churches against the distribution of that tape because it infringed upon their own little domains.

As a result, many believers were deprived of the privilege as Christians to engage in the Lord's Table based solely upon the fact that they were unable to attend a church on Sunday morning because no sound church was locally available, their necessary employment inhibited them, or that they could not attend for reasons of poor health. One must wonder if those are the same churches that say they are praying for revival while at the same time they deny basic Christian liberty. If it is truly the Lord's Table as they claim, how can

institutionalized churches simultaneously claim sole ownership and control over it?

Conclusions

As we can clearly see, even the two simple rituals of baptism and the Lord's Supper can lead to superstition, suspicion and division among believers as well as become the basis for a form of tyranny exercised by temporal church leaders. Both of the rituals began as quite simple expressions of faith using the very simplest of elements; there is nothing mysterious about water, grape juice, and bread. The ceremonies themselves were never intended to be complicated or restrictive. They began as quite simple observances that have been unnecessarily complicated, restricted, and controlled by institutionalized church organizations to serve their own ends. Not satisfied with that, some churches have also added additional rituals and strict liturgies to those two biblical rituals over time to increase their hold upon the masses.

We know that water, juice of the grape, and bread were readily available to every believer in their own homes in the early days of the Church, not just made available to the clergy in a church building (Ac.2:46). If those rituals were to have been administered only by a select few under strict control, surely such simple and available elements would not have been chosen. The fact is that baptism and the Lord's Supper were not ever meant to be restricted to "super saints," but were to be made readily available to all who believed in Jesus Christ in order that the greater body of believers would be encouraged, strengthened, and would continue to grow in numbers.

Chapter 13.3 The Sabbath and the Lord's Day

The custom of Christians observing the first day of each week, that is Sunday, as a day of rest or a "sabbath" day is quite common and shall be considered first. In the next chapter, we shall briefly discuss Christmas and Easter as well as the various days associated with them. Those observances fall into the category of harmless tradition on the surface, but there is a need for Scriptural caution in the exercise of all tradition connected with the observance of days. As Paul noted, one day of the week is not intrinsically more holy than is any other day since God created them all (cf. Ro.14:5). Unfortunately, the mandatory attendance of church services on Sunday is a basic underpinning of Churchianity.

The Sabbath

Since many today confuse the weekly worship day of Christians with the Jewish Sabbath Day, (Ex.31:12–17), we must first study the Sabbath Day, as it was first given to the Jews. The origin of Sabbath-rest is to be found in creation itself. God rested from all his labors on the seventh day, after having created the Earth and all that dwells upon it (Ge.2:2,3). Yet, actual Sabbath-day observance by man is not mentioned in Scripture until the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, were told not to collect manna on the seventh day (Ex.16:26). The Israelites were given a double portion of manna on the sixth day so that they could rest from their journeys on the seventh day (Ex.16:5).

God had ordained their wanderings as punishment for their disobedience in not entering Canaan, the Promised Land. Through an act of grace, the Sabbath Day observance was instituted by God as a day of rest for Israel from their exhaustive desert wanderings and therefore had a practical beneficial purpose. Since God had only worked six days and rested on the seventh, He graciously granted Israel the same privilege that He had enjoyed. Just as God had taken a day to reflect on all that He had created, He granted the Jew the same

opportunity to rest from their labors and to survey the works and glory of God and his creation.

Moral Quality of the Sabbath

We must take special note of the fact that a day of rest was instituted by God in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments (Ex.20:8), not in the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law was public and ritualistic, while the Decalogue specifically referred to personal moral thought and conduct of individuals rather than public worship. Yet, it was not long after the Decalogue was given that a great amount of outward ritual and petty-legalism became associated with the Sabbath. The Scribes in Jesus' day had instituted many legal restrictions that had made Sabbath-day observance a rigid ceremonial snare. Jesus had many disputes with the Scribes and Pharisees over the observance of the Sabbath because Jesus took a firm stand that the Sabbath was established for man's personal ***benefit***, not for a ritualistic ceremonial exhibition to somehow appease God (cf. Mk.2:27). This is something that most believers still often fail to understand today.

That is precisely the difficulty the Scribes and Pharisees were having with ***all*** of the moral Law, not just Sabbath observance. They had heaped up so many regulations in connection with an outward ***ceremonial*** observance of the Decalogue that no one could bear it! Unlike the ceremonial law, the Ten Commandments were never intended to be ritually observed; they were to be responded to with obedience from within the hearts of individual men and women. It is impossible to create personal obedience from mere outward ritual, since hypocrisy is always the ultimate result. In Luke 11:46, Jesus said, "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." For both his remarks and his actions, Jesus was considered a law-breaker by the legalists of that day in the matter of a ritualistic observance of the Sabbath. Let us take a close look at some of the instances of those accusations that are recorded in the New Testament text.

Good Works Never Prohibited on the Sabbath

In the Gospel of John an instance is recorded where Jesus healed an invalid man (Jn.5:5–9). This is one of four recorded instances where Jesus healed on the Sabbath. After the man was healed, he was told by Jesus to take up his bed and walk. When the man did so, the Jews admonished him that it was the Sabbath day, and it was not lawful for him to carry his bed. Rather than rejoicing in seeing this man healed and well, they only saw the breaking of their strict ritual code! Here we perceive the extent with which the Jews were occupied with outward ceremonial observance of the entire Law. When the man learned that his benefactor was Jesus, he told the Jews that Jesus had made him whole. Then, the Jews wanted to persecute Jesus as well for breaking the law because He had healed the man and then instructed him to "do work" on the Sabbath.

Jesus' response to them was, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Jn.5:17). Since God, his Father, worked on the Sabbath Day, Jesus worked also. Jesus went on to describe his "oneness" with the Father that required Him to continually do the works of God. The Sabbath Day was instituted as a day of rest for man, not for God. When man the creature fell, God's own creation rest was interrupted. No longer was his creation "very good" as it was when He had first finished his work (cf. Ge.1:31). God does not rest one day out of seven from his work of redemption (Ps.121:3,4), but unlike man, who has been granted a redemption rest, He continually works in the day of rest to make that redemption sure.

In the account of Matthew Chapter 12, Mark Chapter 3, and Luke Chapter 6, we read of another account of Jesus healing on the Sabbath. It would appear that the man with the withered hand was purposefully placed in the synagogue, by the Jews, where Jesus would be sure to see him, inasmuch as the legalists wished to be able to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath. Jesus was only given two choices: obey a false and legalistic ceremonial observance of the moral law and refuse to heal the man, or observe the spirit and intent of the law and heal him. The letter of the Law, as the Scribes and Pharisees strictly interpreted it, disagrees with the spirit of the law since the

Sabbath was established entirely for man's benefit, not for God's satisfaction. Jesus asked, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life or kill" (Mk.3:4)? The Pharisees could not answer Him, for they, themselves, had just sought to do evil rather than good on the Sabbath. The fact that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath demonstrates an axiom that it is never unlawful to do good works regardless of the day, but evil works are always unlawful.

A certain man who had the dropsy was also healed (according to the Gospel of Luke Chapter 14). Here, Jesus directly asked those present if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (cf. Lu.14:3). The chief Pharisee may have been one of those who had set a trap for Jesus earlier since he did not answer Him. After Jesus healed the man, Jesus asked which one of them would not pull one of their domestic animals out of a pit on the Sabbath day. Again, they could not answer, for they knew it would not be right to allow an animal to die or become crippled and diminish its usefulness and value. How much less right then is it to refuse a man, whom God highly values, healing on the Sabbath?

We observe this same principle in Luke Chapter 13. Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath when He observed a woman that was bowed together such that she could not straighten up. Jesus placed "his hands on her; and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God" (Lu.13:13). This time, Jesus asked if they did not water their animals on the Sabbath and since that was so, "ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day" (Lu.13:16)?

The physical healing that Jesus performed was but an example of the spiritual healing and forgiveness of sins that can be found only in the person of Jesus Christ (Mt.9:5–6). We live in an age of grace where the spiritually healing works of Christ on the cross are available to all that will believe in Him. They who trust in Him are all loosed from the bonds of sin and depravation. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1Pe.2:24).

The Sabbath was and is a day in which man rested from his labors while God unilaterally continued to work on his behalf.

Therefore, good works are always proper whether the day is a workday, the Jewish Sabbath, or the day we set aside for Christian worship. If we have good things that are in God's will to do, we should not neglect them in order to satisfy an ill-perceived ceremonial "letter of the Law." God always looks on the inward man, not the outward man. Man must satisfy the requirements of God's Law in love from his heart, not through legalistic observance of the mind or a mere outward ceremonial performance.

In Luke 4:16, we read that Jesus, Himself, attended worship in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He often taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath when the Jews gathered together. Therefore, Jesus had not set Himself against the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, but against the strict ritualistic attitude that undermined its true meaning and purpose.

The Christian Day of Worship

Jews not only kept the Sabbath Day as a day of rest from ordinary labors, they also took advantage of this same day to worship in their local Synagogues and to visit the Temple. We see that it had a two-fold purpose — rest and worship. All of the first Christians were Jews, the faithful remnant of Israel who had embraced their Messiah. Consequently, they initially continued to keep the Sabbath as was the manner of their tradition on the last day of the week, but in addition to that they began celebrating the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week.

The Sabbath Day Unchanged

There is no specific mandate recorded anywhere in Scripture for instituting a change from the last day of the week to the first as a day for the corporate worship of God. Rather, that came about because of the split that occurred between the Jewish Christians and their fellow Jews that made the Temple and Synagogues off limits to them, as well as from the simple meetings of Christians that were already taking place early on the first day of each week. Eventually, Jewish

Christians worshiped exclusively on the first day of the week, while continuing to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest from their labors.

Still later, when Gentiles came into the Church they also worshiped on the first day of the week, having never before observed a Sabbath day — a day of rest. We must recall that the Jerusalem council ruled that the Gentiles should not be placed under the strict ceremonial requirements of the Law (Ac.15:10,24). That would also have included any ***ceremonial*** observance of the Sabbath day as well.

It is important to note that the first day of the week in biblical times was never set aside as a "day of rest;" that is, it was not a "sabbath" at all ("sabbath" meaning "rest"). Christians met together early in the day and then went on to perform their daily labors. From various historical documents, it can also be shown that Christians met in the evening hours on the first day of the week as well as the morning hours (cf. Ac.20:7). Early Jewish Christians certainly did not find any fault with worshipping Jesus Christ on the first day of the week, but they knew, as should we, that the Sabbath day remained on the last day of the week.

Early Christian gatherings were held to comfort and encourage each other and to celebrate the Lord's Supper not to observe a day of rest — not a second Sabbath day or a substitute for the Sabbath Day. Because of intensive persecution of Christians by unbelieving Jews, and later by the Roman authorities as a consequence of rumors being spread that they were actually eating human flesh and drinking human blood (in the commemoration of the Lord's Supper), those meetings had to be held in secret and quite often under cover of darkness.

Therefore, the Jewish Sabbath day clearly remains on the last day of the week, not the first. Only the day on which God's people worship has been changed to the first day in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. If we still were required to legalistically keep the Sabbath day ceremonially as a forced day of rest, we must then observe Saturday, not Sunday. That, of course, does not take into consideration the fact that our calendar is disjointed to the point that we can not be sure which day is truly the last of the week when it is extended from biblical times. Moreover, the vast majority of Christians today are Gentiles, not Jews. Gentile Christians are not only

free from being judged under the Law, through God's grace which has been extended to them in Christ, they do not have any of the past traditions of the Jews. Why then should they seek to place themselves under a false ceremonial observance of the moral Law by ritually observing the Jewish Sabbath day? That is, in fact, the same error that Jews were making in Jesus' day.

It should be noted that Jesus repeated all of the Ten Commandments in his teaching with the one exception of the keeping of the Sabbath day. In order for the Jew to accept grace, it was necessary for him to leave behind the legalistic and ceremonial foreshadows which pointed to Christ in order to accept the reality that Christ had come — as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews clearly exhorted them to do. Jesus had appeared to his disciples at various times on the weekly anniversary of his resurrection. It is specifically recorded that He appeared to Thomas on the first day of the week (cf. Jn. 20:26). Therefore, we observe that Christ Himself encouraged the weekly resurrection-day gathering of the faithful to worship God.

The Lord's Day

The day of Christian worship is quite often referred to as the Lord's Day to avoid the error of referring to it as the Sabbath Day. We actually find the words "the Lord's day" in English translations of the book of Revelation (Re.1:10). Here, the Apostle John said he was in the Spirit on the "Lord's Day." We must realize that some difficulty is found when translating the Greek expression *kyriake hemera* from which this translation is taken, since this is the only place in the New Testament where this exact expression is used. For that reason, the adjective *kyriake* could also be translated as "royal" or "imperial" [43] such that the expression could be interpreted as "Imperial Day," or even "Venerable Day of the Sun" (i.e. Sunday).

Moreover, it could be that John was actually referring to the ***annual*** anniversary day of the resurrection of Christ (erroneously referred to as Easter Sunday today) inasmuch as the adjective *kyriake*

[43] *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament,* Alfred Marshall

is also found in First Corinthians 11:20 where Paul specifically used it in making reference to the Lord's Supper celebration (*hyriakon deipnon).* In this latter sense, John could even be referring to the Second Advent when Christ will once again appear on the earth. John may have been saying that he was in the Spirit on "the day belonging to the LORD." The final Day of Judgment is often referred to in Scripture as that great and terrible "day of the LORD" as it is found in Isaiah and Jeremiah (Is.13:6,9;34:8; Je.46:10). Considering the revelation that John was subsequently given, we certainly cannot deny the possibility of that interpretation.

Yet, John's use of the expression "day of the Lord" may very well have referred to the day on which Christians commonly met together weekly, and in the absence of any better term it is much more appropriate to use Lord's Day than to confuse two distinct worship days by using the word "sabbath."

Today, there has been considerable legalism raised in connection with the weekly day of Christian worship. Some, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, would have us go back to the old Sabbath Day (i.e. Saturday) observance. Others would have the Lord's Day observance so rigidly adhered to that no commercial trade or services would be allowed on Sunday. In the past, that strict view resulted in the passing of so-called "blue laws" forbidding most if not all business transactions on Sundays. Those are somewhat reminiscent of the strict laws enacted by the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day.

A major difficulty with "blue-laws" is that they force a false observance of the Lord's resurrection upon a large segment of the nation's population that is not Christian. That only results in resentment, not repentance because it is an enforcement of Law, not an offer of grace. No one should seriously think that prohibiting formal work on Sundays would result in the conversion of the unrepentant. The Lord's Day observance only has significance for believers, not unbelievers.

Time of Worship in the Early Church

At what hour did the early church commemorate the Lord's Day? Apart from historic accounts, considerable insight may be gained

by reading in the book of Acts, Chapter 20 beginning at verse 7. The disciples at Troas are mentioned as having come together to break bread, no doubt to commemorate the Lord's Supper. We could assume, as some have, that the Apostle Paul began speaking early in the morning and, continuing all day, was still speaking at midnight. Yet, a more reasonable assumption is that the meeting actually began in the evening, after a hard day of work. Evening would also be a more appropriate time to observe the Lord's Supper, since the Passover supper was always partaken of at sundown, and Jesus' last supper with his disciples was also partaken of in the early evening hours. We also read in the account that lights had been prepared in advance as would have been required for an evening meeting (Ac.20:8).

After an incident when a young man fell asleep and consequently fell from the loft, Paul stayed up and "talked" until morning when he departed. We must ask ourselves if the young man fell asleep as a result of Paul's preaching all day long, or as a result of a tiring day's work (Ac.20:9). It is much more likely that the latter is true. He was tired because of physical labor, and because Paul's preaching continued long into the evening hours, he fell sound asleep. While there is significance in the fact that it was "the first day of the week", there is absolutely no reason to believe that the day had been observed as a day of rest or that the worship service had extended for the entire day as a celebration of the "Lord's Day."

Sabbatarianism

There is a real danger in referring to the Christian meeting day on the first day of the week as the "Sabbath Day" or the "Christian Sabbath," as many do. We must always be on guard against placing ourselves back under the strict letter of the Law, as did the Pharisees, when we have been so wondrously released and redeemed by a dispensation of grace! As we have seen repeatedly in this series of studies, law and grace cannot ever be mixed together, and any attempt to do so disqualifies us from experiencing redemption through grace (Ro.11:6).

Our concern should not be so much that we ***call*** the weekly Christian meeting day "the Sabbath," but whether by doing so we

mislead ourselves and others to observe the day in the same manner as did the Jew as we in turn worship it as a replacement for the Jewish Sabbath. To do so would be to place ourselves again under the bondage of every other requirement of the Law that condemned us, thus frustrating the grace of the Gospel of Christ that has freed us from the Law of sin and death that slew us because of our imperfections (cf. Ro.7:10,11). Therefore, we would do well to oppose Sabbatarianism, which is the strict legal and ceremonial observance of any day, whether Saturday, Sunday, or any other day of the week as a "Christian Sabbath Day."

Origin of the Term "Christian Sabbath"

We may wonder how the tradition of not doing any work on Sunday first began. It was not until or about the year A.D. 325 that Sunday was established as an official "day of rest" for Christians or a "Christian Sabbath day." The origin of the tradition is therefore extra-biblical. Christians may have met prior to that date at various times, although it is likely that early on the first day of the week was a common time because of the commemoration of Jesus' resurrection.

Though persecutions had been extremely heavy, nearly half the Roman Empire openly professed Christianity by this time. The Roman Emperor Constantine, himself, openly professed to believe in Christ, and as a part of Constantine's general toleration and preference for Christians, he established Sunday as a day in which no ordinary work could be done. In so doing, he also officially set aside Sunday as the day when all Christians should assemble for worship. Therefore, correlation of the Lord's Day with the Sabbath was the consequence of a decision made by secular political authority in the fourth century, and it was not derived from any careful consideration of Scripture or even by a declaration of the established church. Therefore, Sunday observance as a ritualistic day of rest is traditional rather than Scriptural.

How We Should Regard the Lord's Day

How then should Christians regard the Lord's Day? Should we consider ignoring the long-standing tradition of resting from

burdensome labors on Sunday merely because it is not directly established in Scripture? Should we furthermore encourage labor on that day to resolutely affirm that it is truly not the Jewish Sabbath? If we do so, we would find ourselves being as contentious as those who would make its observance into a rigid legalistic ritual. We should find no fault in using the day as it has been handed down to us by tradition as a day of rest from ordinary labor, and a day to contemplate the things of God. Not that we are ***required*** to observe the day by any mandate of law, but that we are ***privileged*** to have that day set aside in which to worship the God of grace!

No matter that some would use the day frivolously, wasting time on trivial pastimes. No matter that others would observe it in false religious piety, merely going through the motions as a sense of duty to a vain ritual. Some may sincerely believe that it is a sacred day set aside (i.e. Holy) to God, while rank unbelievers only see it as yet another day of worldly opportunity. While we have the liberty to do as we wish with the day, let us rejoice that it grants us the opportunity to set aside time from our ordinary labor to assemble to worship God openly and in peace as we desire and choose.

Rather than concerning ourselves with a strict ceremonial observance of this one day of the week, we would do well to examine ourselves regarding the remaining six days. For, truly, no day is above another since God sustains us in them all, and God has not rested from his work of redemption since the fall of man. We should utilize each Lord's Day with care, even as we should use ***every*** day of our lives that God has given to us. The exercise of our faith cannot be restricted to one day in seven. Should we pray only on Sunday? Should we praise God only on Sunday? Should we study his Word only on Sunday? Should we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit only on Sunday? God has given us life in abundance through Jesus Christ — every day of the week the same. Moreover, we must carefully consider the rest and peace that Jesus gives us, not just on the Lord's Day, but also in every waking hour of every day. Perhaps the most serious difficulty of all with a ritual observance of Sunday as a Sabbath day is the potential loss of that reality.

The True Meaning of Sabbath Observance

As we observed earlier, Sabbath day observance is a part of the Decalogue, not part of the ceremonial Law. The purpose of the ceremonial portion of the Law was ***totally*** fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ. All Temple worship ended when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in A.D. 70. Jesus also fulfilled all of the requirements for the moral law in his flesh as the perfect man. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Mt.5:17,18).

Therefore, we observe that the Ten Words of the Decalogue remain as a hard-and-fast list of God's requirements for our moral conduct. Certainly, we are no longer under the condemnation of the moral Law, since we are being saved completely by God's grace alone (Ro.8:1). Nonetheless, we still must recognize that the Decalogue is perfect and good since God gave it. In summary, the Law says we are to Love God with all our being and love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mt.22:37–39). Has the Law now become perverse because we are saved totally apart from our works as judged by the Law? In no way, because to disobey the Law of God is still mortal sin — for which Christ died.

The moral Law also states that we must observe the Sabbath. Since that is so, it follows that if we do not observe the Sabbath, we find ourselves deliberately disobeying the Law just as much as if we should murder or steal. However, what we must realize is that the Jewish Sabbath day merely pointed to a coming ***Sabbath age***. That is, it prefigured a day in the future in which man would totally cease from his labors — a day in which God alone would work to save man from his sins — this very day in which we now live and in which we can now fully ***rest*** upon the finished work of Christ.

When we fully reside in the grace of God and cease all of our own corrupt works, we actually keep the Sabbath — a Sabbath that is no longer dictated by law or veiled in ritual, but fully realized in the abundance of grace! No longer is the Sabbath observed in dark

shadow, but in brilliant reality — no longer in the letter that slays us, but in spirit and purpose that bids us live. The love of Christ that is shed forth in us by the Holy Spirit now constrains us to be obedient to the faith that has been given us, not laws and regulations that demanded impossible works and therefore inhibited rest (cf. 2Co.5:14). When we reject a rigid legalistic and ritualistic observance of any day of the week as the Sabbath in an attempt to gain favor with God, we actually uphold the true character of the Sabbath. We now have in substance what the Jews only had in form.

Christ the Substance of the Sabbath

As Christians, we rest daily in Jesus Christ, and in that true sense, Christ Himself is our Sabbath. We read of this in Paul's letter to the Colossians (Chapter 2 vs. 16–17) as Paul is warning them against formalism and mysticism. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a ***shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ***" (emphasis added). Therefore, we should not consider any one day above another considering it holy in itself because the observance of various days was but a shadow of things to come, while Christ is the objective substance that we now embrace.

Nor should we, as Gentiles, consider keeping any of the many other Hebrew ceremonial festivals that would be contrary to our new way of life. Jesus Christ has "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Col.2:14).

Vain Works Prevent Us from Resting in Christ

Let us explore further the rest that we have in Christ. The Old Testament example given in Hebrews Chapters 3 and 4 is that of the Israelites being promised "rest" in the land of Canaan after their miraculous deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Yet, the Israelites did not trust God to provide that rest so they first sent spies into the land, and seeing many obstacles, they failed to trust God to deliver on his promise (cf. Nu.14:3). Later, in prideful presumption, they attempted to take the land in their own strength (cf. Nu.14:40–45) and were

miserably humiliated and defeated. The Israelites could not enter into God's rest when He graciously offered to them because of their lack of faith in his Word over their own ability (cf. He.3:11).

Such is also an example of the Christian today who has been offered the rest of redemption, but fails to accept it at face value. Instead, he constantly looks for obstacles to its reality and for holes in its substance. Instead of seeing the wonderful rest of a completed and secure redemption, he constantly "spies" on his salvation with distrust and unbelief. Because of that distrust in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, he constantly seeks to grasp salvation through his own works. He desperately seeks any works he can find to justify his redemption — especially those works that he feels he can actually accomplish. In doing so, God is no longer with him inasmuch as he has already rejected the free and gracious invitation.

This attempt at self-justification is commonly made through a shadowy form of ritual or ceremonialism since the reality is obviously impossible to achieve. It becomes a constant struggle as he attempts to live up to God's perfect standards by whatever means he can muster. Because of his lack of faith in the finished work of Christ on his behalf, he cannot enter into God's rest! "He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ***ceased from his own works, as God did from his***" (He.4:10; emphasis added). God rested on the seventh day because his work of creation was completed. We also should rest from our works in this our "Sabbath Day" because our salvation is completed in Christ Jesus.

> **"I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto me and rest; Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon My breast.' I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad; I found in Him a resting place, and He has made me glad."**
> (*I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say,* Horatius Bonar)

Therefore, whatever works we may attempt to add to God's grace, whether Sabbath day observance or any other works of any kind, it will prevent us from entering into God's rest. Failing to trust in Christ's completed redemption, we shall instead wander through a wilderness of legalism, ritualism, and despair — wasted effort upon wasted effort with no hope, and no assurance. Therefore, since we

must strive to make our salvation sure, let us struggle to hold fast through faith to God's promise that we may cease from our fruitless labor of meaningless works — really believing — and finding everything we need complete in Him (cf. He.4:11). Hear again Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Mt.11:28). Ritualistic works of any sort is not rest, faith and trust in Him is rest. The Lord Jesus is our Sabbath and this age of grace is our wondrous day of rest.

Chapter 13.4 Observance of Other Days

Many temporal churches today observe a calendar filled with various Holy days commemorating assorted events that occurred in biblical times. While some of the dates commemorate events that occurred in Old Testament times, those days more especially commemorate various events that took place in the life of Jesus from his conception to his ascension and beyond. Connected with many of them is a liturgy that is followed to make that day special or set aside as holy.

While there may be no serious fault in remembering special events in the life of Jesus through a calendar observance, if we begin to consider those days as holy above other days it becomes an error most grievous. We soon begin to worship the day and the rituals surrounding it and in so doing forget what it is that we are commemorating. Since the temporal church has made itself central in all of those observances, it greatly accelerates Churchianity.

Advent

Many churches celebrate an ecclesiastical season known as Advent, a period more commonly known by the general public as the Christmas season. It begins four Sundays prior to Christmas. Because of the variation in the date of the month for the day of Thanksgiving in the United States, the first day of Advent variously starts on the first Sunday after Thanksgiving. Accordingly, the day after Thanksgiving is often viewed as the beginning of the Christmas shopping season and the start of "the holidays" by the secular world.

The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus* that simply means, "coming." Advent is an entire church calendar and liturgy built upon the celebration of the birth of Jesus. The four Sundays have no particular relationship to actual Scripture events, but they are probably derived instead from Eastern Orthodox tradition wherein the forty-day "Nativity Fast" or "Christmas Lent" began on November 28.[44] The period in which the tradition began is unknown,

[44] The Eastern Orthodox Church still uses the older Julian calendar making this date

but some believe it began unofficially in A.D. 380. Early tradition viewed Advent as a representation of the anticipative time of waiting of the Jews for the coming of their Messiah in parallel with the expectant waiting of Christians for the second coming of Christ.[45]

In similitude with Lent, which we shall later discuss below, the season of Advent was originally observed in the Roman Church with fasting and prayer as a means of preparation and in demonstration of their expectance. It was also attended by various other kinds of personal penance and self-denial prior to the day of Christmas. General merriment such as dancing and other amusements were heavily frowned upon if not prohibited altogether, and mandatory church attendance was heavily enforced for that same period.

Not all contemporary Protestant churches observe Advent. It must be understood that all of this ritual is born out of highly questionable tradition and is not derived from Scripture. While some see the days of Advent as an aid to their contemplation and worship during the season, others see Advent as an obstacle to true faith inasmuch as the ritual and pompous ceremony can easily obliterate the true meaning that is supposed to lie behind it. That is, the observance of the ritual itself becomes so enhanced with various outward embellishments that it inhibits true worship.

For instance, in those churches that do observe Advent, each Sunday's sermon is usually prepared with a special lesson regarding the Advent season that commonly centers on a wreath containing five candles. It should be noted that the burning of candles has a prominent place in various pagan ceremonies including devil worship and are prevalent in witches' warrens. It is most probable that this extra-biblical ceremony had its origin in the rampant paganism that was brought into the temporal church during the imperial Roman takeover of the temporal church.[46] The circular wreath is arbitrarily seen to

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correspond to November 15th for them.

[45] It is apparent that most if not all Gentiles were not awaiting the coming of a messiah at all since they lacked the religious background of the Jew.

[46] See The Roman Political Transition, Chapter 17.7, Book III of this work.

symbolize eternity that has no beginning or end. The fifth, and usually central, candle is lit on Christmas day or on the Sunday just prior to Christmas, while the other four candles are lit serially, one on each of the four Sundays of Advent prior to Christmas.[47]

The first candle is commonly seen as the candle of hope, or the prophecy candle. The second candle is seen as the candle of peace, or the Bethlehem candle. The third is seen as the candle of love, or the Shepherd's candle. The fourth is seen as the candle of Joy, or the Angel's candle. The central candle is referred to as the Advent or Christ's candle. To enhance the symbolic meaning, each of the candles is given a specific color, and the colors of the vestments worn by clergy are often changed to correspond. This ritual ceremony, of course, only serves to increase the grandeur of the temporal church in order to sustain and further promote Churchianity.

Special Advent calendars are also prepared and distributed in some churches that highlight the events of each week. Unfortunately, those are often used by children to cross off each day as they anticipate the arrival of Santa Claus, thus mixing legend in with earlier extra-biblical Christian tradition.

Christmas

Although Scripture does not mandate that one day a year be set aside to celebrate the birth of Christ, it also does not prohibit such a commemoration. The error is found in celebrating the wrong thing in the wrong way, as we shall soon observe. The word "Christmas" (*Cristes maesse*) means "Mass of Christ" and it is rooted in the Roman Catholic error of transubstantiation[48] found in the ritualistic Mass. That has led some, including the early Puritans, to avoid any celebration of the birth of Christ. Certainly, to engage in the observance of ritualistic error is obviously forbidden behavior for true Christians at all times.

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[47] One cannot fail to notice a similarity with the Menorah candles that are lit serially day-by-day by the Jews as they celebrate the rededication of the Temple on Hanukkah.

[48] See Error of Transubstantiation, page 450

Nonetheless, the term "Christmas" remains entrenched within the vocabulary of Protestant churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church. It is better described by some simply as the celebration of the Nativity or the Incarnation of Christ.

However, any attempt to formally change the name of the celebration from Christmas to a Scriptural term would be hopeless because of additional pagan tradition and corruption that attends the celebration of the day. We do find however a trend away from using Christmas by the secular world — not because they object to the term "mass," but that they object to the word Christ! They prefer to refer to the entire celebration simply as the Winter Holidays lest they miss out on all the pagan revelry associated with it. To them, any celebration of the Incarnation is only a religious adjunct to a well-established winter holiday[49] that spoils all its fun.

Sun Worship

Most of that which we call Christmas today has its origin in paganism, not Christianity. The winter solstice (which generally occurs on December 21st) is the time when the sun reaches its farthest distance to the south bringing the shortest day of the year to the northern hemisphere. The winter celebration is a form of sun (Sol) worship, and in that sense it is an annual worship related to the weekly observance of Sun Day (i.e. Sunday). The pagan believed that the sun won a victory, aided by their building of fires to help ward off the darkness, as was evidenced by the fact that the days soon again became longer. The Yule[50] time celebration relates to the Teutonic barbarian Goth who invaded and settled in parts of the Roman Empire.

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[49] The fact that the word "holiday" is derived from "holyday" is arrogantly ignored.

[50] Yule or "yole" means "akin to Goth." Today, the word "gothic" describes a rude or barbaric person as well as pertaining to various forms of architecture etcetera. that were prevalent in the middle ages.

Saturnalia

The Romans also worshiped one of their own gods, Saturn, at that time of the year. Beginning on December 17, there were seven days of merriment and revelry, referred to as Saturnalia, which reached its climax on December 24. The celebration consisted of the exchange of visits and gifts as well as the ceasing of all business activity for its duration. Slaves were often set free at this time. Even military campaigns and executions were stopped for this period. It was supposed to be a time of human good will toward others.

Associated with Saturnalia was the death of the Greek god Bacchus (or Dionysus) that was the god of wine. He was supposed to have died each winter and to be born again each spring when the grape vines were renewed. Certain so-called miracles involving wine were supposed to occur during the spring festival. The five-day spring festivals resulted in much licentiousness and drunken orgies. Those not receiving Bacchus' favor would become drunk and eventually go insane while his devoted followers would not. Though the Roman senate officially outlawed those orgies in 186 B.C., elements of the festival remained popular well past the first century A.D. Today, drunken orgies have become more closely associated with Christmas than celebrations associated with spring.

Fixing the date of Christmas

The day of the year on which Jesus was born is unknown and cannot be established precisely from Scripture or from secular history. December 25th is a manufactured date set to coincide with the various pagan celebrations that we have already discussed.

While most Protestants and Roman Catholics still observe December 25 as the day of the incarnation, that date is far from universal. Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate January 6,[51] and the

[51] January 6 was generally recognized by early tradition as the date of Jesus' baptism by John or "Epiphany" as the Messiah was revealed to mankind. This date was also used to celebrate his nativity as well since both his birth and his baptism can be seen as an unveiling of the Messiah to the world.

Armenian churches celebrate January 19. No celebration commemorating the birth of Christ is recorded at all prior to the time of Constantine at or about A.D. 325. The mix of paganism with Christianity, that was so prevalent in that age, caused the Roman church to place the day just after the winter solstice and at the conclusion of Saturnalia.

The concession of the Roman church to both the Yule celebration and Saturnalia was an attempt to make them over into Christian religious festivals. However, the Roman church further agreed to allow both pagan celebrations to continue much as they had always been conducted, thus completely negating that possibility. The consequence was that the day that had been designated for the celebration of the incarnation of Jesus Christ was immediately infused with pagan traditions. That infusion soon resulted in a complete syncretism of Christian tradition and paganism such that they can no longer be separated from each other. The error and paganism associated with Christmas at the very least should cause us to reflect upon what we truly commemorate at Christmas and how we go about celebrating the day.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree that is decorated with ornaments and lights likely had its origin in the Germanic mystery plays as the “paradise tree” which most probably was supposed to represent the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Germanic mysteries stem from various Scandinavian legends regarding the god of war, Odin, as well as Thor, god of thunder, and other supposed deities. Very little is known about the details of their worship because later Christian historians tended to characterize customs and beliefs associated with them in Christian thought and practice.

This is only another instance of attempting to blend paganism in with Christianity. It is difficult to know if the term "paradise tree" came from that blending or from the ancient legends themselves. The paradise tree only began to be used as a Christmas tree in Strasbourg France in the early seventeenth century. From there, it spread through Germany to the remainder of Europe and eventually made its way with

immigrants into the United States in the mid nineteenth century. As we can see the Christmas tree is a relatively modern innovation, but its roots date back into paganism.

Santa Claus

Dutch immigrants brought the tradition of Sinterklass or Sint Nikolaas to the United States. The celebration was originally held on the eve of December 6 (St. Nicholas' Day) wherein the patron saint (of Roman Catholic tradition) presented gifts to children. It was not originally connected with Christmas, but as English settlers took over the tradition, the name became Santa Claus and the tradition was moved forward to Christmas Eve.

From those various pagan traditions come much of the modern customs and revelry associated with Christmas. A large part of this modern tradition is the exchange of visits between friends, often bearing gifts, the burning of a giant Yule log, bonfires in some places, or just the stringing of lights. Holly, mistletoe, and wassail (punch) bowls also stem from those pagan traditions. We also see in those early traditions the origin of the drunkenness often associated with today's infamous office Christmas parties. The modern celebration of Christmas is most certainly pagan in origin, and it is not truly a celebration of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. No wonder there is a move afoot to remove Christ from Christmas.

Whether we choose to celebrate one day a year as the birth date of Jesus or not, God taking on human flesh (the incarnation) is a very significant historical event. Hidden underneath today's pagan ritual, mindless merry making, and rank commercialism is an astonishing event in human history, an event that Satan has largely clouded over in paganism. God, Himself, took on the form of sinful flesh in order to execute his plan for the redemption of mankind.

Lent

The Lenten season is a traditional period of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving that begins forty-six days before the day that we commemorate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Although the period

of Lent extends for forty-six days, Sundays are excluded from fasting and as such, it is actually a forty-day fast.

The name "Lent" is derived from the ancient Anglo-Saxon name for March inasmuch as the larger portion of the forty-six day fast occurred during the month of March. The original Roman term derived from the Latin was *quadragesima* meaning forty hours. The forty hours of fasting are believed to have been observed in the early Roman church just prior to Easter. That forty hours was then expanded to forty days — symbolic of the forty days of the flood in Noah's time, the forty days of Nineveh's fasting, the drought during which Elijah spent forty days in the wilderness, and the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness as He fasted and was tested in preparation for the beginning of his earthly ministry.[52]

The days included within the period of Lent are Ash Wednesday, Laetare Sunday, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. The Lenten season ends on the Saturday before Easter, often referred to as Holy Saturday.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is seen as a day of repentance for past sins. Ashes retained from the burning of palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday celebration are used to mark each participant's forehead with a symbol of the cross by a presiding minister or priest. That mark must remain on the forehead until after sundown thus symbolizing their acknowledgment that they are but dust (Ge.3:19).

Shrove Tuesday

Shrove Tuesday is not a true part of the season of Lent. Rather, it falls on the day before the Lenten fast begins. The word, "shrove" means "to confess to a dreadful unspeakable deed that is extracted under pressure to do so." While this would seem to be a proper day to examine one's heart and mind to confess past sins prior to the Lenten

[52] Various contemporary authors have latched on to this same 40-day concept to advocate a 40-day period of teaching or 40-days of renewal and revival in various church programs.

season, it has instead become a day to demonstrate even parade one's depravity in public. That is exemplified in the debauched celebration known as Marti Gras (meaning carnival — the satisfaction of fleshly lusts). While various days of Lent may be observed by Christians, the open exhibition of one's depravity is certainly not necessary to realize one's hopeless state and need for repentance. It does in fact only flaunt it as one who revels in it.

The festival of Mardi Gras (French: "Fat Tuesday") exposes the charade of this practice, as all manner of revelry and indulgence in food, drink, and intemperate debauchery is condoned the day before Ash Wednesday in expectation of the ritual of self-denial to follow. It recalls the earlier wickedness of the celebration of Lupercalia, a fertility festival that was held each February in ancient Rome, as various forms of gluttony, drunkenness, and indecency are carried on publicly in the streets as an advertisement of human depravity. Such blatant demonstrations deny the solemnity of the fast to follow.

Laetare Sunday

Laetare Sunday marks the midpoint of the period of Lent on the fourth Sunday, and Laetare is derived from the Latin word *laetari* meaning "to rejoice." The common musical introit to services on that day is "Laetare Jerusalem" or "rejoice ye Jerusalem." Laetare Sunday is more commonly referred to as Mid-Lent Sunday. Usually, only Roman Catholics, who are under a strict fast and period of abstinence for the period of Lent, take any special note of this day.

Palm Sunday

Unlike Ash Wednesday, most Protestant churches observe Palm Sunday along with Roman Catholics. Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter and coincides with the "triumphal entry" of Jesus into Jerusalem (cf. Mt.21:5,8–10; Mk.11:7–11; Lu.19:35–38; Jn.12:12,13). It should be pointed out that that was not truly a triumphal entry inasmuch as Jesus was rejected and ultimately crucified shortly after his entry into Jerusalem. All of the shouts of the same people that cried out "Hosanna" would soon turn to "crucify him, crucify him" (Lu.23:21).

That entry was only a precursor to the ultimate triumph when Jesus returns to take his rightful place as King upon the throne of Earth (cf. Ze.9:9). In the Gospel of Matthew, the phrases "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion," and "he is just, and having salvation" (salvation here meaning redemption from the yoke of oppression, which denotes total victory) are omitted. All of this will be fulfilled in his second advent. The account in the Gospel of John says, "Fear not, daughter of Sion," but there is no indication of the great rejoicing that will accompany his second coming.

Maundy Thursday

The Thursday before Good Friday is often commemorated annually as the day on which our Lord initiated the Lord's Supper upon the ambers of the dying feast of the Passover in preparing the apostles for his impending death on the cross. Many churches celebrate the Lord's Supper annually on the evening of Maundy Thursday in remembrance of his death just prior to the day we commemorate his crucifixion. Interestingly, the word "maundy" refers to money that was publicly handed out by various monarchs on this day.

Good Friday

The term "Good Friday" is confusing to many inasmuch as the word "good" does not seem to be appropriate for the day in which our Lord suffered and died on the cross. Others point out that when Jesus died for our sins, it was a good day indeed for mankind. However, the origin of the term seems to stem from a less profound consideration. Today, we may greet friends with "good morning," "good afternoon" or "good day." In times past it was the habit in various parts of the world to mention the day of the week, such as "good Monday," "good Tuesday," etcetera. Therefore, when Christians met on Friday to commemorate the day of our Lord's crucifixion it was quite natural for them to greet each other with "good Friday." Eventually, the day of the commemoration itself became known as Good Friday.

Many believe that the crucifixion, death, and burial of Jesus Christ did not take place on Friday at all, but on Wednesday or

Thursday. Tradition, unreliable at best, strongly insists on Friday. All tradition aside however the Scripture accounts contain ample evidence that the crucifixion took place on the day just before the High Sabbath day thus supporting tradition (Mk.15:42; Lu.23:54–56; Jn.19:31). The question regarding the day of the week arises because of the fact that three ***whole*** days and nights did not pass with Jesus in the tomb if He was placed there on Friday just before sundown. Jesus himself said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mt.12:39,40; cf. Jona.1:17).

However, the eastern usage of the word "day" (Gr. *hemera*) is different from the way we would use it. Three days can mean merely one whole day and the part of two other days. Thus, Jesus was in the tomb a few hours before sundown on Friday, all day Saturday, and for a few hours on Sunday morning, satisfying the three days. The word for night (Gr. *nux*) can mean night as we think of it (after sunset and before sunrise), or the time when work for the day ends. Therefore, it is possible to hold to Friday and still have the term "three days and three nights" satisfied.

Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday commemorates the time that the body of Jesus rested in the tomb. For that reason it is also referred to as "Great Sabbath" by some. (The Jew referred to this day as the "high Sabbath" in connection with the Passover celebration). Others remember the day as the day when Jesus' Spirit entered into Sheol (the place of the dead) to take the old covenant saints being held there into his train to first be resurrected from the dead at the time of his own resurrection and then to ascend with him thereafter into Heaven (cf. Ep.4:8). This explains the meaning of the controversial phrase in the *Apostles' Creed* that merely states without explanation "He descended into Hell."

Easter

It is apparent that Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day of every week when they meet together. However, Christians also enjoy meeting together on a yearly anniversary of the resurrection much as they celebrate the birth of Christ. Not surprisingly, this annual commemoration is fraught with many difficulties and traditional errors.

For many centuries, the yearly celebration of the resurrection of Christ has also been infiltrated by paganism. That is plainly seen in the modern Easter celebration by the secular world. The word "Easter" is not found in the Bible except at one point in the Authorized (KJV) translation. In Acts 12:4, the Greek word *pasha* was deliberately mistranslated "Easter" in that version at the insistence of a church bishop in England in or about the year A.D. 1611. Here again we uncover an instance of tradition overruling Scripture. *Pasha* actually denotes the Jewish Passover and it should have been so translated (see the NIV and various other English translations).

The Goddess Eastre

Easter (*Eastre*) was the name of a Teutonic pagan goddess of fertility similar to Astarte which was one of the titles of the Chaldean goddess also called the "queen of heaven," and related to Diana of the Ephesians (cf. Ac.19:24–35). "Easter" therefore is not in any way of Christian origin. The celebration of Easter was introduced into the corrupted Roman church as a part of the overall effort to merge various pagan festivals into Christianity just as the Yule celebration and Saturnalia was into Christmas. The festival of Eastre was celebrated at the time of the spring equinox, which was generally near the time of the Jewish Passover. This timing facilitated the merger.

Most people, Christians included, are unaware of the pagan origin of Easter. Today, we hear the term "Easter" being used in church services as being synonymous with the Christian resurrection celebration. In so doing, we unconsciously place the celebration of spring and the fertility goddess on a par or above the resurrection of Christ. While there may be a general allegory to be made between the

new life we have in Christ as a result of his resurrection from the dead and new life springing from the earth after a long winter, we carry that notion too far when we celebrate Eastre rather than Christ.

Unfortunately, liberal churches, and even most of our conservative churches as well, celebrate the goddess Eastre with Easter egg hunts on the church lawn on the very day that we celebrate the resurrection. This activity is usually excused as harmless fun arranged for the children while in fact we are instilling in our children a strong taste for pagan worship that diverts their (and our) attention from the resurrection of Christ. Along with the egg, we also include rabbits in the celebration, because of their amazing fertility in multiplying, just as did the ancient Druids and Babylonians. We further perpetuate the error by telling young children that the "Easter Bunny" has provided baskets of colored eggs and candy for them on Easter morning. The colored eggs and even the more modern plastic eggs represent fertilization. That sexual connotation in the celebration of Easter is not accidental but relates directly to the ancient goddess of fertility from which the practice originated.

Certainly, truly reformed Christians should cease worshiping a pagan goddess on the very day that they should instead be celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Admittedly, "Easter" is so deeply entrenched and identified with the resurrection day commemoration that it would now be difficult to consistently use another term for the day and to still be understood. Such is the depth of the corruption.

Determining the Annual Date of the Resurrection

The annual date of the commemoration of the resurrection (Easter) varies from year to year on our calendar. It can occur as early as March 22 and as late as April 15. It is apparent from Scripture accounts that the day of Jesus' resurrection immediately followed the Jewish Passover celebration and the High Sabbath day that followed it. It is therefore also apparent that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Mt.28:1;Mk16:2,9;Jn.20:1).

Jewish months were 29 to 30 days long thus matching closely the moon phases. (The first day of each month of the Hebrew calendar

was determined by observing the first visible crescent following a completely dark moon thus signifying a new moon). The month of Nisan marked the beginning of each calendar year in accordance with Exodus 12:2.[53] It is apparent that twelve solar months is short of adding up to an astronomical year by about 11 days, thus seasons would drift year to year. Every two or three years an additional month (Adar I) would be added as required at the end of the year to correct the yearly seasonal cycle.

Due to astronomical anomalies, observations could vary slightly for the beginning of each month but Passover would always have fallen mid-month on the day before the High Sabbath. Today, Passover has been fixed by the nation of Israel on Nisan 15.

In A.D. 325, the Roman church at the first council of Nicaea established that Sunday should always be celebrated as the date of the resurrection even if the actual date should fall on another day of the week. Our present (Gregorian) calendar established in A.D. 1582 does not synchronize with the earlier Julian calendar in use at the time of the council. All of this complicates the computation of the commemoration date such that a truly accurate annual date is impossible.

In general, Easter falls on the first Sunday after a lapse of fourteen days following the first new moon (i.e. the ecclesiastical full moon) that immediately follows the spring equinox. Rather than basing the calculation on the true astronomical equinox, the equinox has been fixed ecclesiastically as always occurring on March 21 to simplify the calculation.

Pentecost Sunday

Pentecost (meaning the "fiftieth day") was also known by the Jew as the Feast of Weeks. It follows fifty days after Passover and it is

[53] Israel actually celebrates four New Years today. One falls on the first day of Nisan as per Ex.12:2, and the second on the first day of Tishri some six months later. Rosh Hashanah is celebrated in Tishri that is thought by some Jewish scholars to correspond with a yearly anniversary of the Creation. Two other "new years" pertain to husbandry of animals and to agriculture.

commonly recognized as the birth date of the new covenant Church. In many churches, Pentecost Sunday is commonly celebrated with a baptismal ceremony. Because those who came for baptism in earlier times were commonly robed in white, Pentecost is often referred to as Whitsunday in some churches.

Because of the close association of Pentecost with charismatic churches, many evangelical churches neglect it altogether. Unfortunately, there is also a tendency to neglect the reality of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the lives of believers by more traditional churches that have Pentecost on their church calendar.

Halloween

Though not a part of church liturgy, it perhaps should be mentioned that All Hallows Eve or Halloween also stems from Roman tradition. Just preceding All Saints Day, which is a day on which the Roman church memorializes all of the saints that have gone on before, superstitious people of earlier times devised ways to frighten away evil spirits that may prevent the day from being celebrated. That tradition has degenerated into the present secular Holiday of Halloween. Though most churches do not celebrate Halloween directly because of its obvious paganism, they still give lip service to it by providing other dress-up and candy opportunities for Christian children so that they won't miss all the fun connected with the paganism enjoyed by other children.

Reformation Sunday

Halloween is often connected to Reformation Day that coincides with the same date. It is celebrated only by Protestants and is not of any Roman origin. Children are often encouraged to dress up as reformation day characters instead of the pagan devils, ghosts, and goblins of Halloween. This is an anniversary commemoration of the day that Martin Luther tacked his 95 theses of discussion to the church door. From this simple act, a fire was lit that brought the Reformation Movement into full fruition.[54] Most Protestants of the reformed faith

[54] The Reformation Movement is discussed fully in Book III of this work.

only celebrate it by singing *A Mighty Fortress is our God* that was penned by Martin Luther. Others may occasionally have sermons that also address the importance of the day.

While there were other days that we could have discussed such as Ascension Thursday, that is found on the ecclesiastical calendar as forty days after resurrection Sunday, we have covered the days that are most commonly observed today. As we can see, commemorating various days can cause us to reflect upon events concerning the life, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ throughout the year. However, they are fraught with paganism, superstition, and error that often ruin that solemn reflection.

Though most evangelical churches in the past have shied away from observing a liturgical year as being too "high church," many have recently discovered some value in the calendar for Sunday school lessons and sermon preparation even if they do not conform to any official liturgical ritual. Unfortunately, we often find that sermons connected with those days tend to be highly standardized, repetitive, and therefore predictable to a fault — much as the sermons we hear repeatedly on Mother's Day and Father's Day. Unlike Scripture, a liturgical calendar cannot cover all of the major doctrines that the Bible contains within its pages and it fails in its accuracy.

All ceremony and ritual are but shadows of the reality that we have in Christ. In most Protestant churches today the observance of those seasons as times of fasting and self-denial are optional and a matter of personal choice.[55] Whether we observe various days of the year or not does not affect our salvation that has been so freely given us by the grace of God through the death of Jesus Christ. For that reason, we should not hold so closely to them that we begin to worship the shadows lest we reject the reality. As the Apostle Paul said, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an

[55] We shall discuss errors concerning fasting in Chapter 14.5 Ritual Fasting, page 367

holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days*:* Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col.2:16,17).

Chapter 13.5 Institutionalized Church Tithing

Christianity can prevail among the poorest classes of mankind without any exchange of money taking place. Yet, it is difficult to imagine that institutionalized Churchianity in the form that it has taken today could continue to exist for very long without a steady influx of cash to support its great material appetite. Nothing can cause greater conflict than an attempt to mix the things of God with the things of this world, and nothing represents the things of this world as does money. The things of this world generate money, and money purchases the things of this world in exchange. Truly, "the love of money is the root of all evil…" (1Ti.6:10), because money is the essence of the things of this world which we, as Christians, are warned not to love or to place our trust (1Jn.2:15,16). That the church would value money so highly, is to admit that it most often loves and seeks after mammon much more than it loves God (cf. Lu.6:13).

Admittedly, tithing, fund raising, and the pay of ministers that we are about to discuss in this section are topics that cannot be reexamined without encountering long-standing bias and opposition that is dependant upon past customs, circumstances, and an established mind-set. Merely putting forth this discussion at all will raise the ire of many, because on the one hand, it affects the wallet and purse of the individual churchgoer and on the other, it impacts the coffers of organized churches and the wages of paid ministers. Obviously, a paid minister cannot openly reject the practice of legalistic tithing and other methods of fund raising without risking his own livelihood, while the laity dare not lest they risk taking on the authoritarian clergy of the temporal church.

Nevertheless, the reformed approach undertaken in this work is to consistently compare ***all*** recognized tradition and practice directly with Scripture. Tithing is so widespread among churches today that its validity is rarely if ever questioned much less critically examined in the full light of Scripture. Often a few well-worn verses or passages are quoted out of context in support of church tithing — especially passages from the Old Testament — but seldom or ever is the

opposing view explored lest one risk being considered a troublemaker or even a rank unbeliever. Even so, we cannot merely sidestep that topic in this work and be true to the goal of comprehensive reform. We must determine from Scripture alone if the practice of tithing by Christians as a legal mandate of Christian giving is truly proper.

In this chapter, we shall only consider Christian offerings through institutionalized tithing in support of a temporal church while in a previous chapter we have already discussed unrestricted Christian giving through grace alone (Chapter 9.3). We must consider the assessment imposed upon Christians by many local churches and denominations, requiring, even demanding, the surrender of one-tenth of one's salary by each of its members to the church coffers to remain a member in good standing. Along with that demand is the not so thinly veiled suggestion that God will not continue to bless anyone who does not fully comply with this standard. Therefore, to question tithing is seen by many to threaten the security of their financial well being here on earth and even to risk eternal damnation as well.

Origin of the Tithe in Principle

Tithing specifically means one-tenth, although the same term has often been used more generally to indicate a greater or lesser amount. The exact origin of the practice of giving a tithe is not known, and there is no Scriptural evidence that God Himself originated this practice. It may well have had its origin in early pagan religions as an offering to various false gods. The principle of ten percent was probably derived from the fact that men have ten fingers. Therefore, one "finger" of the works of his hands was set aside as a tribute to recognized deity. We most certainly find that this practice existed in principle long before the time of Moses and therefore predates the Law of Moses.

Long before the Law was given, Abraham paid a tithe of the spoils of battle to Melchizedek (Ge. 14:20; He.7:2–6). God did not demand it of him, but Abraham voluntarily gave it out of a sense of his high regard for the "God of Peace." Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the practice originated with Abraham either; it was a tradition that predated his time. Later, in Genesis Chapter 28, verse 22, Jacob said,

"…of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." Jacob did not offer a tithe because of any commandment, but from his hope of future joy and abundance. Some have interpreted this verse as seeing Jacob attempting to bribe God or barter with Him in the hope of future wealth and blessings as many still do through tithing today. Certainly, Jacob was accustomed to having things his own way by such "twisting" as we recall from his earlier actions. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we notice that early tithes were not given under the dictates of any law, nor did any law set an amount. It was voluntarily given according to an established ***custom*** of those days — a principle that through religious ***tradition*** continues to this day.

Tithing Made a Precept under the Ceremonial Law

Nevertheless, tithing was specifically adopted from the earlier custom and mandated by God for the nation of Israel through precept as a rule of law. We must understand that the tithe was actually a part of the ***ceremonial*** portion of the Law that was connected directly to worship in the Jewish Temple and was used to support the national theocracy of that day.

During the time that the ceremonial law was in force, the Levites were to be supported by the tithes given by the eleven other tribes of Israel. Unlike the other tribes, however, the Levites were not to hold any inheritance in the land: "… the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the Children of Israel they shall have no inheritance" (Nu.18:24; cf. Nu.18:20–24). In Numbers 18:20, God said that He alone would be the Levites' inheritance, not the wealth of the land.

Since the Levite's life and work prohibited him from providing for himself through gainful labor, Israel was commanded by God to "Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth" (De.12:19). In Numbers 18:10–19 we read that the families of the Levites were to be supported through the tithe as well. That also meant that Levites were free to marry only within the tribe of Levi, have offspring, and expect the remaining tribes to see to their continuing welfare. Jesus confirmed that tithing was definitely a

matter of old covenant law as we read in Matthew 23:23: "…for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law…"

The Three Tithes of Israel

Three separate tithes were required of the Israelites. The first of those tithes was designated for the Temple and for the functioning of the ceremonial law in connection with worship, the second was for common governmental use, and the third was to be used for the personal welfare of infirm Levites, strangers, widows, and orphans (De.26:12–15; 14:27–29). The first of those tithes, which may have been referred to as "the tithe of the LORD," was given once each year directly to the Levites. The second tithe was apparently paid three times a year (probably in installments) each time a trip was made to the Temple (De.12:6–7,17–18). The third tithe was only required once every three years, except when it fell on a sabbath (seventh) year. Therefore, since a single tithe is ten percent, the total yearly amount that was paid was closer to twenty-five percent. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that Israel was a theocracy (before they foolishly demanded a king), and that a large portion of this total tax or tithe was used much like our civil taxes for the general security of the nation and the welfare of its people.

Since God adopted the tithe as a resource to be used by the Levites for his purposes, the tithes paid to the Levites were considered a tithe paid to God through the Levitical priesthood. We observe this in Leviticus 27:30–33, where "all the tithe of land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD" (Le.27:30). In the book of Malachi we read, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Mal.3:8). To connect this verse with church giving, as it so often is today, is to use it completely out of context. God Himself has no use for money or goods since He is the source of all wealth. The Levites had been declared holy (set aside for God's use). The Temple likewise was holy. To rob the Levites and allow the Temple to go into ruin was to dishonor God; it was to rob Him of his due. It further dishonored Christ (the Messiah) who was

revealed in the ceremonial system and to whom it pointed as the ultimate sacrifice and atonement for sin.

Offerings for Personal Atonement

In Old Testament times, personal offerings were given according to various prescriptions of the ceremonial law and consisted of animals, grain (meal), and drink. Those were over and above any tithe that was collected. The animal offerings were each a type of Christ and were offered as temporary atonement for personal sins in the burnt offering.[56] The grain and drink offerings were usually offered along with animal sacrifices as enhancements to the animal sacrifice.

The "sin offering" (Le.4:1–35;6:24–30) was given to atone for more severe transgressions, while the "trespass offering" was given to assuage the feelings of guilt for inadvertent sins. A "peace offering" was occasionally given solely to enhance one's fellowship with God. In addition to offerings given to God, some offerings were given directly for use by the priests to sustain them in their continued service. Those were known as "free will" (voluntary) offerings and "heave offerings." (Ex.29:24–28;Le.7:14).

Personal Offerings to Atone for Sin Abolished

The many offerings for sin that pointed to Christ under the old covenant were done away with in the new covenant inasmuch as Christ was the final sacrifice for sin who fulfilled the entire purpose of the ceremonial law. The author to the Hebrews makes this quite clear in Chapter 10 of his epistle. Atonement for sin is now complete and effective in the finished work of Christ on the cross. There is now therefore no more need for an offering to be made for sin through the blood of animals (cf. He.10:18).

There is a tendency for the giver to a church to believe that his offerings purchases his continued good standing with God or somehow pays Christ back for his death on the cross. Not only is this

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[56] The entire book of Leviticus gives us a perfect picture of the person of Jesus Christ through the various offerings and their prescriptions.

false thinking it also diminishes the value of the atonement and elevates sinful pride. There is no way we can pay back God for the salvation He has so freely given us; the price He paid is far beyond our reach. To make any further offering to God for our sins, guilt, or even to attain closer fellowship with Him is to deny what Christ has done once for all. That denial would be blasphemous. Jesus has died to make full and everlasting atonement for our sins and our trespasses; He has established perfect peace between God and us such that we always have complete access to Him through prayer and the working of the Holy Spirit who always indwells us.

Tithing as a Precept Ended

The prescription for the paying of tithes is not found in the Decalogue and therefore is not a moral commandment that God set forth as one of his basic requirements for men. The Ten Commandments still stand to condemn any who are not saved by Jesus Christ since redemption is found only in Christ who alone fulfilled the moral dictates of the law. However, the purpose of the ceremonial law was ***completely*** satisfied in the crucifixion of Christ. The entire ceremonial portion of Jewish law was but a fore-shadowing of the coming Messiah. After his atoning death and resurrection, it continued for about forty more years in witness of Him to unbelieving Jews, after which the house of the Hebrews was left desolate (Mt.23:38).

When the Roman, Titus, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70, all practice of the ceremonial law was inevitably discontinued by the Jews that remained. After that time, there was no more Temple, no Levitical priesthood, no animal sacrifices, and no more Temple tithes. The theocracy of the Hebrew nation of Israel was also terminated, and the need for the tithe that had supported it ended along with it. From then on, taxes would be collected solely by Rome.

Error of Correlating the Levite with Church Clergy

Attempts have been made by the temporal church to directly correlate the Levite with church clergy. Thus, say they, the preacher and his family should be supported with tithes like the Levites of old — although the portion of the law concerning the prohibition of

material inheritance for the Levite is commonly ignored lest his family suffer upon his death. Furthermore, the male offspring of a clergyman does not automatically become a part of the ministry at a certain age, nor is there any prohibition against them marrying outside the ministry thus making their continuous support through the ministry impossible. As we can plainly see, an allegorical parallel to the Levitical priesthood quickly breaks down in many respects.

Interestingly enough, we discover that the priests were also to offer a tithe to God of whatever they received. "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe" (Nu.18:26; cf. Le.6:20 and Ps.76:11). Therefore, if churches should genuinely put themselves under the tithing system today, the priests or clergy would also need to offer up tithes. Some Protestant ministers do offer a tithe of their salaries, but their tithes often only go back into the general fund of the church and are recycled to help pay their own wages. When the Levites offered a tithe, it was totally offered to God and none was returned to them. It was completely consumed. It is inconceivable to think that any church minister would intentionally burn money as a tithe to God.

Error of Christian Storehouse Tithing

Under the old covenant, the tithes of the people of Israel were put into "storehouses" where a Levite was put in charge of dispensing them according to need. Here we find that tithes were rarely if ever paid with money, but with various grains and material goods. There are several Scriptures relating to this (Ne.12:44; 13:5,12; 2Chr 31:11,12; 2Chr.31:5–10). There is no viable relationship between this and the so-called "storehouse tithing" of today, and it is very unlikely that wheat or cattle would be considered acceptable to today's churches. Today, "storehouse tithing" generally means that a believer must give all money that he offers to God's work exclusively through his local church. Under that mandate, he cannot donate directly to any other organizations outside of the sphere of the local assembly. In adhering to that mandate, one abdicates all oversight for his own

stewardship such that he is no longer a responsible steward to Christ. He becomes instead a willing slave to the temporal church.

Error of Tithing to Gain Personal Wealth

The often repeated verse of Malachi 3:10 actually applies specifically and only to a back-sliding nation of Israel when God said, "…prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." To say, as some have, that this means that a Christian believer will receive wealth by giving a tithe into the coffers of their local church is totally out of context. While Israel was blessed ***materially*** when they obeyed the Law of God under the old dispensation, the believer today is rewarded ***spiritually*** when he fully trusts and obeys Christ, and his faith is increased when he does so. The Christian's sacrificial offering is spiritual in nature, and his reward is also spiritual (1Pe.2:5). We are to walk in the spirit, not in the flesh (cf. Ro.8:1,4; Ga.5:16,25).

Far too many churches today teach that God rewards our giving in this life by increasing our income far in excess of whatever we give. This teaching commonly referred to as the "prosperity doctrine," is quite prevalent in many churches and especially those that compel their members to give offerings over and above a legal tithe. The wealthy in the congregation are often held up as examples for that erroneous thinking. In fact, it is most often the rich that perpetuate that error by witnessing to others how God continually makes them richer in order that they can give increasingly more.

The fact of the matter is that Christians cannot become rich by giving more than they can afford from what God is already giving them, but can only impoverish themselves as well as their family. In the end, it actually hinders their ability to come to the aid of others that are truly in need. Much in the same way that people buy lottery tickets, greed compels them to give more and more in the hopes that they will hit God's "jack pot." When they ask others in the church why God has not come through for them, they are generally answered that they are still not giving enough — they are still holding back on God.

Adverse Consequences of Forced Tithing on the Church

There are several consequences of a church attempting to enforce a tithe by precept upon its congregation. The desired benefit is to increase the funds available for the operation of the temporal church, but that apparent benefit carries along with it its own adverse effects as well.

Many church pastors and other church leaders sincerely believe that if they remove the tithe as a strict legal edict, the church will suffer financially. Admittedly, if a church does not hold to the Truth they, like many cults, may find that tithing under threat of God's retribution is the only way for them to survive — but we are speaking here of churches, not cults, and believers, not unbelievers. Many of today's churches like the church of Laodicea are rich in garb, but are naked spiritually (cf. Re.3:17) inasmuch as the majority of their funds are obtained from unbelievers.

When the Word of God is preached clearly with the emphasis placed upon God's grace, and where true ***needs*** are clearly stated, God's people always give with abundance and joy to the extent of their ability. That is not to say that the unbeliever will give without coercion, of course, and when God's people see spending abuse they may also decide to withhold their support as good stewardship dictates. When the congregation is oppressed under an ill-perceived rule of tithing, they may only give grudgingly or not give at all because they feel harassed. Christian joy is found in the grace of God, not in the demands of a church ordinance.

Hypocritical Legalism

There were two extreme responses by the Jew to the precept of tithing: neglect on the one hand and cruel and meaningless legalism on the other. We clearly observe the effects of meaningless legalism in Amos 4:4,5. "Come to Bethel, and transgress… offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven… this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the LORD God." Here the Israelites transgressed in as much as they mixed evil in the form of leaven with their offerings. Leaven inflated its importance, making it look like much more than it actually

was. That hypocrisy constituted abject neglect of the ceremonial law. Any attempt to carry forth tithing as a precept into today's church often produces the same neglect through cheating and subterfuge much as we saw with Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.5:1,2).

The Lord Jesus clearly pointed out the "leaven of the Pharisees" in such passages as Matthew 23:23–33, and Luke 11:42. The Pharisees dismissed the importance of exercising mercy, judgment and faith when they interpreted the Law by seeing only the letter. They observed the Law legalistically and applied the Law in an evil way toward others. Unfortunately, many churches are guilty of the same when they insist on receiving a tithe from everyone without considering individual circumstances. There are even reported instances where church authorities have demanded to see the W–2 forms of members to prove that they were giving exactly one-tenth of their gross pay. We must ask ourselves, what has become of mercy, judgment, and faith in such churches.

Pledges

Many churches request, even demand, pledges for regular giving from their members prior to the beginning of each year, since churches commonly budget their spending annually. Some churches ask pledges only for missionary efforts because this is a long-term trust and obligation of the church. However, making pledges at the beginning of a year also places the church member under a legal obligation for every month of the year, and therein arises many difficulties that are associated with that practice.

Few can know what their financial circumstance will become in a year's time. Many could lose their jobs, be transferred to another city or state, suffer other serious financial reversals, incur unforeseen expenses, experience the death of a loved one, and even their own death that would make it difficult or impossible for them to meet their solemn obligations. Some churches, realizing this, place phrases such as "as the Lord enables me" in their pledge cards to allow for such unforeseen circumstances, but most true Christians still consider that pledge as a sacred vow to God and thus unbreakable. Nonetheless,

many pledges based on strict tithing remain unfulfilled at the end of each year since they were impossible to fulfill to begin with.

Hoarding

If the hoarding of money is considered evil for the individual, it is even more evil for government, whether it is civil or theocratic. A temporal church that successfully tithes its members often grows materially rich as the income exceeds actual needs. It thus can become subject to the same spiritual decadence that an individual can succumb to under the same circumstances. A tendency toward hoarding is demonstrated in some churches today by the construction of impressive edifices that are adorned with expensive ornate trappings. Still other churches tend to store their excess in more pragmatic ways such as much larger "barn-like" buildings to accommodate more "converts" that in turn further increases the church's wealth (cf. Lu.12:16-19).

As our Lord said to the church in Laodicea, "…thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Re.3:17). Churches that become rich materially most often become poor spiritually as they set their eyes on material things as a sign of their success. Over time, they become wretched and miserable regarding the things of God. Moreover, they become blinded to their true condition and their need to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Re.3:18). Apostasy must inevitably follow.

Wild Spending

Rather than hording wealth in buildings and land, the other tendency is for churches to spend excess money on building up its organizational influence far beyond any godly purpose through massive secular "outreach" programs. Those outreach programs are not intended to perpetuate the Gospel, but merely to place everyone they can under the sphere of influence of the temporal church regardless of their life style or spiritual state. Rather than being a refuge for the redeemed, such a church soon becomes nothing more

than a welfare agency for the ungodly that eventually infiltrates and controls it.

The same tendency to tax and spend that is present within the government of the United States at the present time can be seen in most secular non-profit organizations as well. Since money is available, it must be spent, and if there is no money to spend, it must be raised. Services that should ordinarily be accomplished by volunteers from the congregation soon become salaried positions as the church becomes increasingly affluent. Ministers' salaries are often bloated beyond what is reasonable in order to entice more talented administrators and pulpit orators away from other churches much as the corporate world recruits its chief executive officers.

The preoccupation with raising, hoarding, and spending money to attain an appearance of worldly value illustrates a fundamental disregard for the primary objectives of the church, which are glorifying Christ through corporate worship and perpetuating the unadulterated Gospel message to a needy world. Just because the world will not accept the inherent offence of the cross that is contained in the message of salvation is no reason to tone it down just to get the world into the temporal church.

Adverse Consequence of Forced Tithing on the Poor

It is interesting to note that in many churches it is the more affluent that strongly advocate tithing. By paying a strict ten-percent, they may also be seeking to excuse themselves from giving a larger amount that they could easily afford. Since they can quite easily give ten-percent from their vast surplus, it has no affect upon their standard of living. Furthermore, since it is fully tax-deductible, they gleefully pay one tax to avoid another. Paying taxes to the government does not increase their status or influence while donating to a temporal church does, which further satisfies their sense of pride.

The poor, who have barely enough to scrape by, often cannot give anywhere near one-tenth of their income without taking food from their family's table or clothing off their children's backs, and there is most certainly no realized tax benefit for them. By insisting upon a tithe from ***every*** member without exception, we again find that

the rich are oppressing the poor. What of destitute or nearly destitute believers who are excluded from some churches merely because they cannot afford to dress like other members or afford to give a tithe from their meager incomes? While most churches would deny that any of the poor are being rejected, that is nonetheless in reality the case as each church develops a social standard based upon affluence. This is but another example of the rich persecuting the poor even when that is not intended. What about the minister who exercises his power over the flock to extract excess wages for himself or build proud and massive edifices to his own glory? Does he not prefer a rich congregation to a poor and needy one? Hindrance of the grace of God through the abuse of ecclesiastical power is very widespread today.

Rejecting the Masses

The insistence of many churches upon strict tithing can even prevent many from seriously listening to the Gospel and coming to Christ to begin with. Many unbelievers are put off by the diligent preoccupation of churches with the collecting of money from its members, and because they do not yet know Christ, all churches appear to be nothing but a religious racket to them. The resulting negative attitude toward churches and preachers effectively insulates them from hearing the true Gospel of Christ that is all of grace. The Gospel is a ***free gift*** from God to all who will accept it: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Is.55:1). The hand of the church should be out in giving aid and comfort to all those in genuine need and in fellowship to brothers in Christ, not in money grabbing. No man should be forced to give anything that his heart can not rejoice in giving, lest it be understood as an attempt to pay the church for a redemption that Jesus Christ has already paid for in full. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold… but with the precious blood of Christ…" (1Pe.1:18,19).

Chapter 13.6 Fund Raising Methods

Today, a good portion of Christian giving is spent upon church buildings and grounds and attending administrative costs. Most Christians incorrectly see the visible Church as being manifested in tangible things that either adorn the church building or are physically a part of it. What they see of course is actually the trappings of Churchianity in the temporal church. What does not go into the building itself is directed toward massive church programs that seek to mollify the local congregation in order to keep them in the fold lest they wander elsewhere. The ravenous appetite of many churches becomes so great that voluntary giving and even calls for legalistic tithing of the congregation by the leadership does not keep up with the demand for spending.

Church Fund Raising Schemes

Since, visible Churches are made up entirely of believers in Christ, all support for its functions should come from its believing congregation as God moves them to give. No funds should ever be received from unbelievers lest they in turn insist upon church funds being used for ungodly purposes thus corrupting the congregation. Unfortunately, the visible Church finds itself encased within the temporal church that has no such standards. One must admit that it is difficult to ascertain the true believer from the hypocrite in our churches today since both go through the same rituals and may seem equally pious in their worship. However, Jesus said that we would eventually know them by their fruit (cf. Mt.7:15-20). Hypocrites can be identified by their desire to make the church worldlier, richer, move away from the Bible as its sole authority, and by their generation of social strife and division among other members of the congregation over matters that have no spiritual significance whatsoever.

Voluntary giving or falsely institutionalized tithing is usually more than sufficient for day-to-day expenses and projects in today's temporal churches, but it often fails to bring in enough revenue when major embellishments to its material holdings are contemplated. When

that happens, recourse is often made to various fund-raising schemes. It is most unfortunate that the temporal church is so driven by prevailing Churchianity to possess a physical building in which to house their congregational gatherings and conduct social events. We shall discuss the church building itself later in this chapter, but first let us determine if the many fund-raising projects that many churches undertake today are appropriate activities for a church to involve itself.

Absence of Scriptural Basis

We must realize at the outset that the Bible does not present us with any examples of early Christians ever engaging in a fund-raising project such as a fish fry or a rummage sale to raise money for local church activities or projects. Quite the contrary, as we have observed before, there is no evidence that a collection was ever taken for the continued institutional support of any local church organization at all. The visible Church, in its infancy, had little need of anything but Christ and his Gospel, and members met anywhere that became available to them. For those reasons alone, we cannot hope to rely on Scripture for addressing questions about contemporary church fund-raising methods in a positive light.

We find evidence of Christians sharing their goods with other Christians in Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:34,35. That giving was done within the framework of the local assembly at Jerusalem, but it was not used for the construction of buildings or massive church programs. The Jerusalem church, consisting of converted Jews, had been excluded from any further social support or temporal provisions from the establishments of Judaism. The Jews through a special tithe within the Jewish theocracy raised all funds for the welfare of their poor, but Christians were no longer recognized as valid citizens of the Jewish religious-political system. Christians, finding themselves on the outside of that commonwealth, needed to pool their own resources in order to support the poor, widowed, and orphaned among their numbers. This was not organized support for the Jerusalem church as a hierarchical institution, but only a necessary means to secure the physical needs of its underprivileged members.

Since the Bible does not address the question of fund-raising directly, we must resort to interpretation based upon the weight of Scripture in its greater context. That leads to controversy as we each attempt to draw from Scripture those indirect texts that would seem to support our own positions. Yet, we have little choice in the matter since so many churches are so greatly involved with external fund raising. Fund-raising projects would seem to have much to recommend them from a pragmatic viewpoint; however, let us state at the outset that there are many reasons why almost all of them are not an appropriate means even for temporal churches to employ.

Selling Religion

The visible Church is not in existence to sell anything — not religion, not the Gospel, or anything else. The Christian faith is not a commodity of this world to be sold along with the inferior things of this world. The general atmosphere of bake sales, rummage sales and the like suggests the paying of money for value received while the Gospel must be presented to all free of charge. The atmosphere is not one of worship, but of satisfying ones appetite or of striking a bargain and is not in any way on a par with genuine Christian giving. Offerings to the needy and to God's work should be given openly and generously with no thought of receiving ***anything*** in return. Various bazaars such as rummage sales, fish-fries, and bake sales all have the air of the market place about them that steals both the spiritual blessing and the joy found in giving to the Lord's work.

Church bazaars should remind us of the incident when our Lord drove the moneychangers out of the Temple (cf. Mt.21:12). It could be argued that the moneychangers served a necessary need to exchange Roman coin for Jewish Temple money in order to pay the Temple tax much in the same way that our fund raising bazaars appear to serve a needed institutional purpose. However, sacrilege was found in the way that the moneychangers were satisfying their greed by making considerable money for themselves in the exchange. That is why Jesus said that they were making the Temple into a house of thieves. When the church sells items in a bazaar, expecting to receive

more than the items are truly worth, they do much the same thing as did the ancient moneychangers.

Many of the persons who attend such fund-raisings would not ordinarily give anything, or give as much, to God's work. In fact, that is the very reason why such events are held. It is felt that such social gatherings will loosen the purse strings of many who would not give otherwise. This is a form of coercion by appealing to human greed, and sin lies at the root. Furthermore, if the event is open to the public, as most are, many may come in just seeking a bargain or good food at a low price. A great many of those people are not Christians nor do they have any inclination to become one. Here we not only hold a form of fellowship with unbelievers, but take money from them to further a work that they generally or specifically oppose. While many would argue that those activities provide an opportunity for Christian witness, it in fact only attracts unbelievers to a church that is acting like the rest of the world. It is very difficult to truly present the Gospel message in such an atmosphere.

Sin-Based Church Schemes

Having already said this much about church bazaars and the like, it should be apparent that such things as "Bingo nights," "casino nights," "happy hours," dances, and lotteries have absolutely no place in being sponsored by any church. Such church activities, in essence, give participants not only permission to sin, but also the expectation of applause from God for doing so! Nor should the proceeds of gambling or booze ever be used as an offering to God.

Some people seem to think that gambling, if it is for a "good cause," is morally and legally justifiable. Gambling is actually a form of theft where one steals from another by mutual consent. It elevates the basest form of jealousy in those who lose as well as greed in those who win, and it is a direct violation of both the tenth and eighth commandments. For the participant it elevates covetousness: "Thou shalt not covet," and for the "winner," it constitutes theft: "Thou shalt not steal."

It is incredible that any Bible-believing Spirit-born Christian and member of the visible Church could become entangled in such a

morass of iniquity within the temporal church. Does God wink at sin because it is carried out on church grounds? Surely, we cannot believe that any good can come from money raised by such methods whether the proceeds are slated for the poor, maintenance of the local church, or even for the perpetuation of the Gospel itself since it negates its message of redemption by grace alone "…without money and without price" (Is.55:1).

Church Business Enterprises

Some churches also engage in large-scale business enterprises to raise money. For example, they often begin nursing homes for the elderly or day-care centers and schools for children to provide what they perceive as a needed service within a secular society. Those may be started honestly enough to provide a service to meet a perceived need, but they do not always remain that way. Worldly-minded individuals earning generous salaries are often put in charge of those efforts with the result that they are run with the ruthlessness of a carpetbagger and the greed of the Temple moneychanger. We also must not fail to consider the entanglements that the church faces with secular governments over how those operations are to be run. State regulations for non-profit organizations often force those operations toward a secular method of operation.

The visible Church has no biblical commission to run such enterprises to bring in money to enrich their managers or fill the church coffers since such funds would come from the very ones that we have set out to aid. We would only be fleecing the most needy of the flock. Because the temptation toward corruption in those enterprises is so great, it is very doubtful that any temporal church should ever be involved in such efforts at all. As soon as the church begins earning a profit through enterprise, it becomes a worldly business, not a church. For that reason, many understandably do not believe that ***earnings*** from such non-religious operations should be tax exempt, though they may still agree that the legitimate functions of the church itself should remain exempt from taxation.

Extra-church Enterprises

Some individuals or groups of individuals engage in special enterprises with the intent of donating the proceeds to a temporal church. We should find no special fault in that as long as the work is honest and is completely ***separate of any church activities or promotion***. We must carry out those activities in our own name, rendering it a mere extension of ordinary work from which we, as individuals, give a portion. However, we must be very sure that when we receive money, we give full value in return. If, for example, we make inferior items to sell that are purchased only because the buyer knows that the money "goes to charity or a church," we have not given full value for the earnings we have received. Such special works should be done with the same integrity that we do regular work in earning our living. Our gifts should always be a portion of that which God has given us as a result of honest effort.

Individual Endowments

Another common practice today is to leave a church money or property upon our death in the form of an endowment in a will. This is generally encouraged by most temporal churches as another fund-raising scheme. Sometimes an individual may purchase a life insurance policy or annuity naming the church as the sole beneficiary. There are several faults with this practice for a true believer. First, the believer should be careful to give to the church while he is still living, not after he has departed. That is in keeping with Christian stewardship as we have seen in Chapter 9.3 — to save up for regular giving as God has prospered us. To amass wealth for giving when we have no further use for it is not Christian giving since it costs us nothing to do so (cf. 1Chr.21:24).

Secondly, the naming of a temporal church often leaves relatives out as beneficiaries or at least reduces their inheritance. That may deny them that which they are morally entitled to, and perhaps even that of which they could have great need. Even if they are not left in need, they may harbor resentment against the visible Church, which is unhealthy for their faith. Moreover, for the unbelieving it may

become a stumbling stone between them and any future acceptance of the Gospel.

Thirdly, such windfalls to a church are not healthy for the church itself, and may not be handled by the church in a proper way. Just as when individuals unexpectedly come into large sums of money, the tendency of temporal churches is either to hoard it or spend it on the first thing that comes to mind. Often "needs" that had never come to mind before are manufactured on the spot to coincide with the newly available funds. Other projects that God had not seen fit to provide for in the past are sometimes dredged up again and launched without his true providence through the congregation at large. There is something wrong when a church has to sit around trying to decide how to spend money that is in surplus to its needs as the result of the death of one of its members.

Fourthly, there is no reason to believe that the temporal church to which such a bequest has been made will remain remotely true to the faith over a longer span of time. There have been many occasions wherein churches that were once reasonably sound in the faith have become quite liberal as time passed. Some have even degenerated into cults or homosexual gatherings. We must always remember that we are living in a time of growing abandonment of the true faith as we continue to approach the end of the age. All temporal churches are in a state of apostasy: some more, some less, depending upon the size of the visible Church that exists within it. It is far better to give to a work that we can prayerfully and continuously monitor to determine if it furthers the Gospel of Christ. Good stewardship of the Gospel demands that of us.

The afore mentioned methods of fund raising are merely examples of the institutional church using worldly methods in an attempt to attain what its congregation perceives as godly results. As Christians, we must be very careful that our methods always live up to our professed doctrine. If not, we may find that our methods will have replaced our doctrine. Such a church soon runs on worldly methods from project to project without any thought or regard for Christ's will and purpose for his Church. If we are sound in the faith, we should apply God's Word to every action whether for building a church

structure, church programs, or even for our missionary thrust. Otherwise, we will find that the worldly methods we employ only produce worldly results.

Many a church or church leader has ambitions exceeding that which God requires of them and may even have excessive aspirations directly in opposition to God's will for them. If God does not supply the funds voluntarily through his own people, it is time to rethink the project for which the money is slated. The project may not be in God's will or the time to launch it may be wrong. Even if such fund-raising efforts are slated for a godly work, how can a Holy God ever use money obtained by unholy and worldly methods from unbelievers? It is the duty and privilege of each congregation to give of their own substance, which God Himself has provided them, for every good work of the church. We must not get ahead of God, but be ready to follow his leading in his own timing when He moves his people to give.

The Church Edifice

Early church structures, without doubt, were patterned, after the Jewish synagogue, which simply means "place of assembly." The synagogue came into existence during the Babylonian captivity as a temporary meeting-place when Temple worship was no longer possible for the Jew. The services conducted in the synagogues demonstrated marked similarity to today's church services. The synagogue services included prayer, reading of Scripture, a sermon, and a benediction. Since the first Christians were formerly Jews, it is not at all surprising to find that church meetings are patterned after the Jewish synagogue.

One difference we may take note of is the fact that no one person was appointed to give the sermons in a synagogue. An elder who was the overseer of the synagogue appointed various believers to give sermons and Scripture readings at any particular meeting. Visitors and guests were often asked to address the assembly as well. That was the foothold that the Apostle Paul had on his missionary journeys when he first addressed Jews in various synagogues to preach the Gospel of Christ.

The early Jewish Church found that they were excluded from both the Temple and Synagogues, and like the early Gentile church, met anywhere that they could meet in safety. Some met in private homes, some in caves, and some in open fields. In some parts of the world today, where persecution exists, that is still the case. We cannot say that the "house of God" is not there just because there is no physical edifice (cf. Ps.23:6), since the elect who meet together collectively make up the house of God. We no longer worship in a temple, on a mountaintop, or any other special place, but in spirit and in Truth whether alone or in numbers any place on earth (cf. Jn.4:23–24). We are assured by the words of Jesus Himself that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt:18:20).

The Gentile believers did not seek to emulate the Jews by building a temple to God, for the Temple made of stone was no longer a place of worship — it being but a foreshadow of Christ who is the true Temple. The foreshadow disappeared in the light of the reality of the cross and the blazing glory of Jesus' resurrection. The early Christian meetings that had no church buildings in which to meet were quite fruitful in extending Christianity even to the half of the Roman Empire (at least in profession). Perhaps the lack of permanent walls to withdraw behind made the early visible Church so effective in perpetuating the Gospel inasmuch as the church building is such a major ingredient of Churchianity.

Protection from the Elements

The first permanent church structure was not constructed by Gentiles until somewhere around A.D. 230. It was ostensibly constructed as a shelter for assembling the church together in one place. There is no particular reason why believers should be exposed to the elements of the weather when they worship, and we can surely see that a large sheltered space of some sort was needed as more and more converts gathered together. The error in building a church building beyond its functional necessities is that man's naked pride will be elevated in the building (cf. Ex.20:25,26; Re.3:17). We may say that it was God's project, but after all, it was our money and our

efforts that built it for Him. Therefore, we should approach the construction of a building to house God's assembly with reverence to God, not reverence to the building. Otherwise, we may have only constructed a beautiful whitened sepulcher within which to hold the bones of the spiritually dead.

Aesthetics of the Church Building

Though the first and most important requirement of a church building is that it protects its congregation from the elements when meeting together, that does not mean that the building should be thrown together without any regard at all to its appearance. Nonetheless, we must realize that the aesthetics of the building are actually more slanted to satisfy the traditions of men, than to glorify God. God cannot be further glorified by an ornate edifice built by men; look at the heavens and the earth and see if any man can hope to match that which He has built! We should build our houses of assembly with modesty, humility, and faithfulness to its purpose, realizing that it is primarily a facility to protect the church assembly from the elements as they meet for worship of the living God.

We should not place undue emphasis on aesthetics to make a church building magnificent lest it become gaudy, nor should we be careless of its appearance lest it become shoddy since neither would honor God. However, it should immediately call to mind why we are meeting together there and set a reverent mood for worship. The building should be constructed to blend in with the prevailing area in which it is built, since what is suitable design for one community in one country of the world would certainly be out of place in another community.

Church Building Idolatry

Churchianity makes its home within the church building that enhances its sense of pseudo-holiness. Therefore, it can easily become an object of worship, and we often find that it is commonly referred to as "the House of God" as if those that meet there could not visit God anywhere else. This is a form of idolatry that stems from the persistent error of relating the meeting place of the saints with the Old Testament

Temple. We have discussed before that the Old Testament Temple that was destroyed in AD 70 has now been made manifest in Jesus Christ Himself (cf. Jn.2:19).

No longer need we seek out a physical building made with hands in which to meet or worship God. As many as are in Christ are building blocks of the house that He is building of us. His apostles are the foundation stones, and Christ is both the door and the cornerstone (cf. Ep.2:20,21; Jn.10:7; 1Pe.2:6,7). The walls are made up of believers from all ages of the Church layer upon layer (cf. 1Pe.2:5). We have also discovered that each man and woman who truly believes is also within themselves a tabernacle of God, for the Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts (Book I, Chapter 7.4).

We must therefore in every way reject the worship of a any edifice as the "Temple" or "house" of God, and may God forbid that our naked pride should return to haunt us in the very building that houses his elect that worship Him. To God be the glory with nothing, not even a church building, between Him and us. Let us worship God deep within our very being in spirit and in Truth whenever and wherever we meet together with other believers.

Neglect of the Gospel

Today's temporal churches undoubtedly spend far too much time and money on the expansion and maintenance of their own buildings and grounds in proportion to what is given to the work of the Gospel and to the needy among us. Some of our church buildings are built more like the tower of Babel than the humble meeting place of God's elect since they are monuments to the pride of men, not to the glory of God (cf. Ge.11:4). Since that is so, it should not be surprising that the church is so overwhelmed by the world they seek to impress.

Quite often, the church becomes bogged down in earthly matters to the point that spiritual matters go begging, while in other instances, material considerations are merely embellished so as to be made to appear as spiritual issues. Perhaps that is because many today, due to a weakness of faith, constantly seek after some tangible evidence of faith. Their internal spiritual certainty is not sufficient for them — though the Holy Spirit strives with them constantly. Certainly,

this is but another sign of the expanding abandonment from Truth in which we find ourselves today.

We should also realize that the walls of a church building serve to isolate the Church from the world about it and therefore hinder the great commission to reach it with the Gospel. One can pass by a church building on a Sunday morning and observe the many cars parked in the lot and realize that something is taking place inside, but exactly what that may be is invisible to the unsaved. The walls are solid, opaque, and mostly sound proof. Even the church bell, which in an earlier day called the community to worship, has been largely silenced by noise ordinances.

In an earlier day, open-air meetings wherein the Gospel was preached without any walls separating the elect from those they intended to reach allowed God's Word to flow out to meet them along the highways and byways. What remains of a congregational witness to the world today is a fortified church building and a parking lot. The secular community is all too happy to allow us to do as we please inside soundproof walls as long as we do not openly confront them with the Gospel.

Misuse of Church Buildings

While the church building should not ever be reverenced or worshiped and should not be thought of as the unique "dwelling place of God," there is a correct sense in which a constructed church building is holy. Here one must understand that the use of the word "holy" only means that it is "uniquely set aside" for the specific purpose of housing the local congregation of the visible Church. This is not an intrinsic holiness, but rather a holiness of purpose and function. When we walk into the sanctuary, we should immediately be able to see that it is a place dedicated to the worship of the living God by its simple visual appointments that should include a place of prominence for the Bible.

When we, who are the visible Church, meet together for corporate worship, we come into the presence of God in a place that was built for that singular purpose. For that reason, we should be cautious that the church building is not used in such a way that it in

any way corrupts that purpose. No dishonorable or worldly activity should be allowed in the building to which the faithful have contributed their offerings for the specific purpose of the edification of the saints and establishing a center for fulfillment of the evangelical commission. The church building must not be a place where the lost meet together to engage in worldly pleasures — or the elect either for that matter. To use the building to worship God on Sundays and then use it to cater to ungodly pursuits of the world on other days violates its set-aside purpose — its functional holiness.

We discover instances today where church buildings are used for all sorts of secular performances. For that reason the central elevated pulpit, which in time past held the Holy Bible, is often dispensed with for a stage, and all other Christian symbolism is removed from the sanctuary. Sometimes the church building and sanctuary is offered free of charge in the vain hope of attracting those who attend secular functions there to attend Sunday worship services. Still other churches charge for their building and facilities in order to offset the excessive expenses of maintaining the edifice or even to supplement their church funds. Again, we find the church having fellowship with the world through worldly endeavors in order to enhance its position in the community without regard to its spiritual integrity. That is dangerous activity for any church that understands the importance of separating itself from all worldly entanglements.

The church building should only be used for housing the congregation when worshiping God and for other functions that further God's work such as Bible studies and prayer meetings. In addition, weddings, dedications, baptisms, and funerals, all of which play such a significant role in the spiritual lives of believers, should also be permissible as long as it is not being done for mercenary reasons. Beyond that, we must seek out the will of God in assuring that each individual purpose to which the building is offered is in keeping with the holy purpose for which it was built.

Financing the Church Building

We now come to the subject of financing the construction of the church building or it's extended property.

Mortgage

Financing is all too often accomplished by borrowing money from a secular source such as a bank. While there is, of course, nothing in Scripture to directly prohibit such financing, it is apparent that in doing so the church becomes directly obligated to a secular institution for its meeting place. Moreover, a mortgage obligates the congregation to pay back the lending institution at a specified amount each month with interest. We then find church funds being used to enrich a secular institution. Furthermore, that obligation to the lending institution must always be met first, even before missionary funding or works of Christian benevolence to avoid the disastrous consequences of default. If insufficient offerings are received, the primary work of the church will most surely suffer.

Bond Issues

Another method of financing church buildings is to issue bonds that can be purchased by church members from their personal savings. As time passes, the bonds are paid back in full. This would seem to be a much more acceptable method of finance provided that such bonds are issued without excessive interest and without a specified pay-back schedule, since the church is actually borrowing from itself. However, there are several failings here as well. Since it is the bondholder's own regular contributions that will eventually pay back the value of the bond, and since he has no access to the funds until the time of the bond's redemption, it would be just as well to donate the full amount directly; otherwise, he in effect donates little more than his normal periodic giving.

If only an affluent few can afford to purchase church bonds, they, in effect, gain financial control over the church. For that reason, the denominations of church bonds must be low enough to allow all members to purchase them. Such bonds should, obviously, never be sold to unbelievers; however, when hard times come upon church members who are holding those bonds, they may come to resent the fact that they cannot yet redeem them from the church. If it is possible at all to sell the bonds to another as negotiable securities, the sale may

be made at discount to unbelievers for their own personal gain, or the bonds may be given over to be held as collateral against a personal loan. As we can see, this method of fund raising is not without its faults.

Direct Contributions

Borrowing large sums of money to build a church building is not trust, but presumption. We not only bind the congregation, we attempt to bind God to our own decisions. Believing that God will provide the means to house his Church in his own time is the exercise of real trust. Presumption says leap, trust says wait for the Lord's leading.

The best way to finance a church building is by direct contributions from the congregation. Here all contribute to a building fund such that there is no obligation on the part of the church to pay back a debt. All general contributions can then go directly into Gospel missions and other evangelistic works, since there is no interest paid to secular institutions to drain church resources. The disadvantage of this method (real or perceived) is that the congregation must often continue to meet in rented or contributed quarters until at least enough money is raised to begin construction. In addition, regular and necessary giving is often neglected because of the added obligation to contribute to the building fund. We, as men, are always in a hurry, but God is not anxious. Jesus has said that He will build his Church without any monetary conditions placed upon that statement (cf. Mt.16:18). Since that is so, we can surely trust Him to provide a place to house our local congregations as He sees fit.

In conclusion, we must always view the material holdings of churches in their proper perspective. We must never think that the visible Church consists of material holdings rather than its members' spiritual integrity as the body of Christ. Beyond the obvious need to faithfully provide for the worship of God (which must always come first), evangelistic efforts must be of second priority, while the building-up of the saints in the knowledge of their faith is the third priority (Mt.28:19,20). Because the temporal church has largely failed in its efforts to aid the poor and the needy, secular government has

instituted great welfare programs with disastrous results. This is the church's fourth priority. Only when those four mandates are being fully met in their order of priority should we consider raising money for church buildings or expansions. Money for all endeavors of the church must come from believing saints of the congregation and supplied freely without coercion as God has prospered them and put into their minds and hearts to do.

Chapter 13.7 Paid Ministers

The hiring of a salaried minister to be in charge of a local protestant church is most certainly a well-established concept of the Churchianity of our times, and traditionally it extends far back into the past as well. However, in reading in Scripture about the offices of the church consisting of elders and deacons, we find that those men served willingly and, other than supporting the office of Apostle, paid offices of the church are never even suggested. Scripture does however indicate through principle that faithful servants of the church should receive necessary support from those to whom they minister. That is almost certain to primarily mean spiritual support and respect that is their due with material support only added when necessity dictates.

The concept of a priesthood consisting of a supported church clergy was falsely carried forth from the Levitical Priesthood through Romanism and it is not a natural product of Christianity. While this priesthood of clergy is more clearly seen in Roman Catholicism than in Protestantism, elements of it that were not properly addressed by earlier reformers still remain in almost every church. We find in Scripture that Christians are collectively a priesthood of believers, each with the ability to go directly before God into the Holiest of Holies as a result of the veil that Christ rent in his own body on the cross (cf. 1Pe.2:5,9; Mt.27:50–51; Mk.15:38). That renders a human intermediary such as a priest or minister between the laity and God not only unnecessary and highly undesirable, but even blasphemous.

An extreme interpretation of Scripture, that required both physical wealth and political power to be vested in church offices, helped perpetuate the terrible corruption of the Roman church during the middle ages. That corruption is discussed in some detail in Book III of this work. It is also believed by many that the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15 as existing in the early Church and which Christ hated was a "priesthood of clergy" that denied the individual believer direct access to the throne of grace. The same denial of grace continues today, not only in the Roman church, but also in many of our Protestant churches as well. That is because of an

unwillingness to let go of false tradition that has not been properly tested against the Scriptures.

Paul's Legal Defense of Wages for Apostles

We read in Scripture that the major reason that Paul's authenticity as an apostle was not taken seriously in Corinth was that he did not receive any wages for his preaching of the Gospel as is evidenced by Paul's long defense of that practice in his first epistle to the Corinthians (1Co.9:15). The faulty logic of their accusation was, "if he does not charge for it, the message cannot be worth anything." A further implication is that his accusers no doubt charged for everything that they taught. Since Paul taught without charge, they saw his practice as endangering their own source of income.

Paul replied, "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, have we not power to eat and to drink" (1Co.9:3,4)? That is to say that Paul and Barnabas were certainly entitled to basic support on the basis of their apostleship if they so chose to exercise it and not just for themselves only but also for the support of wives even as other apostles that received basic support from Jewish Christians. Moreover, they were entitled because of the spiritual burdens that fully occupied their time not to overburden themselves with working for their physical necessities. Who goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and doesn't eat its fruit? Who feeds a flock and doesn't drink milk obtained from the flock (cf. 1Co.9:6,7)? Paul goes on to say that even the Law of Moses allows that much when it states that the ox that treads out the grain should not be kept from eating some of the grain as it does so (cf. 1Co.9:9). Furthermore, as the Levitical priests that received a portion of that which was sacrificed at the altar, "the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1Co.9:14).

So far, it would sound like Paul fully agrees that an apostle should always be paid for his work, and in every legal sense he does, but grace required something quite different inasmuch as Paul as a missionary was preaching the Gospel to those who had not yet heard it; they were all unbelievers. ***His role in this sense was that of an evangelist, not that of an apostle***. Earning money for giving out the

free Gospel message would have undermined Paul's efforts if money and the gift of Christ in the Gospel were ever seen as being linked together in any way. It could appear that Paul was selling the Gospel message and by implication, the salvation it afforded to those who believed it.

That potential conflict is why the Apostle Paul chose to support himself as he preached the Gospel among the Gentiles. By so doing, he did not hinder the Gospel, and he removed any temptation that may have overcome him had he accepted any monetary reward. He was very meticulous in this matter, because he also wished to share in that glory which those who received the Gospel had obtained through Christ (cf. 1Co.9:23). As he saw others being saved through his preaching, he did not want himself to be cast away as worthless for further work due to any abuse of his privileged position as an apostle (cf. 1Co.9:27).

Rather, his overriding desire was that he might share with them in the hope of the Gospel (cf. 1Co.9:23). Even so, "they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel" (1Co.9:14). They must live by the same principle with which the Gospel was given to them — freely and without charge — and in turn have the privilege of sharing eternal life with all that believe in Christ. True life is more than food and drink, and money in itself can sustain neither spirit nor body (cf. Mt.6:25).

Salaried Church Leaders

Paul's defense of wages for apostles does not automatically apply to all contemporary church ministers. The apostles were chosen spokesmen for God that established foundational doctrine for the visible Church. This title in that sense cannot be transferred to any other than those unique apostles of the first century. Local church ministers at the time Paul wrote this were all unpaid elders. Therefore, to apply Paul's saying regarding paid apostles to contemporary ministers is a very long reach.

Let us realize that we tread on dangerous ground here in this investigation; not that we need fear offending God by merely seeking the truth, but that in the process we shall most certainly upset

established human precepts and long-standing tradition. Furthermore, it must be made clear that the things that must be brought to the surface in this chapter are not intended to condemn all paid ministers, but only to put into proper perspective the hired ministers in our churches today. Though Scriptures have nothing positive to say concerning contemporary church ministers being paid, it also says little that would prohibit it since the office as such did not exist in its present form at that time.

The Burden of Paid Ministers

We should be made aware of the tremendous and unreasonable burden we so often place upon paid ministers that can lead to their downfall. We quite often expect them to expunge the spiritual pain of our worldly overindulgence and clean up the sinful messes we make of our lives that are a consequence of that overindulgence.

When a minister first comes into a congregation, he finds that he is to be not only the spiritual leader of the congregation, but also its leader in every conceivable secular endeavor as well. He must be an able administrator, organizer, promoter, councilor, fund-raiser, and only as time permits a preacher of the Word. He soon becomes so overloaded with worldly responsibilities that he has little time for personal prayer and study of the Bible. No wonder that his sermons tend to stem from social situations rather than the Word of God since that is the sphere in which he is forced to spend most of his time.

Worse still, he is required to do those things not from a pure sense of obligation to God alone, but as a means of providing for his own sustenance. A preacher should never be obligated to his congregation for the content of his message since he is responsible to Christ alone for it and is a steward of the mysteries of God (cf. 1Co.4:1–4). Nevertheless, he is being paid by men to say things that will only please them thus dividing his loyalty.

Therefore, we often find that the shepherd is actually being led by the sheep since the shepherd is dependent upon the sheep for his sustenance and dares not lead them in the paths of Truth and righteousness for fear that his sheep will fire him! Here we find the

blind leading around those that can see as if slaves tethered by a rope of monetary dependence.

We make a nurse-maid of our ministers so that we need not feed ourselves from God's Word, but instead let them spoon-feed us little portions of the Bible on Sunday mornings. We use them as a crutch so that we need not stand on our own two feet. We even attempt to make of them a "priest" that we need not face God directly. They are to be our spokesman before God so that we need not go there ourselves. They are to preach the Word on Sunday morning to a sleeping congregation; they are to pray for our continual physical well-being; they are to visit the sick; they are to council both the godly and the ungodly; they are to marry our sons and daughters; they are to bury our dead; and they are to evangelize the world. They are to do all those things. After all, that's their job — that's what they are being paid to do, are they not.

In considering paid ministers in this way, we not only condemn ourselves and other believers to remain infant Christians, we place upon our paid pastors a burden that they could not possibly bear. It is no wonder that so many either crash under the strain and resign from the ministry or else become ineffective puppets of their congregations.

The Conflict between Serving God and Mammon

The central difficulty lies with the fact that one cannot serve God and love mammon consisting of money or worldly power (cf. Mt.6:24). Ministers are not above other men that they are not tempted. Although we find that elders should not have a love for money when they are chosen, they are rarely if ever paid which takes away that basic conflict (cf. 1Ti.3:3).[57] Sadly, many paid ministers serve only mammon by giving lip service to the Word of God, while in moments of temptation men that are more devout fail to choose God over the power of the world. Other ministers may still place God first, but with

[57] That is not to say that they may not find a means through abuse of the authority of their office to enrich themselves.

reluctance because of the worldly loss that it entails. Still others, seeing a calling of God beyond their professional status as set forth by men, are even yet able servants of God, but find themselves heavily burdened materially because of their spiritual integrity.

In the Old Testament, we read about a bizarre man named Balaam who was a prophet for hire (Nu.22–24). Because he was a hireling, it is almost impossible to determine if this man was truly a servant of God or a pagan diviner. For sufficient wages, he was even willing to curse Israel had not God overruled him and caused him to bless Israel instead. Like Balaam of old, many modern pastors and ministers are caught up in a similar way by seeking a large monetary reward for their ministry. Those are men "which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2Pe.2:15). "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core" (Jude 11).

Like Balaam, many ministers are trapped in a position between serving God and earning a living by selling their services — often to the highest bidder — for the sake of their family as well as their own well being. That also results in a distorted doctrine being preached from the pulpit with a major emphasis being placed upon the material and secular rather than upon the spiritual things of God because that is about which they are being paid to speak. Peter had this to say about them:

> **These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the**

latter end is worse with them than the beginning. (2Pe.2:17–20)

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Mt.6:24). That however is exactly the dilemma that faces an ordained minister today, and it includes the well-intentioned minister or pastor who comes to the ministry sincerely desiring to serve God since from the beginning his service is not so much directed to serve God, as it is to please the men who hire him. While some may say that most ministers are well above putting money before the Gospel or are above seeking personal gain and the praise of men, that is to claim more from those quite human men than they can bear. If he loves God more, he will risk losing the support of his largely worldly congregation, but if he heeds the demands of his congregation and the money he receives from them the more, he finds that he no longer speaks for God but just speaks words of vanity to please men.

All too often, when directly faced with the choice, mammon is the master that they choose because the paid minister must often also support a wife and children on what he earns from his congregation. Christ would have us despise (put second or last if necessary) all human relationships if it interferes with the furtherance of God's Kingdom (cf. Lu.14:26). This was surely written for us all, but the paid minister is continually put to the test since his performance in the eyes of the congregation or church board determines the well being of not only himself but his family also. Is it wrong for a man to want the best the world has to offer for his family? In no way, for a man is often judged by how well he provides for his family, and that is true not only in secular circles but in Christian circles as well (cf. 1Ti.5:8).

Seeking Wealth and Fame

An affluent church can obviously afford to pay a minister a higher salary than can a poorer church. The more learned, more educated, more polished, ministers tend to gravitate toward more affluent congregations, while poorer congregations are left with less

educated and less experienced preachers. Again, we find that the poor are being neglected.

Too often the hireling's sense of personal self-worth comes ahead of the spiritual needs of the flock that he purports to oversee. At that time, the sheep become scattered and the pastor (shepherd) eventually flees — usually to a better position in a more affluent church. While we may wish to be represented before a civil court of law by the best lawyer we can afford, do we really want to be instructed and overseen of the things of God by the best minister money can buy?

In the Old Testament, the Levites received no inheritance of land in Israel, nor flocks or herds, but spiritual things were their sole inheritance (Nu.18:20). In like manner, physical wealth should not be heaped upon any church officers or upon hired pulpit ministers. Since the word "minister" literally means "servant," how is it, then, that many servants today amass wealth far exceeding that of those whom they serve? Who, then, is the servant of whom?

The Levites received sustenance from their service in that they shared food with the fellowship offerings of the altar (Nu.18:24). They received only those things that they needed so that they could continue to minister as those set aside for God. Likewise today, a minister must consider that his sole inheritance and wealth is in the rewards of the Gospel itself. He must find his joy in serving God since he has willingly taken on the position of a servant to his congregation, not its king. Even so, the congregation he serves should sustain him as they would any good servant, and, in addition, provide double honor to the high calling to which he has been summoned.

Education of Ministers

Paul was well educated and was chosen to speak the Gospel and establish sound doctrine with his eloquent words, and his writings make up a large portion of the New Testament. Conversely, Peter had no formal education and yet by the grace of God he was also chosen to spread the Gospel abroad and to establish sound doctrine. Few contemporary preachers could hope to equal Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost when three thousand souls received Christ (Ac.2:14–41).

Therefore, we must conclude that formal education, in and of itself, has no direct bearing on one's ability to see and speak the Truth of God. In fact, from the educated can come highly sophisticated exaggerations or corruptions of the Truth while from the uneducated comes less intellectual falsehoods. No man can speak the Truth of God, whether rich or poor, whether educated or uneducated, if the Spirit of God does not enable him. God is not a respecter of persons after the ways of men (Ac.10:34). Therefore, education and polish does not necessarily commend a preacher as a spokesman for God. At times, we may have cause to thank God that he "…has hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes" (Mt.11:25). Often, from the lips of the simple, and from stumbling tongues comes the golden Gospel to the benefit of the "poorer" church, while we also observe that the affluent church frequently suffers spiritual loss because of its wealth (Re.3:17). The affluent church often gets exactly what they pay for to their detriment!

Obviously, that is not to say that a man who desires to serve God should avoid formal training in a Bible school or seminary if it is within his reach. God certainly utilized Paul's formal education and background to his advantage (cf. Ac.22:3), and even the prophets of old had schools, whose students were referred to as "sons of the prophets," established for the learning of sound doctrine (1Ki.20:35;2Ki.4:1). A man whom God has called can make valuable use of a personal storehouse of Scriptural knowledge for which he has studied diligently (2Ti.2:15).

Nonetheless, he must consider all his efforts spent in attaining an education as a personal sacrifice in order that he may better serve God, not as a means of earning greater sums of money. Just because a man is formally educated in a Bible school or seminary and is ordained in a formal ceremony does not prove that that man, through mere human effort and ordination, has become a spokesman for God. Rather, by hidden ordination in the hearts of men through the power of the Holy Spirit men are specifically chosen for that task (Jn.15:16).

The Root of the Problem

The root of the problem is to be found more with the congregations than in the men who are in office. Too many congregations place their paid minister on a pedestal much like men of old fashioned an image of their god out of wood or stone and having done so elevated it prominently for worship. Churches attempt to attract the most charismatic man they can find for the job, carefully check his administrative credentials, and measure his success by his ability to motivate people, raise funds, and grow a church in numbers. They falsely assume that the best preacher comes with the highest price tag while his spiritual qualifications are all too often not examined or are given a back seat to his more worldly attributes. Having chosen their charismatic leader, they heap their praises, their efforts, and their money upon whatever direction he leads them. Because of his exalted position that they themselves have fashioned for him, no man will dare question his doctrines or his methods.

Rather than do away with paid preachers, congregations should diligently choose the wisest and spiritually sound men among themselves to select a minister with high spiritual qualities, holding sound doctrine, and who is dedicated to serve God at all costs— even at the risk of alienating the very congregation that hired him. Having found such a man, they must never idolize him, but rather constantly pray for and with him. In this time of growing abandonment of sound doctrine in our churches, doctrinal purity must be the primary consideration in choosing a pastor so that the ministry of the church is built upon the solid rock of Scriptural Truth and not upon false precepts of men. That is possible only if the elders as well as the paid minister are daily into God's Word seeking Truth and guarding themselves against all error. Unfortunately, individual members of most pastoral search committees today are chosen from a wide spectrum of the congregation that largely includes those primarily concerned with satisfying special secular interests prevalent among their individual classes for selfish social reasons.

The flock of God must not only be guarded against doctrinal error in the pulpit, but against unscriptural methods as well. Extra-

biblical methods of service, discipline, evangelism, and fund-raising should be carefully avoided. Those are most often the very things that a young preacher fresh out of seminary and eager to please may advocate to try to prove his abilities to raise money and build up the church numerically. Practices of the church must always live up to the stature of its doctrines. One cannot expect worldly methods to produce results that are God-honoring. Often there is a tendency to give in to using advertising and promotional methods that are so effective in selling inferior material products or services such that the result of using such methods is to secularize the Gospel message as well. The means thus destroys the end. We must be careful to use only God's methods not those of the world.

A God-fearing, Bible-searching, flock-guarding minister is becoming a rarity today, but certainly not yet extinct. The true minister's primary duty is to fear and serve God in the calling he has received of Him. He must stay very close to the Scriptures to avoid error and assure that he expounds correct doctrine. He is to apply Scriptural doctrine not only first to himself, but he is to use it to edify and guard the flock against error and the encroaching darkness of humanism. It is certainly not wrong to relieve such a man from the burdens of earning a living so that his attentions may be fully focused upon serving God.

As we read in Acts, the twelve apostles called the congregation together and said, "It is not [reasonable] that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables." (Ac.6:2). Material and mundane matters of the church should be kept apart from the "chief elder's" responsibilities so that he may concentrate on serving God in prayer and in the ministering of his Word (Ac.6:4), which alone is his sacred duty. Since one can not serve God and the things of this world, it is reasonable that we should not only relieve, but guard our paid ministers that they not become ensnared with physical need whether their own, that of their family, or even that of the flock. That responsibility is ours as individual members of the congregation of God.

The Paid Evangelist

Christians are often exhorted by their leaders that they must be giving witness to others of the Gospel. However, a paid minister is all too often the witness who approaches the unsaved. Some of the churched may even attempt to drag the unsaved to church to "get them saved" through a preacher's persuasive sermons or arguments. Unfortunately, that has come to be expected, because we have neglected our own personal mission to reach the lost as stewards of the Gospel.

The dialogue between the paid preacher and the unsaved often sounds much like an encounter with a door-to-door salesman. The minister is being paid to do what he is doing much in the same way as is an insurance salesman or even a door-to-door peddler. The paid minister is most often an ineffective witness because his motives appear to be worldly ones to the unsaved. Doesn't a larger congregation make a more affluent church and provide more funds to pay the minister higher wages and allow him to build an "empire of members" with himself at the head? Doesn't the unbeliever that is approached by the minister usually sense that that is the case even if it is not true? Therefore, as we plainly see, the Gospel is being hindered by the fact that money is being connected with the message of free grace.

The Apostle Paul's Rejection of Wages

Returning to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul went on to clarify his position in defense of his apostleship by making an important distinction between spiritual rewards and monetary rewards. "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you are not we rather" (1Co.9:11,12)? That is, why is it so important to his protesters that Paul and Barnabas should have demanded their worldly goods or received money from them in exchange for spiritual things? Are spiritual and carnal things of equal value that they may be bartered one for the other? Concerning those "professional religionists" that accused Paul, if they partook of their converts'

worldly goods, didn't Paul and Barnabas ***deserve*** it more than they did inasmuch as their message had infinitely more value? The answer is yes in every legal sense.

Yet, said Paul, "…we have not used this power; but suffer all things, ***lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ***" (1Co.9:12, emphasis added). We find that Paul did not make use of any of the legal arguments that he earlier set forth for paying apostles in order to obtain wages from the Corinthians whom he had evangelized. Paul carefully went on to say that he also did not write those things that the Corinthians would send belated wages to him either. Rather, says Paul, it would be better that he would ***die*** than that the glory that he freely conveyed in the Gospel should be made void by selling it for sin-tainted earthly goods (1Co.9:15).

If he had received wages for the Gospel, it could easily be said that Paul made up all of those things in his own mind in order to earn money from his speaking, as did the philosophers who accused him. However, as Paul told the Galatians, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which is preached of me is not after man, for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Ga.1:11–12). For Paul to have received money for the Gospel would have ***contradicted*** the offer of free grace that was the foundation of the Good News. One cannot preach free grace and receive money in exchange for it. That would defy all reason.

Paul continued to say that he had nothing of which to glory (that is, of his own works that he should receive pay for it) for it was out of ***necessity*** that he preached the Gospel. A servant must not receive wages from those to whom he imparts his master's gifts freely as directed by his master's express commands. To do so would constitute theft not only from those for whom the free gifts were intended, but from his master as well. Since he belongs to his master, he is dependent only upon his master for his necessities as he carries out his mission. Paul would, in fact, bring great shame and trouble upon himself if he did not preach the Gospel that his master, the Lord Jesus, had intended for him to give out freely "…without money and without price" (Is.55:1; cf. 1Co.9:16).

Should a man expect or demand wages for that service that he gives freely out of love and out of a great personal need and desire to do so? How then could Paul accept a material reward from the Corinthians since he dispensed only that which his stewardship in the Lord required of him? It is God's Good News, not Paul's. He was not hired by the Corinthians, but was commissioned by Christ. He owed Christ a debt that could not ever be repaid though he preached the Gospel until breath itself failed him. "Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel" (1Co.9:18). Paul received of God the forgiveness of sin, the value of which was beyond any price, and in turn willingly offered his servitude in response to that grace so that others might freely receive the same gift of eternal life.

God has not given his chosen the power to speak about the base glory of men, but of ***His*** glory, nor does spiritual ability come from men's efforts, but through God's enabling. Since none of us have been charged by God for this wondrous gift, and have done nothing to earn it, how can we place a price for it upon those to whom we speak? God have mercy on that man if he is silent (1Co.9:16). God has chosen both the speaker and the hearer; therefore, the Gospel must be given out truthfully and freely and without consideration of any reward, for we are all stewards of the Gospel, ***not its owners***.

Many would be quick to point out that Paul received money from the church at Antioch. There is no evidence that Paul ever received any money for the preaching of God's Word to the home church at Antioch though he apparently did receive money for his missionary journeys. Even that is nowhere flatly stated, but it may very well be true depending upon how we interpret certain verses (2Co.11:8; Ac.13:2,4). However, we must make an important distinction here. Those funds were received from ***established Christians*** at Antioch who sent Paul forth as their personal representative with the Gospel.

We must also realize that the amount Paul received, if any, apparently was just enough to make passage upon a ship into the mission field. It is also possible that the Antioch church was able to supply enough funds for Paul's return journey though that is even less

certain. Any money the church may have given him was not used by Paul for his own necessities and comfort, but only to transport Paul and his companions forth to other areas of the world and to provide them the opportunity to freely extend the Gospel of Christ to other lands. Those were far from luxurious accommodations, which probably accounted for John Mark buckling under the hardships of the journey so early on (Ac.12:25;13:13).

If the church had supplied a great amount of funds, it would not have been necessary for Paul to have worked at all while in the missions field, but we know by considerable Scriptural evidence that he did work as a tentmaker in order to feed himself and even to fund his further evangelistic efforts as well (Ac.18:2,3). The only instances that we know of Paul personally receiving gifts from churches for his own necessities were when he was being held in jail by the authorities and thus was unable to work to provide for his own needs. Unlike modern jails, food and other necessities had to be supplied by friends and relatives if the inmate was to survive. Paul mentioned that the Philippian church "sent to his necessity" while he was in Thessalonica (Ph.4:15–16). Those were outright gifts freely given out of their personal love for Paul and were not wages in exchange for preaching the Gospel message.

Therefore, when a minister is paid wages by his congregation, it should not be paid in exchange for speaking the Truth or the Gospel that must remain inviolate, but only for his necessary support that enables him to continue to speak for God alone and so remain a productive servant of Christ.

Chapter 13.8 The Search for a Church Home

Prevailing Churchianity makes it quite difficult to find a church with which the elect can affiliate themselves. Today, when anyone looks at Churchianity objectively, he or she sees a diverse, disunited variety of Christian sects that exhibit a confusion of style, practice, and doctrine. Since there can be but one ***true*** Church, one must wonder how it is that there are so many different churches and organizations that so often compete with each other for members.[58] How can we have any hope of finding one single church in which we can faithfully worship God from the diverse array of churches that we find around us? We soon must realize that there is little hope of finding a church that is sound in all respects; no temporal church can be perfect by its very nature. What we need to search for is a church in which the visible Church is implanted within it and still has sufficient influence to properly guide that church in matters of essential doctrine and practice.

The New Believer's Dilemma

The new believer finds himself ensnared in an enigma: he desperately seeks Christian fellowship within a local church in the hopes of receiving sound doctrine, but precisely because he lacks sound doctrine, he does not know how to recognize it when it is found. A great many new believers have never before attended any church, and they are therefore faced with trying to select one for the first time from the myriad of churches about them. We find that other new believers have attended or even been a member of a particular temporal church for years before God in his infinite wisdom reached down and redeemed them in Christ. The more fortunate of this latter group find themselves already in a church where they can exercise their newfound faith with others of the elect and grow, while still

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[58] How various denominations and sects came about is the subject of a large portion of Book III of this work as we relate church history from Pentecost to the present day.

others suddenly find that they no more belong within the fellowship of their present church than they do in the world at large.

The profusion of Protestant churches has led many new believers to fall into the trap of reckoning that the Roman Catholic Church is the only true church because of its ancient traditional moorings. However, that judgment is based upon human rationalization rather than upon Scriptural and historical evidence. The Roman Catholic Church did not come into existence until the fourth century at which time the true visible Church was absorbed into the decaying Roman Empire that then encased it in Roman-style Churchianity that degraded and ultimately even persecuted it.

Still other new believers have used similar rationalization for joining various so-called Christian cults since they stand out as separate and unique in the general confusion of Protestant Churchianity. They are unique, however, only because they completely deny or severely distort one or more of the very basic tenets of the Christian faith — or they profess a unique doctrine that is not Christian at all.

Therefore, the new believer should not be overly concerned with finding a church to regularly attend overnight. Instead, he must be very careful to search out the ***right*** church where God would have him learn in Truth and grow in faith. Haste in the selection of a church fellowship could have life-long consequences for him. Attending a church that falls short of teaching major doctrines accurately can have no effect on a person's salvation because that rests solely and securely in the established personal relationship he has with Jesus Christ. However, improper choice of a church fellowship ***can*** affect the manner in which a believer can faithfully witness and serve God, and it can greatly affect his growth to maturity in the true knowledge of his faith.

Uprooting of the Mature Believer

It is not always a new believer who is searching for a church home. Perhaps, one has become uprooted from his church home of many years due to a necessary move to a new locality. Moreover, many mature believers have seen their present church slide into a state

of decline away from the sound doctrines of the faith over the years as new more progressive-minded members have filled the ranks and new preachers have been hired to occupy the pulpit in order to further enforce that decline. Unable to halt the flow toward liberalism, they desperately need to seek out another church home lest they deny the faith.

The decision to make a break with a home church is always a traumatic experience. It means leaving longstanding personal relationships behind because friends often cannot understand why you are leaving a church that you have attended for so long. In fact, they may consider you a deserter or even an apostate. Being accustomed to corporate worship and the support of church friends, the feeling of isolation during this time can be overwhelming. For that reason, even the more mature believer may become subject to some of the same snares that the new believer must seek to avoid. Though the mature believer is much less easily deceived, his discernment can make the search for a new church even more disheartening.

Preparing for the Search

It becomes necessary for the new believer to carefully prepare himself for the search ahead of the time he actually engages in it. Three preliminary preparations can help save the believer much difficulty, and aid him or her in choosing a congregation with which to worship. Those considerations should be carefully explored before beginning any search for a church to attend regularly and most certainly before joining any church fellowship.

Guidance through Prayer

Through the aid of the indwelling Spirit of Christ, we have recourse to come before our Heavenly Father in prayer to seek his guidance in all things. We must not ignore that wondrous avenue that is open to God's throne. Choosing a church with which to fellowship must be a matter of unrelenting prayer and not left to "blind chance" or human pragmatism. A new believer must not let his newfound state of isolation from the world drive him over the edge such that he or she is willing to sacrifice Truth for human acceptance. Both our emotional

and intellectual being must be fully engaged in the search for Truth. Because that choice is so very important to our spiritual life as believers, we must diligently pray for guidance rather than merely make a hasty and blind leap into the dark.

Diligent Personal Study of the Scriptures

Secondly, the new believer must immediately begin searching the Scriptures on his own long before he considers searching for a church. The warm fuzzy atmosphere of most churches actually works to prevent him from beginning any independent search of the Scriptures for fear of alienation if he should discover things that are contrary to the beliefs of the church at hand.

Regarding Scripture itself, it is very important to utilize a Bible that is a trustworthy translation. While paraphrases are often useful for general reading, to the extent that many have even come to a saving knowledge of Christ from reading them, they fall very short for any serious Bible study that must lead to sound doctrine. That is because you are reading someone else's ***interpretation*** of Scripture, not Scripture directly. Be sure to choose a sound translation, and one that you can read and understand. The *Authorized Version* (*King James Version*) remains an excellent translation for those who can understand the English of that day. For those who cannot, the *New King James*, the *New American Standard Bible*, and even the *New International Version*[59] or *English Standard Version* are all good contemporary translations worthy of consideration.

A solid background in God's Word is the only way to prevent false doctrine from overwhelming us, and to guard us against falling into pits of error into which many churches have already fallen. This must be a prayerful and diligent search for Truth as we become willing to throw all pre-conceived notions of religious tradition we may have held or heard of aside. It requires a cover-to-cover reading of all sixty-six books of the Bible as well as an in-depth study of each of the major

[59] One should be cautioned to avoid *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) that has corrupted text in order to serve a progressively liberal agenda.

doctrines of the faith.[60] That takes considerable time and effort, but there is no sound shortcut. As you do so, look for the single thread of grace that ties all of Scripture together. Since God is the author of all Scripture it is of one system of thought, not a hodge-podge of disassociated books, phrases, and words.

Scripture itself is the best interpreter of Scripture. If a passage is hard to understand, prayerfully seek out other places in Scripture where that same topic is presented. Often, that will make the meaning clear. In other cases, we must try to understand the passage in the overall context of Scripture. Admittedly, this is hard slow work, but the benefit received from it will be a personal understanding of Truth, and that Truth will set you free from the possible bondage of false religion. A personal study of God's Word allows the Holy Spirit, our primary instructor, to use the textbook that He, Himself, has provided for our edification.

Don't let other professing Christians convince you that only their particular denomination, church, or pastor can interpret Scripture such that you are incapable of understanding it on your own. That is not true and almost certainly ensures establishment and continuation of false doctrines. Of course, we must recognize that some believers have more intellectual capacity than others, but if we cannot individually understand the very basic doctrines that the Holy Spirit reveals to us, we may more easily fall prey to the falsehoods with which men present us. In Chapter 1.2 of Book I we spoke of the perspicuity of Scripture, which means that all men can come to a basic understanding of its truths. In the same chapter, we also discussed the basics of sound interpretation. It is imperative that every believer absorb as much as his own intellect will allow. Remember that you have the same Holy Spirit teaching you as does any other man or woman. A serious search for Truth will always be rewarded as long as we are willing to accept

[60] While it is hoped that this work can provide basic knowledge that can aid the new believer, there is no substitute for the direct personal search of Scripture to verify and develop ones own personal belief and confidence. No one can do that for another no matter how well intentioned that person may be.

the Truth at face value when it is illuminated in God's Word regardless of personal bias or any prevailing church dogma. We must not ever rationalize Truth away in order to affiliate ourselves with a particular temporal church or denomination.

Learning from the Past

Third, we must diligently study the history of both the visible Church and the temporal church on earth to come to an understanding of the manner in which today's diverse factions, doctrines, and congregations have come into being. The new-covenant Church of Christ is now nearly two-thousand years old. It is important to realize that we are not first-century Christians. We live in an age when the institutionalized church has already gone through many periods of moral corruption, terrible doctrinal errors, spiritual darkness and abandonment of Truth — as well as periods of positive reform and revival as the Holy Spirit inspired his elect.

We also find that certain doctrines have come through this period like shining beacons to the Truth having been tested through troubled times. We must carefully study past errors in order that we may not repeat them today, and we must acknowledge past truths that we need not rebuild a foundation that is already laid. A sound historic guide to defining basic Christian foundational belief is the *Apostle's Creed.*

> **"I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, which was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell [abode of the dead]; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from hence He shall come to judge the quick [living] and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic [universal] church; the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting."** (*The Apostles Creed)*

Though not actually written by any of the apostles, this creed is recognized by many sound churches and denominations today as representing a composite of true apostolic belief. It must be warned that many churches that may ascribe to this creed and even recite it in their services do not necessary believe or live up to its statements. They may merely continue to recite it as a meaningless ritual. Some churches can still recite it while simultaneously holding erroneous doctrines concerning the person of Christ for instance. Furthermore, many secondary doctrines can be appended onto this basic statement of belief that renders the basic truth that it contains ineffective.

An understanding of historical Christianity and the Churchianity that parallels it is so important to the life of a believer that a major portion of Book III of this work is devoted to a broad study of church history. By further understanding the source and general beliefs and teachings of many of our denominations today in the light of the studies of we have undertaken in this work, but more especially through Scripture itself, it is possible to totally exclude some churches or denominations outright. That helps us narrow down the search for a church fellowship in which we can in all good conscience, join in its good works and support it with our time and money to the glory of Christ.

Pitfalls of the Search

The newborn in Christ must grow up rather quickly in today's world. Like a young child, he must quickly learn not to accept "candy from strangers." As important as is fellowship with other professing believers, Truth is much more necessary for his nurture and growth to spiritual maturity. While the babe in Christ does not have a "spiritual mother" in this world to protect him (the temporal church is ***not*** our mother), he has someone far better: he has internal guidance from the Holy Spirit of Christ from the moment he believed. A new believer must seek the aid of the Holy Spirit and rely upon that initial measure of faith that He has given to all that He effectively calls to salvation.

As we have discussed in the previous topic, a sound knowledge of the origin and historic doctrines of various denominations can help us weed out a large number of undesirable

churches at the outset. Unfortunately, it is still necessary for each believer to search out the one single congregation that he or she believes more nearly fits the biblical concept of what the church should be today through personal visitation and close scrutiny. The difficulty of that effort is greatly compounded by today's widespread Churchianity that throws many obstacles and pitfalls in our way.

Undue Criticism

Believers are commonly criticized by devout churchgoers for making that necessary search believing that a new believer must immediately join a local church in which to worship and grow. The false assumption is that all churches are the same such that any church will do, but they will simultaneously deny that by imploring you to join their own church. Only a pseudo-Christian who has never seriously considered searching for Truth at face value could make that kind of statement; he just believes what he has been told over many years and has never tested the teachings of his own church or denomination against Scripture. Churchianity has him imprisoned within an intellectual box without any windows from which he can see no need to search for Truth. Consequently, he can have no understanding of the real difficulty and agony of conscience that a genuine seeker of Truth encounters.

Believers that go about seeking a sound church are often characterized by their critics as "church hoppers" or "church tramps" because they do not immediately make a commitment to any one congregation. Some pseudo-Christians may indeed be going from church to church just to avoid making a commitment and avoid the responsibilities that membership involves, but many true believers are honestly constrained from joining a local church as a matter of conscience over serious doctrinal concerns. We must not allow ourselves to be deterred by such false criticism; it is certainly not safe for a Christian to neglect the persistent warnings of his conscience.

Seductive Methodology

Making the rounds of various churches can be potentially dangerous for a new believer because he is often not yet well grounded

in Scripture. Since he is ignorant of important basic doctrines, he is vulnerable to many falsehoods and quite easily deceived. He is especially susceptible to the many methods that some churches promote as a quick road to spiritual enlightenment such as short self-improvement courses, a certain number of prescribed steps to faith, and so forth. Finish their course and you will have achieved immediate spiritual maturity. The gimmicks that some churches offer are as attractive as shiny rattles are to a baby, and the new believer is truly a "babe" in Christ. He is often ruled more by his emotions rather than his head. He may impulsively grasp at the first thing that comes along and swallow it whole without examination. In doing so they are sucked into the deep dark hole of Churchianity from which escape is very difficult.

Hypocritical Love

The wide array of liberal-minded churches available to the immature believer today represents a jungle with a smiling serpent hiding under every rock, or perhaps we should say under every church steeple. Just as Satan most often appears as an "angel of light," many churches put on a face that is quite different from that which is within (cf. 2Co. 11:14). The most common façade they hide behind today is a promise of unconditional acceptance. A sampling of many church marquees, will reveal messages that read, "We ***love*** visitors," "God is ***love***", "Come fellowship with us in ***love***," "We ***love*** the community," "God ***loves*** sinners," "***Everyone*** is welcome here," etcetera.

Many new believers have just come through an emotional roller coaster in their lives before they are finally redeemed in Christ. In their newfound faith, they most likely have felt the sharp sting of rejection from close friends and relatives who no longer understand them. Therefore, when they come into a new church what they are most often seeking is human fellowship and acceptance to replace that loss. They are not immediately seeking Truth, and sound doctrine is the farthest from their minds at that stage in their spiritual development.

What many receive is a false warm fuzzy love that is not founded in Truth but is a cheap counterfeit for what they really need

that can only be found in Christ and among his elect. Church members in such churches often need to be told to welcome new visitors with a smiling face out of a cold sense of Christian duty. This "sloppy love" also manifests itself in various worldly parties, games, and other good times sponsored by the church to "get to know each other," but it has no genuine foundation in Truth. Christ finds Himself on the outside of this saccharin-sweet fellowship, knocking at a barred door (cf. Re.3:17–20).

Religious Trappings

It is most unfortunate that churches are frequently chosen because of its various social programs, the beauty of the church building, the talents and charisma of the preacher, or the quality and type of music program. While all of those are factors that will at times be considered important to the well being of a temporal church, they are the mere trappings of Churchianity. None of those should constitute a primary reason for attending or joining one particular church over another.

Blind Ignorance

Since a new believer as yet has no intellectual sensitivity to what is true and what is false he may accept what other "professing Christians" tell him without question. Because of his lack of spiritual discernment, he may not even notice that he receives different answers to his questions from different Christians — some of whom are likely false professors. If a new believer gets a vague or evasive answer, he may only believe that he himself is at fault in not being able to reconcile those answers in his own mind.

Diverse and evasive answers most often stem from blind ignorance. Churchgoers are baffled by the questions and have no valid answer for them. Liberal churches have adopted a common agenda to be all things to all people, which causes them to place a strong emphasis upon human relationships and a desire to seem less radical to the world at large in order to attract still more people out of the world. Liberal church members are woefully ignorant of important doctrines and how their own local church fails to relate to them. Truth is seen as

being relative to circumstances rather than being absolute. Such liberal churches promote a doctrinal tolerance that recognizes anything as true if the individual believer accepts it as such while still accepting the sincere beliefs of others no matter how unscriptural they may be.

We must especially beware of churches that claim to hold no particular doctrine since those are probably the most dangerous churches of all and are not even worthy to be called a church. The primary purpose of a church is to worship and glorify God, but the secondary purpose is to build up its membership in the knowledge of the Truth in order that they may be strengthened in their faith to fulfill the church's third purpose, which is to provide a true witness to a lost world. To profess no doctrine at all is to admit to holding no truth at all.

Due to the widespread Churchianity present in all temporal churches, even members of many conservative evangelical churches are in the throws of the same doctrinal blindness. Therefore, there is not only the danger of the new believer encountering outright deception but the additional hazard of facing dumbfounding ignorance in the answers received to his sincere inquiries from many existing church members. That ignorance may increasingly characterize itself in an unfriendly attitude that seeks to avoid association with the inquirer whom they see as nothing but a troublemaker.

For that reason, one must often enquire of a church officer or the pastor of a church about doctrinal concerns. Unfortunately, many elders and/or deacons are chosen today with little regard for their knowledge of sound doctrine. Therefore, in many churches the more educated pastor is often the only choice remaining. Even then, it may be difficult to get straight answers because the newborn may not ask the right questions couched in correct theological language. He may only get an accurate answer for a false perception of his question. That false perception may be unintentional or even intentional. Some church pastors will hide their true bent behind pretense or semantics just to gain a new member after which they intend to indoctrinate them over time with their own ideas of what they consider to be appropriate thinking.

Legalistic Traditionalism

A believer must be careful not to equate traditional Churchianity, cloaked in solemn ritual, ceremony, and legalism, with Truth. Paganism is rampant with ritual and ceremony, and the fallen nature of man is titillated by those outward exercises. In approaching God for worship, we must indeed do so with due reverence and seriousness of mind, but our heart must also be engaged. Somber ritual and ceremony without true love in fellowship with God is cold and provides no warmth for the soul. It does not honor God, nor does it satisfy the deep spiritual longing of men. Only when our hearts are rightly attuned to God does a ritual have any meaning. Truth on the other hand is alive as it motivates and directs every aspect of our being — especially so in our worship of God.

Because legalistic traditionalism exhibits a stern face to the new believer, they are less often attracted to it — unless they seek to do so out of a misguided sense of serving penance for their past sin and the lifestyle that accompanied it. That is sometimes the case with a newborn Christian that was plucked as a brand from the fire since he has not yet realized the broad scope of forgiveness and redemption that we have received in Christ. We cannot make propitiation for our sins through legalistic ritual and ceremony; Christ has already atoned for our sins in full upon a cruel cross.

Doctrinal Drift

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to determine a church's true doctrinal stand and methodology with any degree of accuracy without attending and becoming involved to some degree with the church for months or even years. It often takes that long to determine the underlying reality from the outward profession, since many churches ignore in practice the basis upon which they were founded. Moreover, a local church's doctrinal position and practice continues to shift over time as well, further prolonging the search. Because one who merely attends a church is usually kept in the dark about various internal proceedings of the church, its true doctrinal position and any inclination toward a shift cannot be determined until after one accepts

membership. Joining a church is a very serious commitment, and renouncing that commitment in the future, even over serious doctrinal concerns, makes it even more traumatic to make the necessary break and go elsewhere.

The Problem of Distance

Because a sound doctrinal church is becoming increasingly rare today, a seeker of the Truth may soon find that he has exhausted every church within a reasonable driving distance of his home. If a church were to be found only at an extreme distance from home, it would be almost impossible to lend support and participate in the way that we should as members. For that reason, some believers just "bite their tongue" and settle for whatever church is nearby to worship God in the midst of an estranged congregation and try their best to reform erroneous church doctrines or if that is impossible to ignore them. Others may choose to stay at home and attend various electronic Churches that require less commitment from their viewers, but provide no fellowship. Supporting hypocritical churches with time or money only because they are close by or are convenient to "attend" is an exercise of poor stewardship. It may become necessary for a believer to consider moving to an area where a sound church can be found. Though often imperative, this is a difficult decision because it means finding new employment and uprooting oneself from family members and friends.

Church Affiliation

Because joining a church immediately identifies us with its entire body of doctrine, we may not always find ourselves able to join any local church. That does not necessarily mean that we cannot ***regularly attend*** a church if we believe that we can worship with them in good conscience. Many churches allow believers to worship in their company without actually joining with them in a formal manner. It may even be possible to support some or much of their efforts with our offerings and time and to align ourselves with them in other matters that we do hold in common. If they allow, we may also serve God by singing in their choir or in some other supportive role.

Some churches that are deeply steeped in Churchianity, however, will harass non-members and make every effort to persuade them to join their church even to the point of suggesting that they are disobedient Christians if they don't. If that happens, it may become necessary to search elsewhere for another congregation in order to have any peace with one's conscience before the face of God.

Even after we have found a congregation with which to regularly worship, we must continue to search for the Truth in God's Word for ourselves and not become lazy, relying solely on the teachings of other men. Not only does the study of God's Word guard the individual believer from error, it also protects the church at large against faulty doctrine. A church whose members individually study God's Word will be far more sound in the faith than one whose members merely listen to Sunday morning sermons, engage in various church works and activities, or blindly follow the leading of a minister. Only when we have our minds girded with the Truth and gain spiritual discernment for that Truth can we safely benefit from the teaching of other believers. Therefore, we must seek out a church that considers the Scriptures to be the Word of God — alive and authoritative — for the guidance of the corporate church as well as for its individual members.

Joining a Church

Merely choosing a church to ***attend*** is a difficult task, but ***joining*** a church is a very serious step because in so doing, we must accept ***all*** of the teachings of the temporal church, not just select from them. Their paradigm becomes our own thus erecting barriers to our thinking. We must understand that all earthly churches will fall short of being perfect because they have a worldly component gained through their human membership. As some wag has said, "even if we should find the perfect church, we would be unable to join it because our joining it would make it imperfect." As a result, we may at times need to overlook small differences in ***minor*** doctrines and practice when choosing a church in which to worship, or we would most likely find ourselves always staying at home on the Lord's Day.

Moreover, there are plainly some ***minor*** doctrines and practices about which good, honest, and godly men cannot fully agree that cannot be resolved this side of Heaven. However, depending upon the extremes to which minor or questionable doctrines are interpreted and emphasized by the church or its denomination, we still may or may not be able to join that church. Minor doctrines when they are exaggerated out of context and made to supersede important major doctrines in significance constitute a serious error.

Our conscience will surely condemn us if we feel that we have compromised the Truth by agreeing to tolerate error. However, if a church genuinely allows for some variation in thought among its members without coercion concerning minor doctrines, we need not be hindered in fellowshipping with them as an official member. It is the ***major*** doctrines, which should be quite clear to the reader at this point as centering upon God's sovereign grace, that we must not ever compromise. Certainly, a church that errors in any ***major*** doctrines must not be joined or supported and should not ordinarily even be attended.

Section 14, Delusive Rituals and Tradition

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Charismata and Glossolalia

Biblical Survey of Tongues

Ritual Healing

Ritual Prayer

Ritual Fasting

Angel Worship

Chapter 14.1 Charismata and Glossolalia

Since human families are made up of infants, adolescents, and adults as well as the aged, we should also expect to find spiritual infants, adolescents, adults and mature believers within the larger family of the temporal church. A believer is not born anew from above full-grown spiritually and therefore needs to be in the company of mature Christians who along with the Holy Spirit will help them to grow into spiritually mature and knowledgeable adults.

A church congregation that is made up totally of infants makes no more sense than a family of babies that has no adults to care for and guide them. Nonetheless, some of our churches today seem to be very much like a family consisting only of spiritual infants and adolescents. Even if they survive in their newfound faith, they are unlikely to mature in the knowledge of the Truth, but find themselves sentenced forever to play with holy things as if they were the beloved toys of childhood. Those infantile churches are often referred to as "charismatic" because of their extreme preoccupation with sign gifts over a sound theological organization of biblical Truth. Since that preoccupation is so prevalent today, it behooves us to examine it in some detail here.

The Charismatic Movement

Charismata (extreme emphasis on spiritual gifts) constitutes a broad movement, not a denomination.[61] Though we often think of it as being prevalent only in Pentecostal and Apostolic churches, it is far more widespread than that. It can be found to some extent in all of the major Protestant denominations and even within the old Roman Catholic Church. Furthermore, most cults also embrace charismata in one form or another.

The word "charisma" comes from the Greek word *charis* that means "grace" or "favor." However, the charismatic movement does

[61] The Charismatic Movement will be discussed in its proper historic context in Book III of this work. This chapter is concerned only with its present form and practice.

not emphasize the broader meaning of "grace," but rather the narrower interpretation of "favor" or more particularly "gifts." Therefore, the charismatic movement is made up of those who place a strong emphasis on supposed divinely bestowed gifts or powers. As we have already discussed in Section 12, there are many excellent Spiritual gifts to be desired by the believer to help sustain him in his faith and to edify the Church. However, the charismatic movement places its emphasis more narrowly upon highly visible sign gifts that appeal to the fleshly senses.

Commonly Exercised Gifts

Speaking in tongues, more technically referred to as "glossolalia," is the ***primary*** gift that those of the charismatic movement claim to practice extensively today.[62] This activity, as it is widely practiced, is often referred to as the "tongues movement" or the "Pentecostal movement" since this gift is seen to have been first given on the Day of Pentecost (Ac.2:4). Along with ecstatic incomprehensible speech, the interpretation of unknown tongues into English or another vernacular is said to be practiced by still others.

In addition to glossolalia, other supernatural phenomena and powers of various sorts are also claimed that occasionally includes predictive prophecy. Others are said to have the power of "the discerning of spirits." That is, they are said to have a special gift of supernatural ability to determine if a spirit is good or evil. The continued practice of various aspects of this phenomenon, particularly glossolalia, is considered necessary for the full participation of individuals in some church gatherings and is exercised regularly in their meetings.

The charismatic also believes in invoking the "gift of ritual healing" as a divine right of believers. In practice, they call for miraculous healing to take place, usually by the laying on of hands, or by other human physical contact with the sick. Though it is claimed that healing is being brought about by the Holy Spirit, it is commonly

[62] A more detailed discussion of glossolalia is to be found later in this chapter.

the "human healer" that is exalted as he gains recognition for having performed the acts, not God.[63]

Translation Worship

Charismatics are for the most part fundamental in their profession that the Scriptures are the literal Word of God though their approach to the study of it is narrow and limited because of their charismatic preoccupation. It has been stated in Book I, Chapter 1.2 of this work that the Scriptures are inerrant in the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic forms as originally written. We must further conclude that those writings have been divinely preserved through various translations so that we may read them today without doing violence to the original texts, or indeed, to God's Word toward us lest God's Word should become void.

Nevertheless, it is not proper that we should find ourselves ***worshiping*** any particular ***translation*** of the Bible rather than God who preserved it for us since that would be a form of idolatry. Some charismatic churches seem so inclined to worship the King James Authorized translation that they even transfer that worship over to King James of England or as is sometimes heard, "Saint James." We may frequently hear certain Scriptural verses referred to as "pure King James," and observe bumper stickers displaying the message, "If it ain't King James, it ain't the Bible."

We should point out that the worship of the King James translation is not limited to charismatic churches and groups but is also common among many conservative and fundamentalist churches. Perhaps that dogmatism springs from unfamiliarity with the origin of the Authorized translation. King James only authorized a new translation; he did not personally translate it. The actual translation was accomplished by a group of church scholars from the available compiled Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of that day, often referred to as the "Received Text," with consideration being given to earlier translations. Its intended purpose was to standardize the text, rendering

[63] Ritual healing is discussed in detail in Chapter 14.3

it acceptable for use in both Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopal England.

Legal Holiness

The charismatic is also quite often characterized by a stress on holiness of living. Actually, a lot of denominations and individuals could benefit greatly by observing a lifestyle that is separated from the ways of the world and wholly directed to God if they would but allow the Holy Spirit to lead them in that effort. Nonetheless, excessive stress on personal holiness as an end in itself that is accomplished through the flesh, can lead to a self-righteous attitude or, conversely, a sense of hopelessness and despair as one continually fails to comply. It leads to a petty legalism of works rather than an acceptance of salvation by grace alone. Some in the church may come to doubt their own salvation if certain contrived rules cannot be lived up to. This is but a back-door salvation-by-works philosophy attempting to cover over the message of free grace and the liberty in Christ that grace affords us. It leads to a form of bondage similar to the sundry laws that had been fabricated by the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' days on Earth.

A boastful "I don't smoke, drink, or chew" morality tends to become a religion unto itself. Dress codes, unusual and restrictive diets, and other fads begin to occupy the minds of the adherents more than the things of God. They do not realize that this is actually a carnal approach to religion and not an avenue to spiritual conduct. It is impossible to whip the flesh into submission to the Spirit because, although the soul is saved through faith, the flesh is still under the condemnation of death. Soon, this external code of ethics can become dogmatically mandated, and it can become more important to the life of the adherent who is caught in its snare than his faith in Christ!

Pride soon follows along in the train of a self-imposed pseudo-holiness, and love dies. The constant struggle against arbitrary rules of conduct can make one mean-spirited and unkind toward those who are free of those self-imposed rules of conduct through the liberty they have gained in Christ. Those who do not live by the "rules" are regarded as heathen. Christian love for ones neighbor degenerates into

a desire to convert ones neighbor to build up the population within a prison of regulations, not from a genuine desire to see the lost saved from the condemnation of sin. After all, misery does love company, and the more company, the better.

Jesus Only

Some, though certainly not all, Charismatics also fall into a category referred to as the "Jesus only" view of the Godhead. At the risk of oversimplification, Jesus is seen as once having been the Father who came to earth ***entirely*** as Jesus who is now the Holy Spirit who ***entirely*** dwells in man. Therefore, they may say that they believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but must deny that the Godhead consists of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as separate persons in a continuing unity of being. Their belief is similar to that of the ancient Sabellians who considered the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost merely ***modes*** of the same being or person (Modalism). That immediately separates them from any who would dare use the word "trinity" or "person" in connection with the Godhead.[64] Many charismatic followers, of the "Jesus only" group, also prefer the term "Jesus person" rather than "Christian." That is just another way in which they seek to separate themselves from mainstream Christianity.

Glossolalia

Having generally described the charismatic, and we must admit that much variation exists in individual churches, let us now look at glossolalia itself. The technical term "glossolalia" is taken directly from the Greek and means literally "tongue speaking." The word *glosso* means "tongue" (or language), and the word *lalia* means "to speak." Glossolalia, also called the "gift of tongues" as it is practiced by the charismatic today, is variously considered a form of prayer or worship exercised extensively by certain groups such as the Pentecostal and various Apostolic denominations.[65] Glossolalia is not,

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[64] Modalism was discussed along with other Christological errors in Book I, chapter 6.2 of this work.

[65]Many of the Apostolic movement in particular do not choose to call themselves a

however, limited to a few denominations or groups, but can be found within ***individual*** church assemblies of practically all denominations.

Modern Practice of Glossolalia

Glossolalia is characterized by incomprehensible speech or chanting that comes about in an ecstatic manner usually attended with high emotion and personal abandon. Natural inhibitions are commonly thrown to the wind as the mind is placed in a neutral state to allow spirit control of the tongue. Some may dance, jump, throw up their arms, or fall on the floor. Some may even faint which is sometimes referred to as being "slain in the spirit." This experience during glossolalia is often said to be accompanied by a warming or tingling sensation in the members of the body of the worshiper. The mind may go into a completely trance-like state, or it may remain remotely aware of surroundings as if one is standing in a fog.

Some charismatic churches have individuals who are appointed to remain apart from the activities in order to ensure the modesty and personal safety of those who are engaging in otherwise uninhibited abandon. It seems strange that such "designated drivers" would be necessary to prevent a believer who is supposed to be under the power of the Holy Spirit from doing something indecent or harmful to themselves or others. We must ask ourselves why the Holy Spirit would ever lead a believer into such activities to begin with and must therefore question whether they are truly under the power of the Holy Spirit at all.

It is reported that those engaging in "tongues" often speak in a foreign language that is known elsewhere on Earth, but that has hardly been universally verified. Others refer to glossolalia as a language that is only otherwise spoken by angels that, of course, could never be verified. For the most part, the speech is incomprehensible but often rhythmic or melodic. Still others engage in completely uncontrolled

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denomination. Any organization that they have is quite loose to the extent that they often do not even enroll worshipers as members in their local gatherings. Since they do not believe that the Church of Jesus Christ is an organization, they do not formally organize their local congregations let alone establish a hierarchy of churches.

babbling that may simulate hysteria. This phenomenon can run the full range of seemingly intelligent and purposeful recitation of Scriptural verses, to false, trivial, or even blasphemous thoughts, all spoken through the mouth of the participant. Considering Chapters 12–14 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that we discussed in Section 12 of this book, it would seem that abuses of this gift are taking place today that are similar to that which was taking place then in Corinth.

Firewall of the Tongue

Many who have engaged in glossolalia may soon acquire the ability to use their tongue in a barrage of Scripture (most often in questionable context) and the recitation of experiences and whimsical stories (particularly regarding visions and healings) presented in circular reasoning that leads absolutely nowhere. Any attempt to crack through the barrage of words to try to get a rational grasp of their thoughts meets with failure, and it soon becomes impossible to hold a normal conversation regarding any Scriptural matters. We may find ourselves agreeing that their tongue is controlled indeed by someone or something other than the person that we once may have known, and may despair of ever reaching them with the Truth and restoring their spiritual sanity.

Evidence of Tongues

The form of holiness that many who claim this gift practice, separates them not only from the world of sinners, but also from the fellowship of other believers as well. That is further enforced by the general belief of some Charismatics that the ***only*** proof of the Holy Spirit indwelling an individual is glossolalia. If one has not received the gift of "tongues," so they insist, he or she does not have the baptism of the Holy Ghost and is therefore not a genuine believer. The required proof of their validity is commonly referred to as the "evidence of speaking in tongues."

Determining the Source of Glossolalia

The matter that must be ascertained is who or what is controlling the person's tongue during glossolalia. Three explanations

may be suggested: 1) demon possession, 2) an anomaly of the human mind, 3) the Holy Spirit of God. We also know however that there are those who counterfeit the gift and play along just to be members of the crowd. What a terrible thing to be a member of a church that insists on glossolalia as the only valid proof of being a true believer without having the gift oneself! Therefore, many choose to fake the gift and in doing so draw still others into the deception with them. There is considerable evidence that glossolalia can be taught and learned apart from any need of spiritual intervention.

Conceding that glossolalia can be acquired through training and readily counterfeited, we must still determine which of the three explanations we just listed best fits the ***sincere*** worshiper who engages in glossolalia. While all three are potential sources of glossolalia, those that truly speak in tongues by the power of the Holy Spirit are likely in the extreme minority because they would only receive the gift on very rare occasions under very special circumstances. It is highly unlikely that any of the church gatherings in which all speak the same language would ever have a need for gifts of diverse tongues since that would only inhibit their communion one with the other.

The rare occasions in which the Holy Spirit may be the source could only be found on the missions field or during extraordinary times where foreigners are present. Even then, the gift must be needful in order to communicate the Gospel message to a receptive person. While we cannot deny God the power to do anything He desires at any time He wills, it seems apparent that most exhibitions of glossolalia is not of God, but are mental aberrations, of human fabrication or even of satanic origin.

We conclude by stating the obvious: no man alive today was present at any of the occurrences recorded in the New Testament when the Holy Spirit was given. However, if we assume that God can still give gifts to man through the Holy Spirit as He sees fit, we cannot merely discount the exercise of similar gifts today out of hand. The question may be more whether gifts are being counterfeited and abused, rather than questioning the possibility of their continued existence.

Chapter 14.2 Biblical Survey of Tongues

Having considered glossolalia as a delusive practice in the previous chapter, we shall now examine the many passages of Scripture outside of the event on Pentecost in which tongues are mentioned.[66] In each case, we shall attempt to determine from the text the way in which the gift was manifested, to whom the gift was given, and for what purpose it was given. Because of the propensity of some Charismatics to see the Bible as a virtual textbook written exclusively for the practice of tongues, we shall also discuss various passages where tongues are not specifically mentioned but are only mentioned obliquely or only seen as being inferred by some today.

Origins of the Word "Tongue" in Scripture

Before delving into many verses where the word "tongue" is found in the Bible, we shall first look at the word "tongue" as it is translated in the King James Version. While other translations of the Bible could also have been utilized in this study, the King James Version is widely accepted by Charismatics themselves and since it is also the translation widely referred to throughout this work, it alone is being considered here. To consider all of the myriad translations is beyond the scope of this work.

Only three words are used in the Greek that are translated "tongue" in the King James rendering. Those words are:

1. *Dialektos* used in Acts 1:19, 2:8, 21:40, 22:2, and 26:14. This word means "a mode of communication," or specifically a "language" or "dialect." "Dialect" is the modern English word that comes from the Greek word *dialektos*.
2. *Heteroglossos* used only in First Corinthians 14:21. This word means "other tongued," that is, "a foreigner," or one who speaks another language.
3. *Glossa* used in all other verses of the New Testament where

[66] Pentecost has been adequately covered in Chapter 12.1

the King James translation is "tongues." This word means "tongue" and by strong implication a "language" in particular an ***unlearned*** language in which a supernatural origin is implied.

The English word "language" is found only once in the King James translation of the New Testament. It is found in Acts 2:6 and is translated from the Greek word *dialektos*. The fact that the word "tongue" and the word "language" can often be used interchangeably is seen by comparing Acts 2:6 with Acts 2:8 where both words are *dialektos* in the Greek text.

Contemporary Practice

Contemporary practice commonly ignores the evangelical purpose for which the gift was originally given on the Day of Pentecost. For that reason, we must critique the widespread contemporary practice of glossolalia in order to correct misunderstandings regarding the proper use of the gift as it was practiced by the apostles. To that end, we shall briefly consider various texts that the modern tongues movement targets in order to justify their claims that speaking in tongues is given for a single purpose, which is the evidence (some say the ***only*** evidence) of having received the Holy Spirit. With the risk of some repetition, let us begin by looking afresh at the verses in Acts that modern "tongue-speakers" point out with such partiality because they feel that they justify their extreme position regarding glossolalia.

The "Three Pentecosts"

In at least two of the three major occurrences of glossolalia in the New Testament, the sign is most certainly given directly to Jews, ***not*** to Gentiles. The first instance encompasses the events of Pentecost (Ac.2:5,7,8), which we discussed fully in Chapter 12.1 The Gift of the Holy Spirit, page 170, and the second occurred in the house of Cornelius, sometimes referred to as the Second Pentecost (10:44–46). In the third instance, sometimes referred to as the Third Pentecost, it is highly likely that the witness is still being made only to Jews since it

was twelve disciples who had been baptized by John (Ac.19:3) that were speaking in "tongues" (Ac.19:6).

The Family of Cornelius

Since we have already discussed the events on Pentecost thoroughly in Chapter 12.1, we come now to the event in Acts where the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and his family who were all Gentiles. We read that conviction came upon them as Peter preached (Ac.10:44) and that full realization of salvation came upon them as the Holy Spirit came within them. The demeanor of their voices changed; no longer did they speak as Gentiles speak in an unbelieving manner, but with inspired speech that came from their hearts. They praised God with a new voice even as did the elect Jews (Ac.10:46). This was brought home as a ***sign to the Jews*** that were with Peter for "they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Ac.10:45).

The Jews were not astonished merely because Gentiles were speaking in an unknown tongue — many Gentiles obviously spoke in various tongues not known to them — but because the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles as well as the Jews. The text is not conclusive regarding whether those Gentiles actually spoke in an unlearned language by the Power of the Holy Spirit; however, imagine the amazement of the Jews if they had heard those Gentiles speaking in their own native Hebrew tongue, which is a strong possibility. Nevertheless, the burst of praise from Gentile lips for the God of the Hebrews and of their love of Christ would have been enough to astonish the believing Jews in whatever language it was spoken. Here, it was meant as a ***sign to the Jew*** that Gentiles were not to be excluded from the grace of God in Christ.

The Disciples of John the Baptist

In Acts Chapter 19, we find that Paul had come to Ephesus and found "certain disciples" there (Ac.19:1). A "disciple" means merely "a student of some teacher." It does not automatically infer that they were followers of Jesus Christ. It certainly would appear that those

disciples had no understanding of the Gospel in as much as they said, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Ac.19:2).

Paul then asked those disciples in what manner they had believed. That is, by whom had they learned and what doctrines had they been taught that accounted for their current understanding regarding the Messiah (Ac.19:2,3). In answer, they said, "…unto John's baptism" (Ac.19:3). That is, they had been baptized in John's doctrine and most likely also in water as a symbol of their repentance so that they would be made receptive to the message of the Messiah when He came (Ac.19:4). The main purposes of John's ministry was to stimulate the religious faith of the Jews, prepare the way for Christ, and proclaim Him as the Messiah to his people.

Therefore, those twelve disciples, almost certainly Jews, were not yet Christians at all. They not only did not know about the Holy Spirit, but we can clearly see they also had not heard about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, which is the primary message of the Gospel (1Co.15:3). They apparently had not been near Jerusalem after their baptism by John the Baptist, and as a result, they knew nothing specific of the events regarding Christ that had taken place there. Paul would not have needed to preach the Gospel to those men if they were already disciples of Jesus. Obviously, they were not, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Ro.10:17). Then, Paul clearly presented the Gospel message to them, and "when they heard this, they were baptized in [Gr. is actually "into"] the name of the Lord Jesus" (Ac.19:5).[67] They then became disciples and followers of Jesus, were fully identified with Him rather than John.

When Paul welcomed them into the fellowship of believers by the laying on of his hands they were also filled with the Holy Spirit (Ac.19:6). It was then that they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Ac.19:6). Notice again how tongues and prophecy go together; if

[67]Baptism here does not mean baptism in water, but baptism into a name. That name was Jesus Christ. We shall discuss baptism more fully in Section 15 of this book.

there is no message, there is nothing to say. It is ***not*** said that they immediately burst out in meaningless glossolalia, but that they were enabled to speak forth the Gospel in sundry languages. No doubt, they went forth from that place to tell other Jews about Christ in their own languages after Paul had commissioned them by the laying on of his hands. The next verse makes it rather clear: "And all the men were about twelve" (Ac.19:7), the same number as the apostles. Their mission also was the same — to dispense the Gospel abroad to foreign Jews.

Supposed Scripture Proof Texts

In addition to the three major events wherein glossolalia is in evidence, modern proponents of its continued use site various other instances in Scripture as proof texts. As we shall see, many of those texts do not even refer to glossolalia at all or are at best oblique references.

Speaking With Boldness

In Acts 4:31, the disciples are said to have been "filled with the Holy Ghost." Many see this as meaning glossolalia by the phrase that follows: "they spake the word of God with boldness" (Ac.4:31). Glossolalia, at least in the modern sense of ecstatic utterances, has no relationship with those verses. In the context in which those verses are found, we observe that the disciples had been threatened with physical harm for speaking about Jesus Christ in public places (Ac.4:18). Knowing that the Gospel must not be stifled by those threats, and fearing the weakness of their own flesh, the disciples prayed that the Word of Truth would not be affected, but that they might continue to speak the Word without being inhibited by their natural fear of persecution (Ac.4:29).

The disciples were speaking to other Jews who lived in Jerusalem. We do not know whether they had any need to exercise foreign tongues while speaking with them or not; the text simply does not say. Some in the crowd that they were addressing may or may not have been foreign Jews that had lingered in Jerusalem after the day of Pentecost, but the disciples had prayed for ***boldness to witness***, not for

a gift of tongues. We ***do*** know that the apostles thereafter spoke boldly to the multitudes about the resurrection of Jesus Christ without regard for their personal safety (Ac.4:33). That is the significant issue here.

Simon the Sorcerer

In another text in the book of Acts, we read of Peter and John at Samaria (Ac.8:9–24). Simon the sorcerer came to believe and he was baptized, along with many others in Samaria through the teaching of Philip, a deacon of the Jerusalem church.

> **"And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost"** (Ac.8:18,19).

The charismatic advocates say that the Samaritans spoke in tongues as a visible sign and that is what Simon was willing to pay the apostles to receive. However, this is not directly stated in the text, and it fails to recognize the significance of the context. We read that Simon saw the "…miracles and signs that were done" (Ac.8:13). This text indicates that more than one type of miracle was done, and that more than one sign was in evidence. Simon had lost his power for which he had earlier received much acclaim from the people when they received the Holy Spirit (Ac.8:9,10). Therefore, it was out of wicked envy that he asked for the power to convey the Holy Spirit as we read in Peter's response to him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Ac.8:22,23).

We have no reason to believe that it was specifically the conveying of a gift of tongues that Simon sought, but rather the return to him of his lost status and authority before the people of Samaria. Considering the demonstrated ability of pagan priests and shamans to practice glossolalia, it seems likely that Simon could have easily counterfeited or even duplicated it. It was, as he said, the ability to command the Holy Spirit that he wanted. Even if Simon had asked for that power without offering money, his heart was not right, for he saw the Holy Spirit only as another spirit over which he could exercise his

authority through sorcery. He saw the gifts of the Holy Spirit only in the same way that he saw the results of his own black art.

To value a gift more than the giver of that gift is not right. Yet, some, today, seem more to desire a spiritual gift than to welcome Christ into their hearts through the embrace of the Holy Spirit. Through this gift, they expect to gain personal recognition and status. Some, also like Simon, may even believe that they can pay for a gift through tithes and offerings. In that respect, they are not that much different than Simon the sorcerer, being themselves "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

Tongues of Angels

Paul used the argumentative conjunction "if" in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13, verse 1, when he said, "Though I speak with the tongues (languages) of men and of angels…" The word "though" is *ean* in the Greek which denotes uncertainty and in many other places is translated as "if." Here, Paul is stressing a point namely that "if" he could speak in the tongues of all men and even in the language of angels (whatever or if that may be) but was without love in his heart, he would be but a noise whether he spoke very loud or softly. The point that Paul is making is the supremacy of love over the mere exercise of a gift of glossolalia.

Paul certainly did not imply by this statement, as some insist, that he regularly spoke in an angelic tongue or had ever spoken in such a language. Nor does he even imply by his statement that such a peculiar spoken language actually exists among angels. Angels are spirit-beings and therefore do not have the need for or possess the physical attributes to speak an audible language among themselves in the manner that we do. Since an inaudible spiritual language, a language that only angels use to communicate amongst themselves, could neither be heard nor understood by anyone on earth, there would appear to be no way to authenticate such communication as genuine if it were translated into audible speech. Therefore, it could be easily faked or counterfeited with impunity by any having a strong desire to do so.

Tongues a Prayer Language?

Paul listed glossolalia along side other gifts as "…divers kinds of tongues…" (1Co.12:10). We can see from this that we are not talking about any one specific tongue or language, but "divers" or various kinds. Yet, many have thought that glossolalia is a unique prayer language, or the language of the human spirit. For that reason, no one could ever understand it on a mental level — including the one speaking it. Reference is commonly made to 1Co.14:14: "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful." No doubt, the Corinthian Christians were actually making a practice of "speaking" in nonexistent languages or Paul would not have mentioned it. While it is true that the Holy Spirit can intercede to provide us a means of wordless prayer when we are at a loss for words (Ro.8:26), what good would it do for us to attempt to speak those prayers ***aloud*** when there are no words to express it? Anything that would come out of our mouths would be meaningless gibberish and would be of no value whatsoever to others or us.

There would be no way to test the validity of glossolalia if it were exercised as a "prayer language" where the only recipient would be God. That would mean that unintelligible babbling could be excused based on it being an involuntary audible expression of internal groanings as we pray. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul discusses how "…even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope:" (Ro.8:23,24). Paul is not referring here to an audible groaning, but one that is deep within our soul, is inexpressible in words, and is therefore inaudible. We must wait in hopeful patience for the future redemption of our bodies, translated into a sinless state, regardless of the present turmoil that is within us. It is in that context that Paul says,

> **"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered"** (Ro.8:26).

In our prayers, the Holy Spirit translates our innermost desires, fears and pain into a form of silent prayer that God can readily receive.

Those are matters in which we find that language is woefully inadequate to express our great need. Therefore we must finally ask, if the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, how is it that some think they must utter the "un-utterable" in the form of glossolalia? It would seem that identifying glossolalia strictly as a "prayer language" is merely a ploy to give uncontestable credibility to the practice of ecstatic utterances that have no other validity or purpose whatsoever.

Tongues the Best Gift?

It is incredibly out of context to quote 1 Corinthians 12, verse 31 to suggest that when Paul said that "we should covet the best gifts" he meant tongues followed by physical healing. However, some say that with regard to 1 Corinthians 12, verse 30 where healing and tongues have just been mentioned. To place this verse in context, Paul had just been talking about schisms in the Corinthian church brought about by pride over the exercise of certain gifts (1Co.12:25).

> **"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret"** (1Co.12:28–30)?

The questions in this later passage are all rhetorical ones asked in a negative context with "no" as the implied answer. That is, not everyone will receive the same gift, so that no one gift can be valued more highly than can another. The best gift from this list is most certainly that which the Holy Spirit chooses to give an individual for God's own purpose in any given time and situation to benefit the Church and its greater mission. However, beyond those special gifts Paul mentions three greater gifts that all Christians should desire and possess in common and in abundance.

When stating the three greater gifts, Paul refers to "a more excellent way," a better way than going headstrong after special gifts that more often than not appeal to and stimulate the flesh. As we have

already discussed earlier in this section, we should first desire faith, hope, and love. Most especially, love, for love abides forever. This comprises the entire text of First Corinthians Chapter 13 that follows both 1 Corinthians12:31 and 1 Corinthians 13:1.[68] Any other special gift with which the Holy Spirit may endow us must always be exercised in divine love to be of any value to the Church. If it does not benefit others, it is of little or no value at all. It is hard to understand how any gift could be said to come from the Holy Spirit if it is used to elevate personal pride and divide God's people. It is unity in the true faith where love abounds that we should all desire.

Transliterated Words of Scripture

In the epistle to the Romans and again in Galatians Paul used the Aramaic word *abba* (Ro.8:15; Ga.4:6). The word *abba* is a term of endearment and child-like trust meaning "father" in much the same way that we use the word "daddy" today. In timidity, and out of humble respect, the word *abba* was transliterated into English in our Bibles rather than replacing it with the word "daddy," "papa," or some other equivalent English word. Some would venture to ask, how we could dare use such a familiar term as "Daddy" or "Abba" to address Almighty God. To that we can but answer,

> **"there is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us"** (1Jn.4:18,19).

However, some Charismatics have leaped upon the transliteration of the Aramaic word *abba* in Scripture to say that this demonstrates "tongue speaking" because it was not translated into English. Jesus also used the word *abba* in his prayer to his Father in Mark 14:36 as a term of trust and endearment. There is no reason to believe that the word *abba* was ever spoken as an ecstatic "tongue,"

[68] Again, we must realize that chapter divisions were inserted quite late by Bible scholars and were not a part of the original text. They were inserted for convenience in locating subjects and specific verses, not for dividing up the Word of God for the purpose of interpretation.

but that it was in common usage in the days when Jesus walked the earth when referring to mortal fathers. In fact, Aramaic was Jesus' familiar tongue spoken within his own family.

Even Jesus' words on the cross: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* have been referred to by some as "tongue speaking" or glossolalia (Mt.27:46). However, Jesus quoted exactly, with those very words Psalm 22, verse 1, in Aramaic as it was originally written. The Aramaic was fully understood by those Jews around Him as he spoke it, for the text of the psalm was well known in Aramaic. Matthew, in his text, stated Jesus' words exactly in that way and then provided a translation in the Greek: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." The English translators could do no more or no less.

Quench Not the Spirit

Some point to a statement of Paul in which he says, "Quench not the Spirit" as a mandate for practicing unrestrained glossolalia by loosing the reins on ones self-control (1Th.5:19). The Greek word for "quench" is *sbennumi*, which means to "extinguish", or "put out." In context, Paul was exhorting the Christians at Thessalonica to "…ever follow that which is good…" (1Th.5:15). We are to rejoice (vs. 16), pray (vs. 17), and give thanks (vs. 18). We are not to quench the Spirit by ***despising correct doctrine*** (vs. 19,20 emphasis added). We should prove or test all things, keeping that which is good, and by so doing, abstain, even in appearance, of condoning any evil (vs. 21,22). There is, as anyone can clearly see, no reference or hint of glossolalia in this passage of Scripture as Paul actually exhorts them to practice self-control. We do not quench the Spirit by controlling and taming our own tongue; we may very well quench the spirit by turning it loose and setting it completely out of control.

Spiritual Songs

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he makes mention of "spiritual songs." This, say some, actually refers to glossolalia. The full text is:

> **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and**

hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Co. 3:16).

The word "psalms" refers to the recitation or singing of the Old Testament psalms, which were in fact put to music soon after they were written. "Hymns" are songs of worshipful praise to God, and our old hymnals are full of them. "Spiritual songs" in contrast are songs that bring gladness to our spirit: songs of grace that are filled with the joy of our personal redemption. Hymns and spiritual songs differ in that a hymn is praise directed toward God, while spiritual songs are directed out of a grateful heart to God toward our own soul. Whenever we sing spiritual songs, we should sing with grace and thanksgiving in our hearts to the Lord. In so doing, we comfort our souls by letting the peace of God rule in our hearts (Co. 3:15). "Spiritual songs," perhaps better interpreted "songs of spiritual redemption," should not be fabricated in a trance out of an unknown language that our own minds cannot understand lest they completely fail in their purpose.

Spiritual Drunkenness?

The question of singing brings up still another verse that we must now examine:

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" (Ep 5:18,19).

We have noted previously that the apostles were not behaving in a drunken manner on the day of Pentecost, and there is no reason to believe that Paul is even referring to Pentecost in this current passage. What he is obviously saying is that we should not seek to raise our spirits with alcohol to be merry, as many unbelievers do, but being filled with the Holy Spirit make merry in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that lift our spirits in a godly hope.

If a Spirit-filled believer is behaving as if he is a drunken man, he has no self-control of his actions. If he is out of his head, how can he be wise, understanding what the will of the Lord is (Ep.5:17)? The Christian should have tangible but ***sober*** joy in the Holy Spirit wherein there is no excess. Unlike the consequences resulting from being filled

with alcoholic spirits, we will ***not*** become inebriated by being filled with the Holy Spirit. We can find no relationship with glossolalia or its often-attending personal abandon in this passage.

Speaking With New Tongues

We shall now discuss one final passage that is found in the Gospel of Mark.

> **"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues"** (Mk.16:17). [69]

What of the "new tongues" that are specifically mentioned in this verse? Here the Greek word for "new" is *kainus*, which does not mean new with respect to age such as a tongue that has never before been heard. Rather, it means a "freshness" of tongue or speech. The believer speaks with an untainted voice, with lips expressing the love of God rather than with a deceitful tongue and with the poison of an asp under his lips (Ro.3:13). How can that transformation come about except that a new heart is first given to him, and how can that be realized except he is born again with a new nature from above?

Power of the Tongue

James wrote a lot about the power of the "tongue" in his epistle, but not advocating the practice of glossolalia. This text is found in James Chapter 3. We should allow the Holy Spirit to aid us in our daily speech and in our choice of words so that we do not offend others (Ja.3:2). Otherwise, we may find that with the same tongue with which we bless God, we curse men who are made in his own image (Ja.3:9). James is showing us our fallen nature as it is manifested in our speech.

However, the organ of the tongue itself is not our real failing, but is symptomatic. "But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth" (Ja.3:14). Jesus revealed

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[69] This verse is not found in the better Greek manuscripts. See the topic in the next chapter under the sub-heading "Problematical text in Mark", page 344

to us throughout his "Sermon on the Mount," that the act itself is not the cause of our failing. The act is only symptomatic, since sin is found in the manifestation of our lust stemming from our fallen nature. Furthermore, Jesus Himself said that which comes out of the heart is what defiles a man as it goes forward to manifests itself in sinful action (Mt.15:11):

> **"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"** (Mt.15:18, 19).

James also reveals to us the evil that resides in the heart of our fallen nature, and he therefore exhorts us against envying, and strife, and confusion, and evil works (Ja.3:16).

While the question of sign gifts is actually a minor concern in of itself in which some tolerance could be allowed due to Christian liberty, it can lead to a serious deviation from major doctrines of the faith if the charismatic viewpoint is carried to extremes. That comes about because of the typical isolation of charismatic churches from other mainstream churches that emphasize the importance of major doctrines over gifts. The often and unfortunate reaction by the charismatic to the doctrinal emphasis of other churches is to neglect or even scorn all major doctrines as distasteful intellectualism in order to demonstrate their uniqueness and sense of separatism from all non-Charismatics.

While the Church benefits greatly from its diversity of people with their various backgrounds, natural talents, and Spiritual gifts, those benefits do ***not*** extend to a diversity of doctrine. Variation in doctrine causes division and strife, and some doctrinal differences are so major as to be totally irreconcilable to God's Word thus eroding the foundation of the Church. Because of the intrusion of the secular world into our minds, the demands of our own flesh, and the continual hindrance of Satan, there will always be variations in thought even among the elect. Complete unity will not occur until the Church is caught up to meet Christ in the heavens.

Chapter 14.3 Ritual Healing

Closely associated with the Charismatic movement is the gift of ritual healing. God both can and does continue to heal people of physical infirmities today of course. In fact, He does so quite often in answer to prayer as an act of mercy (Ja.5:14–16), but always to further accomplish his sovereign will. Sometimes God accomplishes healing through quite natural means and at other times, He does so miraculously in ways that defy medical science. Nevertheless, we must ask if that fact authenticates all of the sensational claims that some men make about having a personal gift of ritual healing that they purport to demonstrate with such reckless abandon.

We must be clear that when we speak of faith healers in this chapter that we are not talking about those who facilitate healing in others through accepted medical procedures. Healing the sick medically has commonly been associated with most foreign missions as well as various intercultural evangelical efforts within this country. That work is commendable as long as our compassion for the temporal physical suffering of the lost does not overshadow our compassion for their eternal spiritual condition. The Christian mandate is always the Gospel first and foremost.

Healing a Sign Gift of the Early Church

We read in the Scriptures that Jesus was often pressed by the multitudes, and that He healed large numbers of Jews who were ill (Mt.4:23–25) although a few of the Gentiles also benefited from crumbs that fell from their table (Mt.15:22–27). The primary purpose for that healing ministry was to prove to the Jews beyond any doubt that Jesus was God incarnate (the Messiah) to the end that many of them would be made receptive to the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We find that Jesus also bestowed the ability to heal physical infirmities on his apostles (Mt.10:1,8; Lu.9:1,2), and later to seventy more of his followers whom he sent out to preach the good news of the Kingdom from house to house (Lu.10:1–9). He gave each of them that

personal gift in order that men could know that God had sent them and that their message was true. There is however, no strong indication that the seventy retained that ability long after their mission was concluded.[70]

Through the apostles, God continued the ministry of physical healing throughout the first century in confirmation of his Word spoken through them to an infant Church that yet had no established body of doctrine to guide them. In First Corinthians 12, verse 9 and 28, Paul himself listed healing as a gift that the Holy Spirit brought forth in some first-century believers. There is no reason to believe that Paul was speaking of other than the apostles and the seventy in this text however.

The only real suggestion of this gift being given to ***all*** believers without exception is found in a quite problematical passage in Mark 16:18.[71] There is no further indication elsewhere in Scripture that this gift was widespread throughout the greater body of believers even in the early church, but may instead have been quite rare as is suggested by Paul's rhetorical question in his first epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, verse 30.

Furthermore, there is no indication that this personal gift continued after the New Testament documents were written down for future generations to read and study thus relaxing any need for empirical authentication. Nor is there any evidence that this gift continued to be a prevailing factor as the early church underwent a period of severe and widespread Roman persecution in which many were made destitute and even martyred. Nevertheless, there are those today who insist that the sign gifts have been ***restored*** to some in the Church as the time for Jesus' return to earth approaches. Most persons of that mindset are of the "Latter Rain" movement about which we shall have more to say in Book III of this work.

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[70] In Acts chapter 9, verses 10–18, we read of Ananias, who was only referred to as a disciple who was sent to heal Paul of his blindness. It is not known whether Ananias was one of the seventy mentioned earlier.

[71] See the topic below under Problematical Text in Mark, page 344

The Search for Scriptural Examples

We must ask ourselves if spectacular ritual healing services today honor the Word of God in any way. Does it present Jesus as the healer of our souls or does it instead only glorify men who claim to have paranormal power? Does it further God's Kingdom, or merely call out the desperate, sick, and sin-ridden sinner for some hope of physical healing so that they may continue living in their sins?

Our only authority for judging matters of this importance is the Word of God. We must carefully examine the Scriptural support claimed by those practicing ritual healing services in order to test the validity of their claims. While various texts are used, those that follow are the most common ones.

Problematical Text in Mark

We should immediately take note that the text in Mark Chapter 16, verse 9 through the end of the chapter does not exist in two of the earlier and better Greek manuscripts. Therefore, it is somewhat doubtful that Mark ever wrote them but possibly some well-meaning scribe erroneously added them later during copying or translation as a way to close the book. (Admittedly, it is also possible that the text was somehow omitted from some manuscripts by other scribes). For that reason, no major doctrine should ever be based upon those verses alone. We must even be cautious when using verses such as those in a supportive role for doctrines that are adequately established elsewhere in Scripture lest we inadvertently twist the meaning of well-documented text. Upon such erroneous twisting witch-hunts, snake worship, and even devil worship have been construed to be proper Christian practice in the past (Mk.16:18).

In Mark 16 verses 17 and 18, Jesus is quoted as saying, "these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." In Acts 28:3-6, we find an instance where the Apostle Paul was bitten by a snake and he suffered no harm. However, that was not intended as a sign since Paul did not

deliberately handle snakes and we find that the natives actually thought that Paul was a god because he did not die. Pagan superstition was the result, not faith in Christ.

Therefore, this passage of Scripture certainly should not be relied upon to mean that all believers today should deliberately go around seeking devils to cast out or go about speaking in meaningless tongues in an attempt to assure themselves of their own faith. Likewise, we should not assume that believers should go about searching out the physically ill in order to heal them by supernatural means through a ritual performance of some sort. Most certainly, we must agree that it does not mean that believers should intentionally handle dangerous snakes, or deliberately drink deadly poison in some vain attempt to prove their faith lest we tempt God (Mt.4:7).

Prayer Cloths

Some faith healers make a practice of sending prayer cloths, over which they or another minister has supposedly prayed, to the sick. Some have even sold "prayer cloths" through the media as a major fund-raising tactic by mailing them out only in exchange for a donation to their ministry. The verse of Scripture from which such a strange notion is taken is found in Acts 19 beginning with verse 11. Many of the Jews had become hardened and unbelieving because Paul spoke daily in the school of Tyrannus to the Greeks. The Jews were not willing to accept anything as Truth that included Gentiles.

> **"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them"** (Ac.19:11,12).

Nowhere is it said that Paul ever prayed over or blessed those aprons and handkerchiefs as many of the alleged faith healers claim to do today. Most likely, those items were some of Paul's personal clothing that he wore when making tents (Ac.18:3). Nor does this passage ever say that Paul actually ***sent*** those garments, but just that they were brought to the sick. The Greeks in accord with their pagan background that allowed them to imagine power in mere physical objects likely took —actually stole — the clothing of Paul and

returned with it to their sick in the hopes that they would be cured by mere contact with the clothing of this "holy man." It is apparent that they viewed Paul in exactly the same way as they did one of their own pagan shamans.

However, we read on that those Greeks were actually healed! In no way is it possible that the Greeks were healed by some power in the cloth itself; therefore, it must have been by the power of God. God healed those people even though their faith was terribly misplaced because God always honors his Word. We read in the text, "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" (Ac.19:11). The words translated as "special" from the Greek means "not the ordinary." God would not ordinarily work in that way.

Here we observe that we can never put God in a "box" whose boundaries that we fashion dictate what He can and cannot do. As we can see this was done as a sign to the unbelieving Jews. God, in his mercy, may at times heal even those whose faith is badly misplaced in superstition because of their ignorance. That could very well account for a few who may seem to be genuinely healed through ritual healing today despite the fact that God would not ordinarily work in that way. Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves if informed believers should practice today that which the Greeks in their pagan ignorance did two thousand years ago. We need to put all superstitions aside lest they carry us away into occult worship or some form of neo-paganism.

Anointing with Oil

How should we view the practice of ritually anointing the sick with oil that is practiced by many alleged faith healers today? Didn't James command that that should be done for the sick in his epistle?

> **"Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."** (Ja.5:14,15)

Here again is a matter where superstition has entered in to cloud the more obvious meaning of Scripture. The oil that is commonly referred to in Scripture is olive oil that was used for lamp

oil, the dipping of bread, in cooking, and even as a cosmetic. It is in connection with the sacred or ceremonial that the misinterpretation of "anointing" comes up in association with this verse in James' epistle. The Greek word for ceremonial anointing is *chrio*, while the word used in James (and in Mark 6:13) is *aleipho*, which means the application of oil for refreshment or medicinal purposes.

In Old Testament times, men were ceremonially initiated into office by anointing their heads with oil. A guest in a home was often honored by being anointed with oil as an act of courtesy; the oil was poured over their head as a soothing balm after they had traveled long under the hot sun (Lu.7:45,46). More to the point here however, oil was widely used as a medicinal preparation. It was used both to soothe the pain of the ill and for its apparent curing effects on the wounds of animals and men. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, we read that he bandaged the injured man's wounds after pouring oil and wine into them to kill the infection and aid in the healing process (Lu.10:34).

If we consider that anointing with oil was just a simple remedy for illness that was quite common in those days, the words of James take on a much less mystical meaning. Namely, that if any are sick we should call the elders of the church, let them pray for him, and let the sick be treated with a suitable medication in the name of the Lord.

Using a medication does not deny the exclusive power of God to heal, since a physical remedy cannot bring forth healing in itself. Medical procedures cannot ever overrule God's will. It is the prayers of faith that James says will save the sick, not a ritual anointing. By the power of God, our sometimes inadequate physical remedies are a means to bring forth physical healing when combined with our prayers.

Healing of the Centurion Servant

We read in Matthew Chapter 8 and in Luke Chapter 7 of an example of unsurpassed faith. The Centurion did not feel himself worthy even to have Jesus enter his house (Lu.7:6) since Jews did not associate themselves with Gentiles. However, the Centurion believed that Jesus, having authority over disease, could merely command that the illness would leave his servant and would not even need to go there

personally (Lu.7:7). The Centurion was also a man having authority over others and perceived that one word of command from Jesus would be enough and that distance was no factor against the order being carried out. No one else in Israel had such confidence in Jesus, as did that man (Lu.7:8,9). Here we find that Jesus healed the servant without any ceremony or ritual, no anointing with oil, without the laying on of hands, without even seeing him or sending prayer cloths to him, but merely by the power of his spoken Word alone (Mt.8:13).

Healing of a Leper

However, we must understand that God does not always grant physical healing even through the devout intercessory prayer of godly men. Faith alone cannot guarantee physical healing. If healing is to come, it must be done because of God's will for it, not in our request or demands. Genuine faith actually calls for that kind of obedience to God. In Matthew Chapter 8, Mark Chapter 1, and Luke Chapter 5, we read about the healing of a leper. In all three accounts, the leper worshiped Jesus and said, "…if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean" (Mt.8:2). The Leper knew with certainty that Jesus had the power to heal leprosy, indicating the soundness of his faith, but he could not be sure that it was in God's will for him to be healed. He was willing to leave that up to Jesus. Once we have delivered our petition through prayer, we must leave it up to God to decide what is right and best for others and for us.

In mercy, Jesus said, "…I will; be thou clean" (Mt.8:3). Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the answer always will be "yes" to our requests for healing. It is not reasonable to believe that our personal faith could be so strong as to overrule God's will for our lives and for his greater purpose of which we are a part. God created each one of us for his own specific purpose, and we live only to serve that aim. True faith must rest in the loving God in whose will we cannot only fully trust, but willingly yield. True faith is to be found only in fully trusting in the Holy and sovereign God who answers to no one. In fact, that kind of confidence can ***only*** be placed in the one true God who cannot be overthrown or thwarted in his purposes and is therefore

worthy of our praise, not in a god of our imagination that only does whatsoever we ask of him.

Satanic "Cures"

We saw regarding Job in Book I, Chapter 8.1, that Satan, himself was the root of Job's illness (Jb.2:4–7). Since Satan instigates that with which he brings tribulation upon us, it follows that he can just as easily remove it to further his evil designs. It is interesting to note that Jesus was accused of driving out demons by the power of Satan (Mt.12:24), indicating that it was quite possible that satanic healing was going on even in that day. If Satan can get us to follow him by pursuing a dark paranormal method for relieving our illnesses, he in turn receives worship in exchange for what is thought to be genuine healing. Some are actually relieved of pain by Satan's practitioners, while others may only be deluded into believing that they are healed. We must understand that Satan cannot remove a disease from a person whom God has chosen to bear illness for his own purposes. It follows, then, that Satan can actually only remove those illnesses that he himself has placed upon men to justify his own accusations and actually has no power to heal at all.

Therefore, many may not only trade their souls for the hope of a few more years of life, they may not even receive the years they had bargained for! Satan is not interested in healing men of diseases, but only in obtaining glory and worship from mankind in the place of God. If he can obtain open satanic worship, that is fine with him. However, he will also accept worship from those who may only think that they are worshiping God. It matters not to him what they think as long as he receives the glory.

Many unbelievers have traveled to various parts of the world to be healed of incurable diseases by a shaman, and it matters not to them whether they are healed by God or by Satan, for they only wish to be rid of their dread malady. As a result, they often undergo absurd "medical" or "surgical" procedures at the hands of occult devil worshipers. If release from disease comes by Satan, our bodies can only be reinvigorated for a time while our eternal soul is under obligation to the prince of darkness. If we have traded our soul to

Satan for what seems a few more years on earth, what hope can we have of eternal life when our soul is finally required of us and Satan has it in his possession?

Contemporary Healing Ministries

We must be aware that Satan often disguises his activities in the garb of Christianity. That is especially easy for him to do with those who have little or no personal knowledge of the Scriptures. Traditional Christians that are deeply entrenched in ritual such as many Roman Catholics, as well as unenlightened and overly-emotional Protestants are all too easily trapped into trusting a shaman who is a human agent of Satan. It is hard to see how anyone could mistake such activities of Satan for the works of God, but it is all too commonplace today. Pain and fear can motivate the ignorant as well as the unsaved to consider satanic means of healing while superstition does the rest. Since Satan masks his procedures in ritual and ceremony that has the facade of religion, many may mistakenly think that God is actually healing them.

Miraculous healing as it is being practiced today is the sum-total of many ministries as the essentials of the Gospel are buried beneath sensationalism. There is, in fact, no Word of God to confirm by the sign gift of miraculous healing in many of those ministries since they choose to operate in a doctrinal vacuum and even seek to capitalize on the Scriptural ignorance of their followers. How many of those practitioners are deluded into believing that they are serving God, how many are outright charlatans, and how many are a Satanic shaman is hard to determine. However, all three serve Satan's purposes.

A large number of alleged faith healers are embedded within local churches, and they confine their practice to local church members. They therefore find themselves "healing" the same people repeatedly — often of the same affliction. Incredibly, at least some of those men appear to be devout believers that are sincere about their work. Their practice was handed down to them over many years by other practitioners who had received it the same way. It could be stated then that ritual healing is more of a tradition than a doctrine in some

churches. Once the door is opened to amazing signs and wonders whether real or feigned, it enters into the worship and practice of a congregation to overpower everything else including sound doctrine and even the Gospel itself.

Other alleged healers travel about the evangelical circuits today and claim that God has given them an even greater healing ministry along the fringes of the un-churched population. Some make great use of television to extend their reach and raise funds. Since many that go forward to practitioners in those mass meetings are not Christians, the "faith" that is being exercised is primarily directed toward the charismatic personality of the faith healer himself and his supposed abilities.

Subversion of God's Will

Many faith healers today claim an absolute personal authority akin to God Himself to heal anyone that they choose. There is usually no question at all in their minds of first asking through prayer whether God is willing to heal them (Mt.7:21–23). Many of those so-called faith healers actually ***demand*** that God heal in Jesus' name during their performance. Jesus is not a "mantra," but a person. It is not merely his name, but the will of Christ that is represented by his name, that has any power (Ac.19:13–16).

We must always seek God's will before we act and especially so when we are so bold as to claim that we are acting for Him. Otherwise, such a person is being presumptuous; he may actually find himself opposing the will of God and attempting to take upon himself that which is the sole prerogative of God. In so doing, he is Satan's agent.

Power of Self Delusion

Some people may actually be mesmerized into believing that they are healed for a short time through emotionally heated rituals before the mental euphoria wears off and reality returns. This is no different from having a positive reaction to a placebo. During that interim, the infirm may even be able to do extraordinary things such as throwing off their crutches and walking off a platform as the flow of

adrenaline temporarily overrides pain and triggers the emergency reserves of the body. Nevertheless, if that is all that ritual faith-healing accomplishes, it would be like waving a motorist onto a bridge spanning raging flood waters that abruptly ends in midstream. Their initial high hopes of safely reaching the other side would be quickly drowned in reality a short time later.

Because of that temporary euphoria, which may last for hours or days, it is barely possible that even the faith healer himself is deluded into thinking that healing is actually taking place. That is especially true of mass meetings on an evangelical circuit where the person that is "healed" may never be seen or heard of again by the practitioner. The assumed positive feedback that the healer gets from that situation only spurs him on to perform greater “miracles.”

Lack of Medical Proof

Many are convinced that God does heal men and women through the ritual efforts of faith healers today by examples that are not ever medically authenticated. That is because the “healed” often are told that any attempt at confirming their cure through medical examination is a breech of the “faith” that cured them to begin with and which continues to keep them well. Therefore, for them to attempt to confirm the restoration of their health would be to doubt God. Furthermore, we must add that to question or examine their cure would likely only dash their hopes. As a young child once answered in a Sunday-school class, “faith is believing what you know is not true.” Certainly, Truth does destroy ***misplaced*** faith.

It would be necessary to check up on each individual weeks or months after a healing ritual was performed to determine that the malady had not “returned.” That is done rarely if ever. If disease is rediscovered through returning symptoms, it is usually considered a reoccurrence brought about by the weakening of their faith to maintain their health or a separate disease for which they require a second healing ritual.

Those who do not trust medical doctors or are too poor to afford sound medical treatment often seek after ritual healing, regularly adding to the faith healer’s dominance in their lives.

Unfortunately, many individuals who are persuaded of their healing disregard sound medical advice and even stop taking prescribed medications. Even when symptoms return, the subject often attempts to ignore them believing that they are only the result of a weakness of his faith. As a result, those imaginary "healings" can lead to increased physical difficulties and even death for the subject.

Fakery

There can be little doubt that many of those "healings" we hear about today are simply being faked by charlatans. Subjects for "healing" are pre-selected at some of the larger meetings based on their emotional makeup, the exact nature of their malady, and their vulnerability to accept ritual experience for fact. This selection process is usually excused as finding only those who have "sufficient faith" to be healed, when in fact the search is for those who have the necessary superstitious bent, emotional instability, and a basic ignorance of sound Scriptural doctrine. That leads many others to attend healing ceremonies only for their entertainment value. This is probably the core, while only on the fringe are those to whom the medical profession has offered no hope of a natural cure.

We must ask ourselves whether or not people are actually healed of physical infirmities through ritual acts at those sensational meetings, and if so whether or not they are healed by the will of God. Still more to the point, are people being led to Christ and souls saved through the efforts of the alleged faith healers, or is the desired end only the self-seeking notoriety of a charlatan that is brought about through the misery of the hopeless?

Sin's Effect on Mental and Physical Health

We must also ask ourselves if a "sin-sick soul" can enjoy physical health. Many unbelievers seem to get by with sin and thrive on it, though we know that this is only for a time. However, what of those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, but their sins overwhelm them or they have so much sin remaining in their lives that they can not reach any assurance of their salvation? Many are sick not because of the physical consequences of their sins, but because of sin's impact

upon their minds. We need not think that such psychosomatic illnesses are unreal or just imagined since it can manifest itself in many forms of real illness and physical maladies. Beginning with minor disorders, the body can continue to deteriorate as many of its normal functions are progressively disrupted.

The worldly approach for solving a mental problem that is brought on by the spiritual consequences of sin is to "brain-wash" the mind into believing that the sinful nature is natural and embraceable rather than sinful. The conscience is merely cauterized against the pain. This is, unfortunately, the common medical approach and is in line with the absurd theory that all men are evolved from lower animals. That is, such activity is simply a part of our nature; what is called sin is perfectly natural. This approach to effect a cure for a spiritual malady seeks to create "happy sinners." The body is often healed by that approach for a time because the mind is no longer bothered by the condemnation of sin. A person may even delight in that license for a while as the mind is numbed and a spiritual blindfold is worn against the reality of sin. However, sin is only being ignored for a time, not atoned for and most certainly not forgiven.

Spiritual Healing

The fortunate see their sins for what they are, the result of a fallen nature. Rather than embrace our sins, we must seek forgiveness and release from them by turning to God whom we have deeply offended. Rather than a numbing anesthetic for our pain, we must seek the One who is able to cure our great illness. Rather than "white-wash" our sins, we must turn to the cross where our sins are exposed and laid bare! When we do, the Spirit of God gives new birth to our spirit, our souls respond, our minds are cleansed, and quite often even our bodies are healed. Nevertheless, we must realize that physical healing is only a side-benefit of the spiritual cleansing that came from within us. It was not received through some ritual, not by words said, not by cloth, not by oil, not by the touch of hands, but by the working of the Holy Spirit from within our being. At last, we experience no more turmoil in our minds, but peace with God through Jesus the Great Physician.

Those who receive the Kingdom of God in their hearts are healed of more than mere physical illness; they are healed of spiritual corruption that is a disease far worse than any physical infirmity. That is the true healing which only Jesus can provide. We observe a parallel between sin and physical disease in the healing of lepers. The lepers were considered "unclean" and were put away from any association with their people, or the things of God as represented by the Old Testament Temple (Le.13:44–46). When Jesus healed the lepers, no longer were they unclean (Mt.8:3,4). Not only was their physical infirmity healed, but also more importantly they were once again able to associate with their own people and commune with God. Likewise, we, receiving the spiritual healing of Christ, are also made clean and able again to associate with other believers and with God Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The Gospel Inhibited by Fantasy

It should be apparent that any need to exercise the sign gifts that the Holy Spirit utilized to confirm the Gospel in the first century has been greatly diminished today. Even genuine sign gifts would be largely ignored by the sophisticated populace today or merely looked down upon as a curiosity, while the ignorant are more likely to stumble into superstition by worshiping the gift or the person in whom the gift is supposedly vested. The marvelous message of the Gospel is most often lost under the fantasy that no one need ever be sick, and if he only has sufficient "faith," he can be healed of every disease. Nevertheless, the lives of those who profess that belief are not disease-free.

Therefore, what worked to authenticate the Gospel in the first century is more likely to subject the Gospel to ridicule today. Many unbelievers are turned off to the Gospel because of the obvious fanaticism of some who claim to be Christians. Their witness to the Truth is not only questionable, but lacks soundness of mind. Many fantastic stories about miraculous healing are being spread about in order to convince men to "believe." Those are generally second or third-hand stories with no authentication and probably little or no basis in fact. The deliberate faking of this sign gift by many individuals and

even entire churches has not only caused the unbeliever to doubt the signs, but the message of personal redemption in Christ as well. If the signs are fake, they reason, the message must also be fraudulent.

Because of this wild pseudo-Christianity, the unbeliever is inhibited from trusting anything that even remotely has the name "Christian" associated with it. In reaction to what the unbeliever erroneously perceives to be genuine Christian beliefs, he may instead turn to various non-Christian religions, cults, new-age practitioners, or even the occult. That is because error has been presented to him in what he sees as a more coherent or scientific manner that seems more plausible than Christianity. Having been turned off to the Truth, they can more easily be convinced to believe the lie.

Therefore, attempting to "dress up" the Gospel message with "signs" and "wonders" in an attempt to authenticate it, adorn it in ritual, or augment it with pointless rules of conduct, only thwarts the efforts of the Holy Spirit to convince the unsaved that God through Christ has provided a way of salvation for them that is all of grace and grace alone. Rather than "playing tricks" with "sign gifts" to get the unsaved to "accept Christ," we would be much better advised to calmly and sanely present the Gospel and only the Gospel in a conversational tone, in words that can be easily understood, omitting all of the common Christian clichés and unsubstantiated fantasy. We should then be ready to answer questions in a totally honest and matter-of-fact way and let the Holy Spirit do his work in them as He sees fit.

Chapter 14.4 Ritual Prayer

Many treat prayer as a ritual of words that if followed to the letter somehow satisfies God that we are pious and therefore worthy to be heard. Prayer is not a ritual, nor is it a method of worship, but it is a privileged means of plainspoken communication between the believer and his Father in Heaven as we discussed in Section 10. Nor is it a one-sided speech lest we find ourselves preaching to God. Speaking a barrage of words that has no meaning to our minds greatly hinders communication thus rendering it worthless. Nothing can be expected to come from such prayers, because we have not really asked for anything. Furthermore, praying without having any confidence that our prayer will be heard and answered is the height of hypocrisy regardless of how eloquently our words may be spoken. This is what we refer to as ritual prayer that is but a meaningless practice.

Because prayer is seen by many as a prescribed ritual to be performed perfectly, sincere believers most often do not pray at all because they fear stumbling over words, or not forming their request properly. For that reason they tend to memorize certain prayers of others or formulate prescribed prayers of their own to be repeated as necessary. Such repetitious and rote prayers become nothing but meaningless rituals over time as we speak them automatically without thinking about what we are saying. Our prayers should instead be characterized with spontaneity and simplicity of speech, not verbose oratory as we speak with Abba, our Father, who loves and cares for us.

Until we learn to pay with simplicity in private, our prayers in public will automatically take on a ritual façade leading to hypocrisy. Lastly, ritual prayers are often accompanied by various prescribed positions of the body and hands as if our words must be enhanced by these body rituals if we are to be heard. So much so that prayers offered up without this visual display are considered insincere. All of those topics shall be addressed in this chapter.

Private Prayer

We find that Jesus often prayed in secret (Mt.14:23; Mk.1:35; 6:46; Lu.5:16; 6:12; 9:18). If the sinless Jesus had this personal need, how much more do we? Since our prayers are reformed as we express them by the Holy Spirit living within us, we should not be excessively concerned about the formal organization of our prayers (Ro.8:26).

Many fear bungling their prayers because of their perceived ineptitude of verbal expression and constantly solicit others to pray for them. Perhaps that is because they have been discouraged by the pious prayers of others that were made in public. Often verbose hypocritical prayers are actually held up as proper examples of genuine prayer and they become the standard for which others must aim. Be assured that every child of God has the same wonderful privilege of coming directly before God's throne. Even if we stutter and are unsure of our own thoughts, God will understand our weakness, encourage us, and aid us. Our prayers should always be made in simplicity and innocence of speech remembering that we are talking to our Heavenly Father who knows and loves us intimately. He does not grade us on the eloquence of our prayers, but receives joy in that we have come close to Him for his aid and comfort.

It also does not matter where we are when we pray, if we are closeted in our minds and soul to the purpose of seeking true and honest communication with God. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to find a place of quiet solitude. Even if we are by ourselves, we still have the distractions of worldly matters hammering away at our minds. Therefore, even when we are secluded from other men, even when we have entered our private place of prayer, we must also enter into the inner closet of our soul and seek the aid of the Holy Spirit in order to shut out the noise of the world.

However, even in our private prayers, we must rebuff our natural bent toward religious ritual and formality. Even prayers that we offer up when we are alone with God can become hypocritical if we are merely engaging in prayer out of a sense of duty through religious form. In doing so, we find ourselves kneeling before the throne of

grace with nothing to say, but spouting pious words without any sincerity of meaning.

Public Prayer

We must first seek out God in private and pray candidly to Him before we can ever hope to direct prayers for others without bungling them or being hypocritical. Obviously, we should never attempt to pray in a public gathering if we do not pray regularly at home in private. If we attempt to do so, our prayers are automatically hypocritical since we are attempting to conduct prayers for others when we do not even offer up our own prayers. How can we lead others in prayer if we do not know the way ourselves?

If we become overly anxious about our natural ability of oration as we pray in public, we shall find that we are not praying to God at all, but to satisfy other men! We must be careful that our words are not chosen merely to impress others with our piety, and that we do not exhibit unusual physical positions or actions in an attempt to persuade men that we have some unique status with God. Jesus spoke of this hypocrisy when He said,

> **"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward"** (Mt.6:5).

The passage of Scripture in Matthew Chapter 6 is not a flat injunction against public prayer, as some may conclude, but only opposes false ritualistic prayer. Having said that, it is apparent that public prayers do lean more toward hypocrisy than does private prayer because other men hear them and observe us as we pray. The "hypocrites" (Gr. *hupokrisis* = "play actors") whom Jesus referred to were not seriously offering up prayer to God.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Mt.6:6). Only when we pray in the Holy of Holies of our innermost being can God reward us, not when we pray in the outer court of our flesh. How could

God openly reward those who merely pray to seek the praise of other men, since rewarding hypocritical prayer would only add fuel to the fire of mans' pride! Any hope that such a prayer will be answered by God is immediately forfeit. Even if the prayer being offered is for a good and right cause, how could God openly answer the feigned prayer of a hypocrite, since it was never really directed to Him at all? They are merely play-acting, feigning prayer, and repeating memorized words for a show before other men. The play-acting of men cannot fool God; we may be taken in by smooth talk and pious platitudes, but God is not.

Therefore, when we engage in public prayer, we must make every effort to commune directly with God without being distracted by how we may think others view our prayer in its outward appearance since as soon as we allow that, we have broken the heavenly connection. We must not be concerned that we choose our words carefully in order that other men will think we are well versed in prayer and complement us afterward on saying a "fine prayer." Nor, should we be distressed about any criticism we may receive of men if our prayer does not satisfy their personal criteria.

Men who do not ever commune with God in private are more concerned with how other men will see them rather than considering how God would see their prayer when it is offered in public. That is probably why so many men will not pray in public gatherings or in the church; they fear being embarrassed before others by what they see as their ineptitude in formulating a "great prayer." While it is true that many refuse to pray publicly because they never pray at all, it is most sad that the well-articulated prayer of a verbose hypocrite is often valued more highly than is the short simple sincere prayer of a genuine believer.

The Scripture text commonly referred to as the "Lord's Prayer" is often recited verbatim in many of today's churches as a part of a weekly liturgy. However, ***meaningless ritualistic*** recitation in public or private should be avoided, because in ritual recitation the words are most often repeated without any regard to what one is saying. That prayer outline was obviously never intended to be utilized

ritually in a church gathering when it was given to the disciples.[72] Perhaps it was because so many have problems formulating their own prayers that this practice first began in the hopes that by reciting it repeatedly we would soon learn to pray on our own. Unfortunately, ritualistic recitation of this prayer outline has become a form of idolatry that prevents us from ever reaching the throne of grace — we have become trapped in the form.

Repetitious Prayer

The tiresome ritualistic recitation of the Scripture text commonly known as the "Lord's Prayer" was used in the Roman Catholic Church as a means of serving penance for some sinful act. In order to make restitution for some evil deed, one would need to recite one hundred or more "Our Father's," as it has been often referred to. That is an absurd way to treat Scripture as well as being damaging to our prayer lives. Prayer should never be looked upon as a dull and boring ritual recitation to be repeated mindlessly for any reason, but a great privilege that is a balm to our souls.

> **"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him"** (Mt.6:7,8).

God already knows what we need even before we ask. We do not pray to a wooden idol that must be pounded with our words, and still it does not hear; we pray to the living God who is capable of hearing even the quietest thought. We should never go before God with a virtual "shopping list" of basic needs, going through that same list repeatedly each time that we pray. God knows better than we ourselves do what we truly need. If we are confident that our God will supply all our needs (cf. Ph.4:19), why should we continually repeat them over and over to Him? Do we think that God will vindictively shut off our supply, or do we seriously think that we can wear down

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[72] See Chapter 10.3 How We Should Pray, page 73

his will by our continual petitions if He has at first seemed to refuse us anything? Over time, such prayers become meaningless ritual.

In the parable commonly known as the “parable of the unjust judge” (also known as the "parable of the importunate widow"), Jesus demonstrated God hearing and answering our prayers by contrasting Him with a corrupt human judge (Lu.18:1–8). The widow had to wear down the human judge to the point that he would finally give in and honor her request just to get rid of her! When we go before God with repeated and continual petitions to wear Him down, we dishonor God by implying that He is like the corrupt human judge in the parable. We imply that God does not really want to hear us and does not want to be bothered with answering our petitions. God is not like that at all; He is a righteous and just judge that is also our Father. He will always welcome and hear our requests and petitions; He invites and enjoys them.

This parable was presented by Jesus as a parable of ***contrast***, not one of similitude, since it is apparent that God is exactly the opposite in character from the unjust judge that Jesus described in the parable. Unfortunately, this parable has often been used by some to persuade believers that they should repeatedly bring the same prayer before God ceaselessly until they get an answer (i.e. the positive answer that they want to hear). That is an absurd approach to prayer and is exactly the opposite of the teaching that we should receive from this parable.

Having heard our prayers, God will answer them ***at once*** according to his will. Though God hears and answers our prayers immediately, that does not necessarily mean that we will be able to hear his answer immediately. That is because we tend to be results oriented and expect immediate gratification. God's answer does not always satisfy that desire, and then we pray repeatedly to make sure He has heard us. It is often many months or even years, before we finally come to understand that God heard and answered the first time.

God’s decision is not only immediate it is also final (Lu.18:7,8a). We should not think that God, like the corrupt judge, will “change his mind” through our nagging Him with requests that He has already heard and answered just because we do not like his answer.

Rather, we can always pray with confidence that God will hear every prayer we offer the very first time. How could He not hear us when his Spirit indwells us to aid us in that task? It is important that we understand this so that we do not lose heart if we do not see an immediate response by God to our prayer (Lu.18:1).

We read that the Apostle Paul three times asked the Lord that his physical affliction be removed, before God finally answered that his grace was sufficient for him (2Co.12:9). Surely, Paul expected that God would immediately remove the "thorn" if his prayer were heard.[73] Since it was not immediately removed, Paul prayed twice more. It was not that God had not answered Paul's prayer the first time, but that Paul had not perceived the answer. Finally, Paul did come to understand that his prayer had been heard and answered the first time and that God's answer had simply been, "no."

Should Paul, then, repeatedly have asked afterward for that which God had already made clear would not be done? Of course not, for the Lord had also made it very clear to Paul that his power was actually made evident in that very weakness that Paul wished to have removed! God was using that weakness for his own purposes in the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. If God had removed Paul's affliction, it would no longer have been possible for men to see the power of God that daily sustained Paul in that affliction.

Therefore, since God is not at all like a human judge, it follows that the nagging petitions that may wear down a corrupt human judge are not appropriate and certainly not necessary with God. Unlike the unjust judge, God hears our prayers and responds to them immediately (Lu.18:8a). Therefore, repetitious prayers are futile at best and blasphemous ritual at worse.

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[73]We do not know exactly what this "thorn in the flesh" was that Paul was referring to. Some have thought that it was an eye disease not uncommon in that day. If so, it apparently was a painful disease that made one unsightly to others as well. Paul may have even thought that this was hindering the Gospel, but God informed him otherwise.

Positions of the Body in Prayer

For some reason, many think that prayer must be attended by certain ritualistic body positions as if the ritual placement of the hands or body can appease God. That probably has something to do with man's natural attraction to ritual to enhance or even replace reality. Unfortunately, it also contributes to hypocrisy in public prayer inasmuch as pious positions of the body are observable by other men and can be part of the play-acting.

Positions of the Torso

In Scripture, we find at least four different body positions that men took when praying. Each seemed appropriate at the time of their prayer. Those are: standing (Lu.18:11,13), bowing (Ge.24:52), kneeling (1Ki 8:54), and prone (Jos.5:14). This surely covers the full range of body positions, and there are many instances of each in Scripture, not just the ones we have noted here. The fact that no one position is favored over the other in Scripture should indicate that the position of the body is ***not*** an important factor in prayer. In most of our churches today, prayer is offered while standing or sitting. It would often be impractical to lie prone or even to kneel in many of our churches because of the space required.[74] However, that does not rule out the adopting of various positions in our ***private*** prayers when the situation seems to call for it, and if we are not merely doing so out of some sense of ritualistic legalism.

Positions of the Hands

How important are the positions of the hands? We observe that Solomon had prayed on his knees with his hands spread upward to heaven (1Ki.8:54), and again, he stood with his hands spread upward (1Ki.8:22). Many charismatic churches, which place great stock in various "body rituals," hold one or both hands aloft when they pray.

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[74]Some churches do arrange such things as kneeling pads in the pews for corporate prayer. Those are usually found in the liturgical churches that place greater emphasis upon ritual and ceremony.

Paul said, "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (1Ti.2:8). However, merely spreading the hands upward toward Heaven does not insure that God will hear us. The raising of hands in false piety by the unrighteous is actually an affront to God. In the prophecy of Isaiah God said, "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you — your hands are full of blood" (Is.1:15). Rather than referring to a literal holding up of the hands, the Apostle Paul was expressing his desire that all men would pray with expectancy and in personal holiness with the absence of any malice in their hearts and with the full confidence of faith.

Today, many men fold their hands together in prayer. We must understand that some Scriptural examples are merely representative of customs in those biblical times. In the same way we should consider the position of the hands in prayer as a convention, not a hard fast rule. Who among us today is able to "lift up holy hands" that have wronged no one, or done no evil before God? Folded hands can be seen to signify the abstinence from our own corrupt works and an expression of faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf. It can be seen as a signification of trust: a resting in God, and patient waiting for his benefits through prayer.

Position of the Head and Eyes

Someone has said that the reason the congregation today bows their head and closes their eyes in corporate prayer is a tradition that was carried over from earlier times in England. It is said that this custom first began because in that manner the congregation could not see the minister read his prayers from a "common prayer" book that was used in those days. When the minister bowed his head to read, they bowed their heads as well. The bowing of the head should be in reverence to God, not to avoid seeing the failing of a preacher's ability![75]

[75] Written prayers may at times be appropriate on various occasions and cannot be condemned out of hand. After all, many of the Psalms that we recite are written prayers.

Often we may pray with our eyes open as if diligently seeking God; conversely, with our eyes closed to shut out the distractions of this world. In one of Jesus' parables the publican "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven", yet the Pharisee surely lifted his hands and eyes in his counterfeit piety (Lu.18:13,11). We should be aware that it was the publican that God heard. Was it because of the position of his eyes? No, it was because of the humbled position of his soul.

Therefore, some pray standing, some sitting, some kneeling, some bowing, and some on their faces. Some pray with lifted hands, some with spread hands, some with folded hands. Some pray with searching eyes, some with eyes closed. What is in those practices but the custom and traditions of mortal men? We should know by now that God does not look upon the outward appearance of men, but upon the inner man. It is not an appearance of outward reverence that God requires, but an inner reverence of the heart. What does it matter that we lie prone before Him if we, in our spirit, are standing up in arrogance inside? Moreover, it is not with carnal eyes that we witness spiritual blessings coming down from heaven, but with an inner vision made manifest through the Holy Spirit. We should not be contentious about such worldly concerns as where we pray, when we pray, or the position of these mortal bodies. Prayer is privileged communication with the living God, not a ritual.

Chapter 14.5 Ritual Fasting

In a previous chapter, we obliquely discussed ritual fasting in connection with the ecclesiastical seasons of Advent and Lent (Chapter 13.4). Today, many churches practice ritual fasting as a congregation, while many individuals also practice fasting as a private ritual. In this chapter, we shall first discuss spontaneous fasting, as we explore its causes, its meaning, and its purpose in the lives of believers. Then, we must resort to a careful study of the Holy Scriptures to test the validity of fasting as a prescribed ritual and determine what if any benefits can be received from engaging in it.

Fasting Defined

Starting with the Greek word for fasting which is *nestis*, we find that the primary meaning is simply "not eating." If we fast, we do not eat. The ***reason*** for "not eating" is not implied in the word itself. The reason could range from a ceremonial rite of self-denial to merely having no food available to eat. We always fast when we sleep. This is where the word "breakfast" comes from since after a night's sleep we "break our fast" with a morning meal.

The Hebrew word for fasting has a more extensive meaning, which is to deny oneself any type of nourishment by mouth. This could also be construed to mean abstaining from water as well as food. We read of several examples of fasting including abstinence from water as well as food in the Old Testament such as the text found in Ezra 10:6, and Exodus 34:28. Therefore, our simple definition of "not eating" could possibly be expanded to mean, "not eating or drinking."

Common Reasons for Fasting

We may well ask ourselves why someone would abstain from eating if food were available. Of course, some may not eat because their hunger is already satisfied with food from a previous meal, and so they willingly skip a meal. Some may refuse food because they are overweight and wish to loose a few pounds. Here we see that fasting could range from an act of vanity to a medical necessity. Another

obvious reason that a person may not eat is that they are physically ill. Often a person's condition may only become worse if they eat when they are ill, especially with certain stomach disorders. Here fasting clearly has a therapeutic benefit, and in every case fasting is a matter of personal voluntary choice.

However, when we speak of fasting in this chapter we must generally assume that the individual is in need of food and yet abstains because of intense pressures having nothing to do with a conscious rational choice, but out of mental anguish. Unfortunately, none of those common reasons, while being perfectly valid ones, gains us much understanding of fasting in the biblical sense. Therefore, let us see what Scriptures have to say about fasting.

Mourning over Illness and Death

In Scripture, fasting always has a very close relationship with mourning or sorrow. Scriptural illustrations of fasting always feature that one direct connection such that fasting in the absence of mourning or sorrow is not truly fasting in the biblical sense at all. There are several Scriptural examples of fasting being the result of mourning over illness. The first example we shall examine is that of David's mourning over the illness of his child (II Samuel 12:15–17).

> **"And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.**

Fasting is mentioned in verse 16, weeping in verse 21. We see how fasting and sorrow go hand in hand. David did not eat because of his preoccupation with sorrow.

In still another example, David expresses that relationship in Psalm 35 verse 13: "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom." David's unanswered prayers on his friends' behalf returned to gnaw at him, creating in him so much sorrow that he could not eat and even ignored his personal standing

and appearance. No wonder, then, that the belly was considered the location of human emotions by men of old whereas today men consider it the heart. Apparently, the ancient man understood something that we do not.

A closely related motivation for fasting is found in mourning over the finality of death. Death may come about as the result of illness, incident, or violence and in every case leaves in its wake the sorrow of separation for the living. In First Chronicles 10:12, "valiant men" mourned and fasted for seven days over the death of King Saul and the bodies of his sons (1Sa.31:13). David "mourned and wept and fasted" over the loss of Saul, Jonathan, and many others who had died in battle (2Sa.1:4,11,12). There are many other examples as well such as one we find in 2Sa.3:35 as David wept over the death of Abner.

Fasting is a natural outward expression of mourning by the human soul. When Jesus was questioned as to why his own disciples did ***not*** fast, Jesus answered, "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Mt.9:15; cf. Mk.2:19). Here Jesus was not saying that we should all engage in ritual fasting because He has now ascended. He was saying that the disciples at that time had joy in his physical presence (why should they mourn?), but acknowledged that they would soon mourn his crucifixion and death and would surely fast in their grief at that time.

Mourning Out of Fear

Another cause of fasting is fear, which is mourning over impending death. In the book of Jeremiah, we read that Jeremiah called for a fast to be proclaimed in response to the fear of God's judgments against Judah and Jerusalem (Je.36:9). Joel said, "Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD. Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come" (Jl.1:14,15). In still another place, we read "the people of Nineveh believed God [i.e. believed that He would destroy them: Jona.3:9] and proclaimed a fast

and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" (Jona.3:5).

An unusual example is found in the book of Esther (Est.4:16). Esther had decided to go into the king's presence unbidden in an attempt to save the Jews from Haman. That was against the law of the King, and since Esther was also a Jew, Esther felt that she would likely perish in the attempt. Here fasting was not an attempt to persuade God to intervene, as some might suppose, but it was an act of mourning over Esther's impending death. Fasting as it is used here could not be allied with prayer to God since God is never mentioned throughout the book. Because the Jews believed that God had not heard their pleas for so long during the time of their harsh judgment, they had simply given up calling upon Him. Esther is a book demonstrating God's continuous providence to his own even when they ignore Him, as had most all of the Jews during the long length of their captivity.

In Acts 27, we observe what may seem to some today an unusual thing. Roman soldiers fasting, and the Apostle Paul encouraging them to eat in time of extreme danger (Ac.27:34). The soldiers were too fearful to eat, believing that they would die at any moment. Here the man of God, Paul, saw it was good to eat in order to keep up their strength because he trusted God to deliver them. It was fear that kept the Roman soldiers from eating. Paul himself did not engage in some form of ritual fasting in order to entreat God, but in confidence trusted Him. As in all ceremonial rites, there is always the real danger that we will come to place trust in the ritual itself to save us!

Fasting out of a Sense of Hopelessness

However, fasting can also manifest itself as an outward sign of our sole dependence upon God that is brought about out of a humanly hopeless situation. When King Jehoshaphat received word of an enemy army advancing against Judah, he "…proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah" (2Chr.20:3). He placed his dependence upon God: "O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee" (2Chr.20:12). King

Jehoshaphat had nowhere else to turn, and fear and mourning was upon him and his people. He turned to God, and depended upon Him alone for deliverance.

In still another instance, Ezra "proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance" (Ezra 8:21). "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us" (Ezra 8:23). Be careful to notice that God did not deliver his people because they engaged in ritual fasting, but rather because they placed their full dependence in Him and besought Him in prayer. Fasting was only an outward consequence of their dependence. Fear as well as hopelessness had contributed to their fasting.

Fasting as a Consequence of Intense Prayer

Another cause for fasting explains the close relationship many see between fasting and prayer. We must realize that fasting is not something that we can do as an alternative to prayer, nor is it an enhancement to prayer; rather, fasting is something that occurs spontaneously as a ***consequence*** of fervent prayer. The best examples of fasting as an effect of intensive prayer are found in the New Testament in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights in the desert (Mt.4:1,2; Mk.1:12,13 and Lu.4:1,2). Lest we think that Jesus was practicing some rite of ceremonial fasting here, lets look into the accounts more deeply. Jesus had just received the Holy Spirit without measure at his baptism by John. The sudden in-filling of the Holy Spirit and all of that that was revealed to Him "drove" Jesus out into the wilderness (Mk.1:12). He was compelled to be alone in order to pray and commune with his Father. During those forty days, Satan sorely tested Jesus. So severe was that testing that Jesus did not eat anything. Of course, we can also see that the wilderness did not provide much if any food, but Jesus was so intent upon prayer and repelling the attacks of Satan, that He did not even notice his hunger. That is made quite clear in the text that we read in Luke 4:2 that "Being forty days tempted of the devil… he did eat nothing: and when

they were ended, he afterward hungered." Hunger came ***after*** the forty days. Jesus' fasting was a result of the intensity of the attack against Him and of much time spent in fervent prayer.

It is no wonder that many see fasting and prayer as being closely related. Intense and extensive prayer will most certainly bring forth fasting. Who would cease praying to "take a coffee break" or eat lunch if his heart is set solely upon seeking God's will? It is just not reasonable to interrupt an intimate time of prayer with a concern over food for the flesh. If our minds are fully engaged in prayer, we do not even notice our hunger. Therefore, in a practical sense, it is well to eat regularly and to set aside times to pray so that we will not be tempted by hunger when we should be praying. Otherwise, we may give in to the weakness of our flesh to our spiritual loss. A grumbling belly is hardly a sign of spirituality.

There are several verses where fasting seems to have a very prominent place in the text of many Bible translations; nonetheless, many of the better Greek texts do not include those particular references to fasting. The first text we shall examine in that regard is Matthew 17:21 in the King James Authorized Version where the disciples were unable to heal a lunatic (Mt.17:15,16). When Jesus had cast out the demon, the disciples asked why they could not cast him out, and Jesus replied that it was because of their unbelief, going on to say that they needed only the faith of a grain of mustard seed (Mt.17:20). Too many people skip right past verse 20 and jump with both feet on verse 21: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting," as if fasting was the magic ingredient necessary to achieve success when prayer alone fails.

It is believed by many scholars that some scribe probably added the text of verse 21 to a few manuscripts, since it is not actually found at all in the better Greek manuscripts. We must always remind ourselves that only the original autographs in the original languages can be said to be infallible and directly inspired. While our translations are miraculously preserved by the providence of God, they are still only translations of the originals. Translators can and do make honest errors in judgment, especially when working with text fragments and copies of questionable origin. When some question about whether text

in a translation has been added to or altered, it is best to resort to Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek texts. If the question is still not resolved, we must defer to other texts of Scripture in which there is no doubt of authorship. We must not ever base Christian doctrine on questionable text alone.

Again, in Mark 9:29, we read "And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting." Here it is only the word "fasting" that is not found in the best manuscripts. It is apparent that faith and prayer go hand in hand because we do not merely have faith in complete isolation from God who gave it to us. We have faith in God's power that we seek by the means of prayer. In First Corinthians 7:5, we again find the word "fasting" along with prayer in the King James Version though other versions such as the New International Version omit it. Again, the better Greek manuscripts do not have the word "fasting" included here suggesting that it was likely added later.

Whether some of those translations include the word "fasting" because the original autographs actually did contain them, or some well-meaning scribe included them as a marginal explanation that eventually found its way into the text, the association of those two words does have something important to say to us. It is not that we should elevate fasting to a plane of equality with prayer, but that we should pray with ***great intensity***. When we find prayer and fasting mentioned together, we should be reminded that the intensity of prayer is being emphasized — not a little, short, quick prayer offered up in passing, but an intense calling upon God for a demonstration of his power and revelation of his will.

In Acts 13:2, we read that the leaders in the church at Antioch fasted as they prayed about sending Barnabas and Paul to minister to Gentiles. No doubt, that was a heart-wrenching and difficult decision for them to make driving all appetite for food from them. We read in Acts 10:30 that Cornelius, a Gentile, fasted as he prayed (Ac.10:2). Not being a Jew, Cornelius was not given to ritual fasting; he did without food because of the long intensity of his praying. Paul and Barnabas also "prayed with fasting;" that is, they prayed with intensity for a long period of time regarding the elders they had ordained such

that they had no thought for food (Ac.14:23). In Acts 9:9, Paul fasted, not because of some ceremonial rite, but because he prayed (Ac.9:11). God did not hear Paul because he fasted, but because he diligently prayed. In Luke 2:37, Anna fasted as she served God in the Temple and because she prayed day and night.

Fasting as a Consequence of Ministry

Prayer and ministry are often linked together, since fasting can merely be the result of having no time to eat, or merely having no food available to eat because of intense effort as well as prayer. There are several examples of fasting because of intense effort recorded in the Scriptures. Elijah ate his fill at the bidding of the Angel of God, and then went on foot forty days and forty nights without food to Horeb, the mountain of God (1Ki.19:8). His mind was completely focused upon the end of his journey. Again, we read in the Old Testament, that Moses took no food with him when he went up the mountain to receive the Decalogue (De.9:9), though he had no way of knowing how long he would be up there alone with God. When God calls us to do something, there is often no time to think about providing ourselves with food or other creature comforts.

The Apostle Paul, in describing the many perils that he had underwent in preaching the Gospel characterized them in these words, "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2Co.11:27). Here Paul speaks of fasting in the context of his overall suffering because of his fervent haste in spreading the Gospel (2Co.6:5). The context clearly indicates that Paul was not intentionally fasting in order to perform some sacred ritual.

Another example of fasting as a consequence of exhaustive ministry is found in John 4:31–34. Jesus was very weary from his journey into Samaria and rested at Jacob's well as his disciples had gone for food. There He bore witness to a Samaritan woman and had received water from her. As she went to return with others who wished to hear Jesus' words for themselves, Jesus' disciples returned with food and urged Him to eat. However, Jesus' mind was intently focused upon those men who would soon return with the woman from the city

of Sychar. Jesus' ministry was food to sustain Him for as He said, "I have meat that ye know not of…" (Jn.4:32) and "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn.4:34). Jesus' work was infinitely more important to Him than eating mere physical food at that time because He said, "…look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (Jn.4:35). The bounty of ***that*** harvest was "…fruit unto life eternal…" (Jn.4:36).

Sometimes those that benefit from the ministry of others find themselves so occupied in their concentration on the message that they spontaneously fast. Two examples of spontaneous fasting by the many recipients of Jesus' ministry are found in Mt.15:32, and Mk.8:3. Jesus had not encouraged them to fast, but had compassion on those that had followed him about to hear his Words without having given any thought to bring food along with them. He then miraculously provided them with food lest they faint on their homeward journey.

Mourning over Sin

Another cause of fasting is mourning over sin. Would that we should be so concerned over our sins and the sins of others that we would mourn over them — not merely acknowledge our sins, but mourn in deep sorrow over our iniquity against God. We find that Daniel mourned and fasted over his sins and the sins of his people:

> **"And I set my face unto the LORD God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O LORD, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments"** (Da.9:3–5).

Notice that fasting ***accompanied*** "prayer and supplications" and is not placed on a level with them. Fasting is not a substitute for or an enhancement of prayer, but is an involuntary response to the human condition that makes prayer a desperate necessity. Likewise, in the book of Nehemiah, "…the children of Israel were assembled with

fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Ne.9:1,2).

Penitential Fasting

Many Protestant churches still observe the Roman tradition of Lent, which is 40 days of strict fasting on weekdays beginning eight weeks before Easter on Ash Wednesday as we discussed in Chapter 13.4. This tradition dates back only to the fourth century, is not of Scriptural origin, and is but another example of how the Reformation Movement fell short of reaching its ultimate goal. Also associated with fasting in this tradition is the exacting of penitence that takes on various other forms of self-denial that is also not Scriptural. The Roman church had established very strict laws concerning Lent that were only recently relaxed in 1966 to require fasting and abstinence only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. Such prescribed ritualistic fasting and deceitful self-punishment is of no spiritual value whatsoever, and it should be summarily rejected as unsuitable conduct for a believer who has been redeemed by grace from all his sins.

Fasting Not a Means of Deliverance

Ritual fasting will not save us from God's wrath when we have been disobedient to his will. Jeremiah was told by God not to offer up intercessory prayer for the people of Judah, since they had already gone beyond the point of deliverance. "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Je.14:12). Judah was going through all the outward motions of religion at that time, which included Temple worship, burnt offering, and fasting, but their hearts were not in it; it had become nothing but meaningless ritual.

Jesus told a story of two men who went up to the Temple to pray (Lu.18:9–14). The Pharisee said, "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess" (Lu.18:12). Was the Pharisee "afflicting his soul," or was he merely elevating his personal pride by relating those acts? The publican on the other hand probably never missed a meal,

and we know by his occupation as a tax collector that he took "tithes" of others, rather than giving to them. Yet of the two, the publican went away from the Temple to his home justified before God because he had "afflicted his soul" — "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lu.18:13). We cannot be made worthy of God's mercy through an outward ritual, but receive it only when we acknowledge our unworthiness through sincere inward remorse and repentance.

Fasting Not a Substitute for Prayer

Fasting is not a means of getting things from a reluctant God that He will not provide with lesser effort. We should not think that we can "get on the good side of God" through ritual fasting. Nor dare we "hold a gun to our heads" and say to God that we will starve ourselves until He gives us a desired answer. That is a very foolish and dangerous thing to do since God cannot honor such arrogant demands and foolish actions. Furthermore, the loss of physical and mental strength brought on by extensive ritual fasting can break down our guard until we can become receptive to an answer from ***anywhere or anyone***. We may actually see visions or have false revelations that Satan has planted in our minds, having taken advantage of our weakened condition, and think they are from God. God is faithful and just to answer our sincere prayers just as easily when we have a full stomach as when we are fasting.

Be very clear that God does not bend his will to meet our will because we throw tantrums or refuse to eat. This is like a child that threatens to hold his breath until his parent gives in to his demands! True fasting is the spontaneous result of an inward contrition of the heart, a self-denial resulting from intense anguish. The difficulty today is not that we do not fast often enough, but that we do not fear God with intensity, mourn over our sinful state with intensity, pray with longing intensity, and minister to God's calling with such urgency, that food, dress, and other human comforts become quite secondary to the task at hand (Mt.6:25).

Vanity of Ritual Fasting

All ritual fasting is vain. That is, fasting as some form of outward ritual is meaningless. That is very hard for many Christians, who desire to add works to grace, to accept today. Too many are inclined to seek a direct avenue to God through some work of personal denial to make them more worthy. Moreover, they may believe that God considers fasting a more spiritual approach than merely openly presenting our petition to Him in simple humility as we have been invited to do (Jn.14:13,14). Food was made for the nourishment of the body, and the body was designed by God to eat food. Even in the old dispensation, God did not give the Hebrews fast days in which to mourn, but gave them feast days to celebrate.

The only exception to days of feasting is the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 16:29, the Israelites were told that they were to afflict their souls on this one day. That was to be an inward contrition of their souls, not merely an outward infliction of their bodies through empty ritual. If real inward contrition occurred, outward signs would appear, as all remorse manifests itself outwardly, but those will then be signs of a genuine sorrow over sin, not meaningless ritual.

The people of Israel, like many Christians today, soon came to see the "affliction of their souls" as a mere call to engage in outward ceremony during a prescribed fast day (Je.36:6). We find an excellent Old Testament example of the vainness of ritual fasting, in Isaiah 58:3–7. The Lord God said, "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD" (Is.58:5)? Here God spoke to Israel through Isaiah, to tell them that outward ritual without inward contrition of the heart was not the "affliction of their souls" that He had called upon them to do.

The Day of Atonement was a fore-shadowing of the atoning work of Christ. "…To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke…" (Is.58:6; cf. Ps.68:18; Ep.4:8). Through still another

prophet, Israel was admonished for their meaningless ritualistic attitude: "…When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me" (Zec.7:5)? The implied answer to this rhetorical question is "no," and so it is with many today.

Ritual fasting is an outward act that is not truly directed to God, but toward other men. In what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus said, "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast…" (Mt.6:16). Notice that Jesus did not say that they should not ever fast, but rather said, "when ye fast." Fasting is an outward expression of suffering that is a normal part of living in this fallen world. As we know joy, so we must also know sorrow. As we know laughing, so we also know weeping. As we know times of celebration, so we also know times of fasting.

Nevertheless, we are not to fast, as does the hypocrite. We are not to put on a mask of contrition, speaking prescribed words through the mask, with no genuine inward sorrow of the soul. To do so is not to seek the reward of God, but only the praises of men. As Jesus said regarding them, "They have their reward" (Mt.6:2). Even when we greatly mourn and our souls are truly afflicted, we should not put on a ritual mask of fasting. "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Mt.6:17,18). If we mourn and suffer from a contrite heart and afflicted soul, we should openly go to God with our faults laid bare, not hide behind a mask of a ritual, that He may heal our souls and provide comfort in our time of sorrow.

The Spontaneity of True Fasting

If we are so overcome by the Spirit of God that we do not even think about eating for a time, we engage in true inward fasting since seeking God's will has become all important to us. We fast because we emotionally have no appetite for food. If while fasting, we are tempted to eat because we have an uncontrollable craving for food, we are not truly fasting in the Scriptural sense. It is merely a vain ritual of

the flesh. Fasting is not something that we do overtly as a ritualistic act, but something that merely reflects the inner state of our minds and souls as we pray. True and honest fasting before God demonstrates to Him that we are serious about our mourning over sin and that our sorrow is real. We cannot merely fake it and expect God to believe it.

Spontaneous fasting also demonstrates to God the state of our repentance. God saw that Ahab truly repented and humbled himself before God when he "…rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly" (1Ki.21:27). The Lord spared him immediate judgment because as he asked Elijah, "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me" (1Ki.21:29)? Ahab did not do this to impress others or even in a false attempt to persuade God, it was a spontaneous expression of the true condition of his heart. At another time, the children of Israel abstained from drink and water because they said, "We have sinned against the LORD" (1Sa.7:6). As we read in Jonah 3:5–10, the Ninevites feared, repented, and humbled themselves before God, which also manifested itself in humble dress and in fasting.

Conclusions

Therefore, we should not consider fasting as an independent act of worship. It always attends some real affliction of our soul stemming from helplessness, fear, illness, death, our sins, or the sins of others. It may spontaneously come about when we engage with great intensity in worship, prayer, or ministry. Though not a prescribed ritual, the presence of fasting is an outward sign to God of our true sorrow, repentance, and dependence upon Him as we contemplate his holiness. Fasting is not something to be play-acted. If our remorse is not real, the outward act is meaningless; we are lying to God and He will not be fooled. Fasting is not an alternative or a substitute for prayer, nor is it a means of wresting some great truth from God that He will not reveal to us in any other way. It is most certainly not a means by which we can bend God's will to our own.

How, then, should Christians view fasting today? Should we engage in ritual fasting as an act of worship? To do so, without genuine inward mourning, would be to wear the play-actor's mask of

the hypocrite. God will not take notice of empty form without real substance. Rather, we should always seek to worship God openly in Spirit and in Truth. Let our remorse over our transgressions be real, let our prayers be fervent, let our service to Him be consistent out of reverence and love. If in so doing, we must sometimes abstain from food or water out of necessity because of the diligence of that effort then give praise to God and let it be so.

May we rather let the joy of our salvation be truly joyous, and let us not put on long faces and fast at a time when He bids us to feast. For, we know that our Redeemer lives and we love the thought of his soon appearing. The afflictions that may now bring mourning will quickly pass away in the glory of his presence. Even as God spoke to Zechariah saying, "The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace" (Zec.8:19). All fasting will someday be turned to feasting. Even as Judah's mourning shall be turned to joy in the Kingdom age, so in this day let his Church not be so much inclined to fast, but to feast on Him who is the source of our joy and righteousness.

Chapter 14.6 Angel Worship

Instead of placing our full trust and confidence in Christ who indwells us by the Holy Spirit, there is a tendency, even among Bible-based Christians, to seek out angelic beings to aid and instruct them. However, as Christians our personal guardian is the Holy Spirit who permanently indwells us. Christ through the Holy Spirit is closer to us than could be any man or even an angelic being. Through the Holy Spirit, we receive knowledge, wisdom, and comfort as He takes all that is Christ's and reveals everything about Him to us.

Meanwhile, angelic beings are directly involved in a spiritual war that is going on in Heaven as well as upon the earth today. While man sits by mostly unaware, a war rages around us, because of us, against us, and for us. We are not speaking of the internal warfare that takes place within our souls that was discussed in Book I of this work, but an external war being waged in the spiritual as well as the physical universe. Unfortunately, mortal men though ill equipped to deal with it are often drawn into that eternal struggle between good and evil, and too often they become aligned on the wrong side of it thus becoming pawns that are wasted in the conflict.

The Nature of Angels

The first thing that we must understand about angels is that they are ***created*** intelligences. Like God, they are spirit beings. However, unlike God, who is the first and the last, having no beginning or end, angelic beings had a beginning in the moment of their creation. Just as we were created for God's pleasure and purposes, so were his angelic beings. Both angels and men were created to serve God and to enjoy his presence and love as a reward for that service.

Since angels are spirit-beings, they do not have a physical body as do men. However, they do have a "spiritual form" which in a sense can be equated with a physical body since their being is contained within the confines of that form. As a result, an angelic being cannot exist everywhere at once; they are not omnipresent. That

immediately differentiates them from the Holy Spirit who can indwell, guide and motivate many believers simultaneously everywhere in the world. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, not one of his angels.

We are not told about the exact characteristics of this "form" of the angels. The best explanation would be to suggest that while men are physical beings consisting of material substance, angels are spirit-beings consisting of pure energy. The writer of the book of Hebrews may have alluded to this when he wrote, "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire" (He.1:7). Angels are also sometimes spoken of metaphorically in Scripture as "stars," which are bright sources of energy in the form of a light in the night sky (Re.1:16,20; 12:4). Angels, like stars, are bright sources of energy and exist in large numbers. However, there is no reason to assume that the stars we view at night are actually angelic beings. The stars, though producing light, consume matter and are not pure energy. In addition, the stars do not have any personal intelligence; stars are to angels what a rock is to a man. A rock is similar to a man in that both are composed of matter, but rocks have no intellect and are not living beings. Likewise, angels are similar to stars in substance (energy, sometimes visible as light), but a star has no living intelligence, as do angels.

Angels are normally invisible to men (2Ki.6:14–17). However, angels also on occasion have demonstrated the ability to appear to men in a human form (Jn.20:12; Ac 1:10,11 etc.). That would suggest that they are able to adapt the pure energy of their form into visible energy — or perhaps even into a physical substance — at least for short lengths of time. If so, it would appear that those conversions of energy into material substance are not always complete. Consequently, we find descriptions of heavenly angels in Scripture that do not completely equate them with mortal men. Angels are often said to be dressed in extremely white garments or are clothed in a bright light, which sets them apart from mere human messengers (Mt.28:3; Lu.24:4; Jn:20:12 etc.). The splendor of their appearance is such as to startle and even stun men (Mt.28:4). Perhaps what is being observed is a glimpse of their true nature of energy that men observe as an extreme radiance of light within or about their visible form.

The commonly held belief by some that human beings are transformed into angels when they die is without any foundation whatsoever. Apparently, this notion is born of erroneous traditions formed out of ignorance since there is absolutely no Scriptural support for such a viewpoint. That whimsy would suggest that men become spirit-beings when they die — permanently discarding their bodies to be destroyed through decay in the earth. If that were true, there could be no physical resurrection of the dead, which is the crux of the Gospel. Angels are created as spirit beings, while men are created as physical beings making angels and men two separate and distinguishable creations of God. That distinction must continue throughout eternity to satisfy God's original intent in creating them.

Superior State of Angels over Men

Angels are created superior to man in their intrinsic purity. That is because of their exclusive spiritual nature and their heavenly estate. Men are born with a physical nature and an earthly estate that is amalgamated with the spiritual breath of God in forming their soul (Ge.2:7). That therefore ranks man a "little lower than the angels" since man is not created as a purely spiritual being but also has a physical component (Ps.8:5; He.2:6,7). In spite of their superiority, however, angels are not to be worshiped by men since they, like men, are created beings of the same God. Both were created for his pleasure in order to serve Him. In that sense, both men and angels have a similar status before God.

Angels have knowledge that is far superior to that of mortal man in his fallen state. They have dual knowledge of the physical and spiritual universes because of their celestial nature, while mortal man is largely limited to physical knowledge. Only when the Holy Spirit indwells a man is he capable of any spiritual understanding at all, and even that is limited since his mortal physical nature remains to hinder him. Due to their extreme longevity, angels have a vast knowledge of past events both personal and historic. However, that knowledge does not extend to future events. They, like we, can only speculate about the future based upon the present and the past, but their vast knowledge of the past gives them apparent superiority over man in predicting future

events. To fallen mankind, they may even appear to be all knowing. Nevertheless, they are far from being omniscient since they are limited in their knowledge to that which God gives them access.

God has given angelic beings the ability to exercise their spiritual powers to impact the physical world under his direction. That power is very specific and is limited to that which God has deemed necessary for the task that they are to perform. The ability of angels to affect the material can be seen in Matthew 28, verse 2 where one angel rolled away a massive stone from the tomb of Jesus. In yet other places, an angel opened the prison doors for the disciples in Acts 5, verse19 and released Peter from a locked prison in Acts 12 verses 7–9. Many other instances that demonstrate the angels' abilities to alter the physical world are seen in the Old Testament (Da.3:25; 6:22 etc.). Moreover, the power that angels can exert is enormous as is clearly demonstrated in the book of the Revelation (Re.15:1; 16:1–21). Nevertheless, angels are not omnipotent since they only receive delegated authority as they wield power that originates with God Himself (Ps.103:20; 2Pe.2:11).

Classification of Angels

Angelic beings appear to be ranked into a hierarchy, with certain angels holding superior positions over others (Col.1:16; Ro.8:38). Various angels also have specific tasks and duties to perform that differ from those of others. Although they are arranged in ranks, all angels report directly to God as their "Commander in Chief." Only three angels are named specifically in Scripture. Those are Michael, Gabriel, and Lucifer (Satan). Michael is referred to as an archangel in Jude 9. Gabriel is not directly referred to as an archangel, but he instead appears to be the chief messenger or spokesman for God as he announces major events (Da.8:16; 9:21; Lu.1:19,26). Lucifer also is not referred to as an archangel, but he must have originally occupied a very high position before his rebellion. Many other angels are not named at all in Scripture, but there is little doubt that they all have unique personalities, ranks, and names that are known among themselves and God.

In addition, angels must be further divided into two separate groupings. The first group consists of the loyal angels who have steadfastly served and honored God faithfully since their creation. The second group is made up of the fallen angels led by Satan who rebelled against the authority of God seeking to share the throne of the Most High and steal the worship of men.

Loyal Angels

Large multitudes of angels remain loyal to God praising and serving Him faithfully. In addition, they minister to mankind as God directs them. In the Old Testament, we observe that angels consistently ministered to Israel, and in the New Testament, we read that angels ministered to Christ and after his ascension to the early Church. There is also some evidence that angels may minister to guide the elect on the earth away from harm ***before*** they receive salvation in Christ: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who ***shall be*** heirs of salvation" (He.1:14, emphasis added)? Others interpret this verse as referring to ***redeemed Christians*** who are the heirs of salvation, since none of us has yet inherited the full benefits and rewards of our salvation in this life (see the N.I.V. translation).

Regardless of how this verse is interpreted, there is no need for angels to appear to the redeemed to impart a special revelation from God because we have the Holy Spirit constantly witnessing within us, and we have the written Scriptures along with the assistance of the Holy Spirit as our teacher. We also have the company of other Spirit-filled believers to inform and encourage us, and we have constant recourse to our prayers that are winged to the very throne of God as we pray through the Holy Spirit. We do not need to pray to or through angels. Any attempt to do so is to dishonor Christ who is the only mediator between man and God, not his angels (1Ti.2:5).

Furthermore, it should be clearly understood that angelic beings are not being used as messengers of the Gospel to the lost as is evidenced by the complete absence in the New Testament of any such incident ever occurring. We are only being protected and aided by the activity of invisible angelic hosts to prepare the way behind the scenes

for the Gospel to go forth. The dissemination of the Gospel itself is the exclusive task of the Church, which consists of those who have received salvation in Christ and who in turn joyously tell of it to others. Angels have never experienced the joy that our salvation brings making redeemed man a much more effective messenger for the task, but more than that, God has so ordained it (Mt.28:19,20; Ac.1:8). Consequently, when Cornelius, the centurion, was visited by an angel in the early Church period, the angel could only direct him to seek out Peter who in turn imparted the Gospel to him (Ac.10:1–6).

That does not mean that God cannot use his angelic hosts to protect and defend us in times of great need from both spiritual and physical harm. That knowledge can be a great comfort to us especially in times of great spiritual turmoil, physical disaster, and terrible catastrophes. We are the spoils in the war between good and evil in which the angels are fully engaged. Satan certainly uses his legions to try to trip us up and to deceive us if he can. Since we are the booty that Satan desires, we can be quite sure that the Heavenly angelic hosts that oppose him in Heaven also oppose him down here on earth as well.

All angels are directly subject to Christ as they execute God's judgment upon a fallen world, announce major events, and work as reapers at the end of each age. The last major events announced were the resurrection of Jesus Christ and his ascension into Heaven (Lu.24:4–6a; Ac.1:10,11). The last reaping that took place was at the end of the age of law before the beginning of the age of grace (Mt.9:37,38; Lu.10:2). Angels are not reaping today because this is a time for planting and watering by the Word of the Gospel of grace. The wheat and the tares are growing intermingled today without even any weeding taking place. Only at the end of this present age, will angels reappear on the earth to "pull up the weeds" after the Church has been harvested (Mt.13:30;Re.14:15).

Fallen Angels

Angels are created free of sin in the mortal sense since they have no physical bodies to contribute to sins of the flesh. While all men inherit a sin-nature from Adam when they are born, angels are individually created by God with no inherited traits. Therefore, while

we are all born in sin, angels were all created without that predisposed slavish propensity to commit sin. Furthermore, their original state of knowledge and perfection was such that, unlike Adam and Eve, the angels who fell from God's grace had no initial innocence to claim as a shield for their rebellion. Fallen angels were not deceived; their rebellion was totally willful and committed with complete knowledge of the evil embodied in the act.

For that reason, we find that God has drawn a strict distinction between the deceiver and the deceived. Fallen angels and Satan in particular will ultimately be judged by God without mercy for the deceptive role that they played in inducing humankind to commit sin against Him. It is not surprising that demons deeply resent the redemption of men since they themselves have no inheritance in the redeeming work of Christ. They exist only to make war against the throne of God, the loyal angels, and against mankind whom they took captive with them when Satan induced the first man, Adam, to sin.

They fight furiously since they know that their time to do so is quite limited because of the resurrection of Christ, and because Jesus has the power to wrest the souls of fallen men out of their grasp (Ep.4:7,8). Although they have no hope of attaining an ultimate victory, they continue to gain pleasure from besmirching mankind who was originally created to reflect the image of God (Ge.1:27). In doing so, they slander God Himself and exalt Satan whom they also worship in his place.

Satan's legions are continuously at war with the archangel Michael and the loyal angel hosts of Heaven, obediently executing Satan's orders to inflict the physical world with all manner of evil in much the same way that the loyal angels follow God's orders to protect the physical world. Therefore, we find that Satan brings about some of the supernatural events that occur on earth while others are directly ordained by God. Though demons have an extreme amount of power, there is a notable limitation to their ability. Satan must work against the natural laws that God has set into motion, while loyal angels are given permission to suspend those laws when God so directs. Satan's miracles are therefore always inferior to those of God.

Nevertheless, the acts of Satan and his demons are spectacular enough that natural men can easily confuse them with acts of God. Satan's purpose is to continue the same type of deception that worked so well against Eve. If man is kept mesmerized by Satan's works, they will also come to worship him instead of God. That is the primary reason that we cannot fully trust that visions of angels are God-sent. We must keep in mind that demons are also angels, and Satan's angels, like he, can and do appear as an "angel of light" (2Co.11:14). Satan does not dress in red, nor does he wear black in advertisement of his evil intent. As an angelic being, he would appear to us much as any other angel would appear and most likely be even more dazzling. Satan's angels also possess that same spectacular appearance by nature of their creation. It is no wonder then that his false messengers are often received as angels of Truth by the unsuspecting who are not aware of Satan's angelic nature.

Are Angels Visiting Men Today?

If angels are truly all about us, is it at all possible that at least some of those angels can be seen? Today, there is a great amount of interest in stories about angels directly intervening in the affairs of men. Many claim to have seen or even to have been visited by angels. There is a tendency, even by Bible-based Christians, to accept fanciful stories about various contemporary sightings of angels as fact without any tangible proof. Mankind is always looking for visible evidence to substantiate their faith not realizing that faith itself is the evidence of things unseen and that to constantly seek substance in this world to bolster hope is to deny the efficacy of faith (He.11:1). Those fanciful stories tickle the interest of many today because of a growing mental speculation about the supernatural world, but to explore that interest can prove to be very dangerous since it is foreign to mortal men while it is Satan's natural domain.

The appearances of angel messengers were abundant in Old Testament times. The four hundred years between the testaments were silent on their part, but their ministry began anew at the birth of Christ as a host of angels announced Jesus' birth. During Jesus' formative years, angels protected Him (Ps.91:12), and during the ministry of

Christ, the attention of the angels was focused upon Jesus as He imparted the message of the Kingdom. Angels ministered to Jesus after his testing by Satan in the wilderness (Mt.4:11) and again in the garden of Gethsemane just before his crucifixion (Lu.22:43). Angels then announced Jesus' resurrection to his disciples (Mt.28:5,6; Mk.16:5,6). After Pentecost however, when the New Testament Church was established, there was a notable reduction in the frequency of visible angelic visits. The apostles and the disciples were broadcasting the message of God's grace, and angels were still at work to be sure, but in a supportive roll to protect and aid the Spirit-filled men who were now designated as the messengers.

Therefore, if one should be visited by an angel today, we must seriously question why the angel became visible and from whom he was sent. Does God assign a personal angel being to look out for us and protect us behind the scenes from physical harm? Many still think that He does. Nevertheless, what we must clearly recall is that Adam's first angelic guardian lied to him and betrayed him, and all of the angels who were to be the guardian spirits for Adam's race are now Satan's legions that we commonly refer to as demons.[76] While we cannot completely discount God sending an angel-messenger to Christians today, it would be unusual indeed.

Satan, however, is regularly sending his angel-messengers to unbelievers and even to the unwary among us. They appear as an "angel of light" just as if they have a message from God. Most of the messages are cryptic ones that can be interpreted various ways or trivial ones that impart no new truth or revelation. Perhaps their only intent is to get a man or woman accustomed to seeing those spirit visitors with the primary objective of getting their minds off Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and God's Word by turning them on to supernatural visitors.

The messages that fallen angels impart are not always just cryptic or trivial but are often out and out lies behind which is great evil intent. Satan is the father of lies, and his demons are very willing

[76] This topic is discussed in Book I of this work.

to disseminate them for him. Fully trusting in such angel messages has often resulted in personal disasters including suicide and murder.

Occasionally a wider deception is planned as the individual is made to believe that they have received a special revelation from God. Coupled with the personal pride and charismatic personality of the human individual in which the lie has been planted, angel visitation can foster a new cult leader. Just to site one example, it was through an alleged appearance of an angel named "Moroni" to Joseph Smith that the Mormon religion was fabricated. Satan's purpose in creating and perpetuating cults is to corrupt sound Christian doctrine and to undermine the effectiveness of the Gospel message — preventing many from coming to the knowledge of the Truth and throwing a road block in the way of their salvation.

In the oft recited verse in Hebrews 13, verse 2, we read "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." This verse often comes up when discussing the possibility of contemporary angelic visitations. However, the epistle to the Hebrews was written during the transition period of the early days of the Church after the resurrection of Christ and before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70. During that period of a single generation, angels still infrequently continued to appear to men. If a visitor should have turned out to be an angelic being that did not announce their nature, they that entertained them may not have known that they were not mortal men as they themselves.

Unfortunately, most readers, biased with traditional ideas about angelic beings, are not able to envision anything but a spirit-being when the word "angel" is read in Scripture text though the correct definition of the word "angel" derived from both the Greek word *angelos* and the Hebrew word *malak* is simply "messenger." That must be clearly understood if we are to get the true sense of various verses of Scripture text. Today, God sends ordinary men and women to us at times to impart a message that we need to hear, and most often, those men and women are not even aware that they are being sent for that purpose. We see that by entertaining strangers, we may indeed be entertaining a messenger from God unaware.

The proper application of this verse is that we should not be so involved with our own group of close friends and relatives that we forget to entertain strangers who may turn out to be God-sent to impart some bit of wisdom for our benefit. Those of our own circle are often caught within the same paradigm as are we and can only reinforce our own notions. That traps us into a way of thinking that blocks various aspects of the Truth that a believer outside our circle may easily recognize.

Worship God Alone

Since Angels are but fellow created beings and servants with us in the service of the Lord, they are not ever to be worshiped as any form of deity. To do so would give way to Satan's evil desire to steal the worship of men away from God and garner it for himself. The Apostle Paul had this to say regarding those who taught various forms of mysticism and Gnosticism in his day, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and ***worshipping of angels***, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col.2:18 emphasis added). There can be little doubt that Paul was referring to satanically motivated worship of angels here. To accept the doctrine of angels would make one guilty of committing the same error, as did the Gnostic in Paul's day (Ga.1:8).

When an angel revealed the mystery of the apostate church to the Apostle John (Re.17:1), he wrote, "And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God…" (Re.19:10). At still another place John was again so overcome with emotion that he sought to worship an angel, "And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Re.22:8,9). God alone is worthy of our worship and praise (Ex.20:3–5).

Section 15, Foundational Christian Traditions

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Baptism

The Tradition of Ritual Baptism

Today's Practice of Baptism

The Memorial to Christ

Abuses of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper Today

Chapter 15.1 Baptism

In the previous section, we discussed various delusive traditions that have unfortunately made their way into the lives of individual Christians and even into the teachings of the temporal church. In this section, we shall discuss at length the two foundational church traditions of ritual baptism and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which have been handed down from the very earliest days of the church. Though there is a solid Scriptural basis for both of those traditions, over a span of time both have been greatly mystified and elevated far beyond their intended beneficial purpose. At times, they have been formalized and legalized until they have overwhelmed and supplanted the wondrous grace of God in Christ that they were intended to affirm — as was discussed in chapter 13.2 of this book. Inasmuch as the effect of the intended purpose upon the viability and veracity of the Christian faith are quite different for each ritual and because their historic origins are quite dissimilar, we shall discuss them separately beginning first with baptism.

The next three chapters, wherein we engage in an exposition of baptism from Scripture, will be most difficult for many believers to accept because of deep-set notions that were carried over to them through tradition from the Roman church that remains in Protestantism. The false dogmas surrounding baptism was not completely expunged by the reformers during the Reformation Movement perhaps because of the necessary concentration of their efforts in restoring grace to its proper place over works. However, false notions about baptism can easily lead to a doctrine of "works baptism" that obviates grace, as we shall reveal. Ritual baptism, some may be surprised to learn, is not even a major Christian doctrine.[77] It is tradition that is not in any way on a par with the study of the Godhead, the person of Christ, or the study of redemption that is contained in the Gospel.

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[77] All major doctrines were discussed in Book I of this work leaving practice and lesser doctrines to be discussed in this book.

Not unlike during the Roman church era, Christian life for many today begins with a ceremonial immersion in water and all too often ends as it began without any knowledge of ritual baptism's underlying tradition. Many actually consider this ritual to be an end in itself as if an application of water to their bodies somehow makes them a Christian. In ignorance, they see their salvation resting solely upon a mysterious ritual of which they have no real understanding whatsoever. For that reason, it seems unnecessary for them to study the Bible in order to discover the great doctrines of Scripture and to learn more about God for themselves. After all, they have been initiated through baptism into a church and they are paying a preacher to do all of that for them. It is their minister's job to take care of their relationship with God on a corporate level relieving them of any responsibility on their part. When the rest of their church goes into Heaven, so will they, carried away within the crowd. Embracing a ritualistic symbol without any knowledge of the underlying reality it represents is more than worthless; it is spiritually dangerous to the soul.

We must begin our Scriptural exposition with a word-study to discover the precise meaning of "baptism," a word whose broader meaning is totally alien to most Christians today. It has generally been displaced in church circles by a much narrower meaning revolving around a mere ritual, which, as shall be demonstrated, has even resulted in the misinterpretation of various passages of Scripture to enforce that narrow meaning. In this study, we must let Scripture fully speak for itself in the context in which it was given without applying any external traditional preconceptions to it.

Origin of the Word Baptism

The lack of understanding of the Greek word *baptizo* is at the core of the difficulty in understanding the word "baptize" or *baptisma* for "baptism." The root word of *baptizo* is *bapto* (or *baptein*), which literally means, "to dip." The use of the root word *bapto* will be considered more fully in Chapter 15.3 Today's Practice of Baptism, page 414, where we discuss the various modes of ritual baptism leaving us to consider *baptizo* and *baptisma* in this chapter.

As the earliest English versions of the Bible were being translated, it was not possible to merely replace *baptizo* or *baptisma* with an existing English word since there was no English word that fully expressed the meaning found in the Greek. Therefore, the Greek words were never actually translated at all since their meaning in their contextual setting was far too complex and controversial for that and would have required unwarranted interpretation. The words that we find substituted for the Greek words in our English Bibles is what we call transliterated words. That is, the Greek word *baptizo* was anglicized or "reshaped" into the word "baptize," and *baptisma* into "baptism." The words "baptize" and "baptism" did not previously exist as English words, and have no meaning apart from that imposed upon them when the translators first coined them as transliterations of the Greek words. Therefore, baptism and baptize carries essentially the same meaning as the Greek without any translation or interpretation in between.

We encounter similar problems in translating to and from many of our contemporary languages. Many thoughts and ideas that can be expressed exactly by a single word in one language cannot be expressed fully in another language, because the exact essence of its meaning is too complex to be expressed in any single word. The solution to that problem is to merely use the foreign word or phrase as it is, or to transliterate the foreign word into a word that better suits the English tongue. Any attempt to replace the word with another word that is not sufficiently precise in meaning would result in going from simple translation to interpretation that could distort the original text.

All translation, at times, requires a small amount of interpretation to facilitate a readable text, but when the context is not perfectly clear to the translator, interpretation would become subject to personal bias and even provide a license to render a slanted translation. A translator's job is to avoid interpreting the text in such a way that it adversely affects its initial intent and meaning, thus leaving the interpretation to the reader. However, if the reader of the translation in turn does not understand that, he may merely seek to simplify the anglicized word everywhere it is found into a single narrow meaning that does not actually fit the context of the text at all. That is exactly

what has happened with the Greek word *baptizo* and the resulting anglicized word "baptize."

Meanings behind the Word "Baptism"

Let us see if we can discover, as far as possible, the complex meanings of the Greek word *baptizo* in its various forms. We will need to build a meaning from many English words since, as we already know, a single word will not do. Let us begin with a common contemporary English dictionary definition of the word "baptism." One such dictionary defines baptism as "a ceremonial immersion in water, or application of water, as an initiation rite or sacrament of the Christian Church" (*The Random House College Dictionary*). This is a common definition, and something similar will be found in most any English dictionary. Unfortunately, that only tells us how the word "baptism" is commonly used today in a narrow ecclesiastical sense and it therefore sheds no light at all on how the Greek word *baptizo* was previously used when the Scripture texts were written.

However, a second usage, even today, is seen in a broader definition that is more metaphoric in its meaning. That is, "baptism" may be defined as ***any*** ceremony of initiation, a testing of ones abilities, or an immersion in a subject, topic, or fluid ***other than water***. We are actually "baptized" into any organization religious or secular when we fully identify ourselves with their activities and goals. We become "baptized" in a hobby or occupation when we are fully engrossed in it to the exclusion of all else.

We are also said to be baptized when we are forced to use our skills and abilities in an overwhelming way such as in an emergency or time of adversity. In this latter connection, we often encounter the phrase "baptism by fire." First, we must see that the substance in which baptism takes place is not water. Secondly, the baptizing substance that ***is*** mentioned is not literal, but symbolic. That is, we must agree that the phrase "baptism by fire" does not usually mean immersion in ***literal*** fire. "Fire" as it is used in this context is emblematic of extreme difficulty or trial. Therefore, the transliterated word "baptism" can even take on various meanings in common English depending upon the context in which it is used.

If we consult a Greek lexicon (i.e. Greek dictionary), we gain a better understanding of the underlying definition of the word "baptism" as it was employed in Scripture. The word *baptizo* literally means to make "fully whelmed," and the word "whelmed" means to submerge or to engulf, and "fully whelmed" means to "overwhelm." The English word "overwhelm" means to overpower or "to overcome completely in mind or feeling" (*The Random House College Dictionary*). The word "engulf" means "to swallow up as in a gulf" or to immerse completely. Here we are beginning to see the original meaning showing through ordinary contemporary usage, the complexity of which made it impossible for the early Bible scholars to translate it.

Nevertheless, one could suggest that the Greek word should have been translated by entire phrases if not by a single word when the immediate context was not in doubt. That did not happen for the same reason that many will not attempt to do so today. The context cannot always be agreed upon due to denominational haggling and would further introduce controversy regarding the entire translation. Moreover, any effort to attempt a more direct translation would require throwing aside the "thick glasses" of a long-standing tradition that has filtered the meaning through a ritual for many centuries. Many are unwilling or, perhaps, even unable to do that.

Baptism as Used in the Old Testament

The word "baptism" is found in the Old Testament signifying washing or cleansing in the Mosaic Law of purification as seen in connection with things of the Temple. From that we must conclude that ritual baptism is certainly not a unique Christian tradition. The Greek word *baptizo* is actually found in the Greek Septuagint, an Old Testament text in common use in Jesus' day that was translated from the Hebrew.

Jews traditionally baptized proselytes, who were Gentiles that had converted to Judaism. Therefore, we can see why the Jews were not taken aback by the act of water baptism that John the Baptist administered since there was nothing uncommon about the ritual of water baptism in and of itself. The Jews had fully accepted the

ceremonial "cleansing" act of baptizing in water as a part of their custom long before John came upon the scene. Not only was baptism a common tradition, it had even degenerated into a matter of superstition. This can be seen in connection with the pool at Bethesda. Bathing in the water of this pool was thought to have supernatural healing properties (Jn.5:2–4)![78]

The purpose for which John the Baptist baptized in water was to cleanse the Jews outwardly as a symbolic act of cleansing denoting their inner repentance. As has been said before, the act of water baptism itself could not and did not bring forth repentance, for we read that John admonished the Pharisees and Sadducees for coming to be baptized without hearts and minds already in a state of repentance (Mt.3:7,8). There is no recorded question in Scripture regarding the practice of baptism by John, but only regarding John's identity, and the reason for his coming to baptize ***Jews*** (John 1:19–28). Since in their minds only newly converted Gentiles needed to be so baptized, it was humbling indeed for Jews to express repentance of their sins and submit themselves to this ritual.

Common Greek Uses of the Word Baptizo

Additional insight into how the word *baptizo* was used in New Testament times can be gained by looking at the more common utilization of the Greek word *baptizo* in ordinary day-to-day communication. That can be done by examining various secular texts. In many parts of the Greek world, the dyeing of cloth was a large industry of the people. One interesting Greek text refers to the dyeing of cloth as "baptizing" the cloth. That gives us some insight into the Scriptural usage in as much as the dye ***changes*** the cloth and ***permeates*** it or completely ***diffuses*** through it and ***saturates*** it. In

[78]The passage beginning in verse 4 of Chapter 5 of John is not found in the better manuscripts. It is possible that this is merely a marginal note made by a scribe that eventually became part of some texts. Nonetheless, this note may very well be based upon some knowledge of the superstition of that day about an "angel" that stirred up the waters in the pool. Ironically, this "lottery" allowed only the most able-bodied to enter the water first.

effect, the dye has become one with the cloth through "baptism." In this example of the usage of the word "baptism," we see the full unification of that which is baptized with the baptizing substance. The substance that is dyed takes on the full color, character, and identity of the baptizing fluid such that the dye actually becomes part of the cloth. In like manner, when we become baptized in the Holy Spirit, He permeates us and becomes fully one with us as we in turn begin to reflect the character of Christ with whom we are then fully identified.

Water Not Implied by Baptism

"Water" is not automatically implied by the word "baptize" and certainly not by the Greek word *baptizo* that it represents. The key to the meaning of the word "baptism" is to be found in the immediate ***context*** in which it is used in ***individual*** Scripture passages. Many read the word "water" into the word "baptism" in the New Testament text everywhere it is seen without any valid reason for doing so except that it would seem that deeply imbedded ***tradition*** requires it. Yes, baptism ***can*** mean submersion in water (made fully wet), but it can also mean a submersion and complete overwhelming by something, or ***someone*** other than water.

It is impossible to come up with a single meaning that will universally satisfy its use everywhere in Scripture since it is used in such a diverse manner. However, a significant key to the use of the word in the Christian sense can be found in the Gospel given by Matthew. Here John the Baptist said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he [Jesus] that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:" (Mt.3:11). We can plainly see that John baptized with ***water***, but that Jesus would baptize with the ***Holy Spirit*** and with fire. The comparison is very plain: Jesus will immerse, overwhelm, overcome, and completely submerge us in the Holy Spirit in a way that is similar to that in which John immersed his followers in water.

In no way can we construe from this verse that Jesus will baptize anyone with water or, for that matter, that He commands that anyone receive ritual water baptism in his name! In fact, John has

deliberately set up a contrast between his baptism with water as a symbol of repentance and Jesus' overwhelming of the sin-sick soul with the Holy Spirit. *Baptizo* is used here in such a way that water is not only ***not*** implied, but is ***eliminated*** by the contrast. Jesus will and does ***baptize*** believers in the ***Holy Spirit***, not in water. Therefore, we must readily admit that the word "baptize" as it is used here in connection with the redeeming work of Christ, does not have anything to do with water.

Incidentally, the word "fire" as it is used in this verse is a metaphor that represents the purifying presence of the Word of God in a similar manner to the way that the Word of God came to Moses from out of the burning bush (Ex.3:2). In and following his first advent Jesus baptizes men in the Holy Spirit for the salvation of their souls. When Jesus returns to earth again, He will judge the wicked that have rejected his salvation. Those that are not baptized in the Holy Spirit will ultimately be baptized in the fire of God's wrath in the Day of Judgment thus purifying his Kingdom of evil.

Ritual Baptism Seen as a Sign of Identification

Even as John's baptism pointed to Christ as the savior, so ritual water baptism today is only a sign pointing to the real baptism whereby Jesus has immersed us in the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us, we are at that very moment baptized in the Spirit of Christ — in an instant, we are overwhelmed and submerged in his Spirit. We are saturated and made one with the Holy Spirit and thus with Christ as we are fully ***identified*** with Him through a Spiritual infusion. Our minds become immersed in the Word of God as the Holy Spirit begins his work in us. We are inwardly convicted of our sinful nature, and then we are washed of our sins by the blood of Christ and mentally regenerated by the washing of his Word (Ep.5:26). We turn and follow Jesus with a new spiritual nature that has been imparted to us through this baptism. We become permanently identified with Christ for all time and eternity.

Moreover, God sees us in Christ — identified fully with Him in such a way that we are inseparable from Him in his death for sin and in his resurrection for our justification. The baptism into Jesus

enables us to say with conviction, "I am his and He is mine." Ritual baptism is only symbolic of that identification that has taken place when the Holy Spirit overwhelmed us and revealed the Truth of Christ to us.

Water Symbolic of the Holy Spirit

We must now see the relationship between water and the Holy Spirit as it is expressed in Scripture. God has said that in the latter days he would ***pour*** out his Spirit upon men (cf. Ac.2:17; Jl.2:28). The Holy Spirit is characterized here as a fluid. We must realize how precious water was in Palestine in the days of Christ and still is for that matter. Rivers were small and drinking water was stored in cisterns and sold in the streets. One could not merely turn on the tap and take a daily shower or bath. For that reason, clean water was precious — so much so that it was used as a symbol for the cleansing of the soul from sin.

Another important parallel also exists between water and the Holy Spirit — both are life-giving substances. Without water, our flesh would soon die, and without the Holy Spirit, our soul remains dead in our trespasses and sin. Water does for the flesh what only the Holy Spirit can do for the soul. In the book of Revelation, we read that the Spirit of God flows from God's throne like a river (Re.22:1). The Holy Spirit is truly "the water of life" that Jesus gives us to drink.

> **But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.** (Jn.4:14)

Nevertheless, the close parallel between the carnal and the spiritual also increases the confusion regarding ritual baptism, though the parallel is both appropriate and revealing of the truth. Many erroneously see in the Gospel according to John a definite reference to the necessity of ritual baptism in water for salvation when Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (Jn.3:5). Taken out of the context of Jesus' discussion with Nicodemus, this verse could be construed to mean that we must submit to ritual baptism in water followed by baptism in the Holy Spirit in order to enter Heaven.

However, we must not interpret verse 5 in isolation without also reading verse 6 in which Jesus said, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn.3:6). A physical birth of human parents, or even a symbolic rebirth through ritual baptism, is obviously not what Jesus was referring to here as being necessary to enter into God's kingdom. We could too easily confuse the carnal with the spiritual, but, again, we observe that "water" is only being used as a physical representation of the Holy Spirit who alone gives us spiritual life.

The connecting word "and" that is used in John 3:5 comes from the Greek word *kai*, which can be utilized as being both copulative and cumulative. That is, the word "water" and the word "Spirit" can actually be seen as being united by the word "and" so that one actually identifies or amplifies the other. The word *kai* could have been translated as "even" without seriously altering the meaning of the text. That is, "water even of the spirit." Jesus is actually talking of only one birth at this point (and one baptism), not two — the new birth brought about by our baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In John 3:8, Jesus compares the Holy Spirit with the wind, because like the wind we can not predict the Holy Spirit's movements — though we can observe his effects. Should we then be baptized in the wind instead of or in addition to water?[79] How far must we be willing to go with mere symbolism? Our minds are so often dulled to spiritual things, that we grasp the physical symbols as if they were spiritual reality instead of seeing them as an aid to our understanding in order that we may move beyond them. Nicodemus' spiritual dullness was clearly expressed by Jesus when He said, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things" (Jn.3:12)?

It is very important that we do not attach a cause and effect relationship to ritual baptism and the regenerative baptism of the Holy Spirit. Some have incorrectly assumed that Spiritual regeneration

[79] This could in part have been the reasoning of a Christian sect known as the Dunkards who practiced baptism by immersion only in a moving stream.

automatically comes about from ritualistic baptism, but as we have already shown, regenerative baptism in the Holy Spirit takes place solely by the grace of God and not by any works of men. Therefore, baptism in water does not result in Spiritual regeneration any more than Spiritual regeneration automatically results in ritual baptism. They are in fact two separate events in which the ritual is symbolically subordinate to Spiritual regeneration.

Conclusions

Therefore, we must conclude that the tradition of ritual baptism in water is only symbolic or a tangible representation of Spiritual baptism that takes place in an instant as our soul becomes identified with Jesus Christ. Water applied to the body can in no way penetrate to the soul, which is filthy with sin. The ritual of water baptism is not an end in itself, but can only be seen as a signpost in the desert of sin pointing to that oasis which is the Spirit of Christ. Jesus spoke of having "living water" which He had to give to the woman of Samaria (Jn.4:10). Like so many today, the woman at the well thought He spoke of nothing more than water, when He truly spoke metaphorically of the Holy Spirit. Let us drink deeply of that Spirit as thirsty men. Jesus said, "whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Jn.4:14). What is that living water, but the Holy Spirit Himself in whom Jesus Christ baptizes us and joins us to Himself?

Chapter 15.2 The Tradition of Ritual Baptism

Baptism in water as a ritual predates Christianity and even predates Judaism being found in early pagan cleansing rituals.[80] Therefore, baptism is actually a long-standing tradition that we find was first adopted by Judaism and then later on by Christianity as the human tradition continued forward. Moreover, we cannot say that ritual baptism was instituted by Christ. Jesus never baptized anyone ritually in water (Mt.3:11; Mk.1:8; Lu.3:16), nor, as will become evident as we proceed in this section, can we find any declarative statement made by Him that would mandate it or for that matter even explicitly approve of it.

We find only that his disciples practiced the tradition of ritual baptism as new followers identified themselves with their group and that Jesus never made any statement that would prohibit that practice. Baptism was a practice so commonplace in that day that it was not even a matter at issue. Therefore, we find that ritual baptism is but a long-standing human tradition that over many centuries has become thoroughly adopted by Christians and is deeply entrenched in the institutional temporal church.

A study of baptism would not be complete if we did not discuss the tradition of baptism in water as it was practiced by the followers of Christ as seen in the New Testament (Jn.4:1,2). There are instances where the word "baptism" in Scripture ***does*** refer to ritual baptism in water as a physical act that ***symbolizes*** immersion in the Holy Spirit as administered by Christ in the new birth. Since Spiritual identification with Christ occurs inwardly and is therefore invisible, it would seem appropriate by many that we testify of our conversion by some outward visible act. Ritual baptism can aid us by providing a personal tangible assurance of our salvation, and it further acts as a

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[80] As one example, the Ganges River in India is worshiped as a godess known as *Ganga Ma* or Mother Ganges. Hindus still immerse themselves in the river as a purification rite to absolve them from sin. Ashes of the dead are also scattered in the same river to attain assurance of heaven for their loved ones.

witness to others by affirming Spiritual regeneration with a tangible evidential token.

Incidences of Christian Baptism in Scripture

The Word of God attests to that practice in several places that we shall now examine. However, we find that many of the texts that are often used to prove the prominence of ritual baptism in Scripture do not specifically indicate that water was involved at all. For that reason, we must carefully read and analyze each case without undue bias toward or against ritual baptism.

The Day of Pentecost

Let us begin by reexamining the text concerning the event on Pentecost when Peter preached to the Jews of all nations on earth (Ac.2:5–40). Peter had just told those Jews that Jesus was "both Lord and Christ" (Ac.2:36). When they realized that they had just demanded the crucifixion of their Messiah, they were overcome with grief. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do" (Ac.2:37)? To which Peter replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Ac.2:38).

We must be careful to interpret the word *baptizo* by determining how it is being used in the context of this passage. As we discussed before when we spoke of John's baptism, one cannot bring forth repentance by a mere washing of water. It would be even more incredible to think that engaging in a ritual of baptism in water could bring about "the remission of sins!" Going back to the Greek, the verse is more literally translated as follows: "Repent ye, and let each of you be baptized on the name of Jesus Christ with a view to forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (see *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, Alfred Marshall).

Through careful interpretation, we see that Peter is telling those Jews to turn (i.e. repent) from their state of despair and turn toward Christ; be immersed and identified in, on, and with Jesus (taking upon themselves his name), acknowledging Him as the

Messiah, and looking to Him for the forgiveness of their sins. In so doing, they would receive, without condition, the Holy Spirit (the Comforter) freely as a gift. Peter then told them that the promise of the Holy Spirit was not being made to them only, but to all of their descendants, and as many others as the "…Lord our God shall call" (Ac.2:39). Peter continued to testify of Jesus and exhorted many to believe in order that they would be saved out of that "crooked generation" which had crucified the Messiah (Ac.2:40).

Then, we are told, "they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Ac.2:41). We must understand that as many as believed on the Lord Jesus were immediately baptized in the Holy Spirit when they received Him as a gift to remain within them — for that is exactly what Peter had promised them (Ac.2:38). This passage does not categorically state that the three-thousand were not ritually baptized in water, nor does it explicitly state that they were since the word "water" is nowhere in evidence in this verse. Some have pointed out the great difficulty of baptizing three-thousand people in one day (Ac.2:41), while still others have conceived of ways in which that could have been done. Since water is not even implied in this passage, why should we contend with each other about ritual baptism at all? Rather, we should rejoice that three-thousand souls became regenerated and of one mind in Christ through immersion in the Holy Spirit in whom they then shared common fellowship (Ac.2:44–47).

The Ethiopian Eunuch

One noteworthy instance of ritual baptism took place when Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch. We read that the Ethiopian eunuch had already received the Holy Spirit ***before*** he requested baptism in water (Ac.8:36–39). It is obvious therefore that his regeneration did not come about through the ritual of baptism. The eunuch not only believed the Gospel was true, he ***knew*** with absolute certainty it was true since the Witness to that fact was already indwelling him. Philip then proceeded to baptize the eunuch in water as a tangible token of that momentous event (Ac.8:38).

It is quite evident from the context that the eunuch was baptized in ***water*** by three specific references to "water"

(Ac.8:36,38,39). The ritual of water baptism was administered so that the eunuch could place his flesh in subjection to his spirit, and affix in his flesh the symbol of that which had already taken place by his immersion in the Holy Spirit. It indeed would be absurd to assume that the eunuch "…went on his way rejoicing" because of a mere washing in water (Ac.8:39). Rather, his joy was evident because of his baptism in the Holy Spirit who now lived within him — of which the ritual of baptism was merely a tangible token in his flesh.

Family of Cornelius

We see that Cornelius and his household first received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ac.10:44); ***after*** which, they were baptized in water. We find direct proof of that fact when Peter said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we" (Ac.10:47)? Again, we find in this verse that the Holy Spirit was given ***before*** ritual baptism had taken place. That the ritual of baptism in water was in those days closely ***associated*** with the baptism of the Holy Spirit cannot be ignored, but we must understand that it was but a voluntary physical ***response*** to an inward Spiritual infusion of the Holy Spirit.

Lydia's Household

In Acts 16:15, we read that Lydia and others of her household were baptized. Water may be obliquely inferred here in as much as they were meeting next to a river in verse 16:13. However, we read that Lydia's "heart had been opened" by the Lord so that we can certainly perceive that she and others of her household were already baptized in the Holy Spirit and therefore already identified with Christ. That a subordinate act of ritual baptism could also have taken place here is possible, perhaps even likely, though much less than certain by the mere mention of a river nearby.

Baptism of the Samaritans

In Acts Chapter 8 verse 12, we read that people in Samaria were also baptized as the Gospel expanded out beyond Judaea. If we assume that Philip had ritually baptized the Samaritans in water, we

must conclude that their witness was false or was made in ignorance since they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, which the ritual properly signifies (Ac.8:16). In light of the customary usage of the word "baptism" in that day and by considering the total context of this passage, we can justifiably assume that the Samaritans had been immersed or submerged in the Gospel message that was preached to them by Philip. If so, their "belief" was actually intellectual assent based largely upon their observation of the many miracles that Philip had performed rather than any heartfelt trust in God for their personal salvation (Ac.8:6–8). Their belief in Christ was tentative or nominal much as the belief many church members profess today who may have been ritually baptized in many of our churches, but are not truly converted.

The Samaritans' lack of true faith is even more apparent when we consider the case of Simon the sorcerer. Even Simon had believed Philip, and he was "baptized." Then he followed Philip around to observe his methods (Ac.8:13). It is quite apparent that Simon was not converted since we read later that Simon's main interest was only in the miracles and signs that Philip performed. Later, when Peter and John came, Simon wanted to buy what he saw as a magical technique that would enable him to impart the Holy Spirit to whomsoever he wished by the laying on of his hands (Ac.8:18–19).

The Samaritans who had earlier viewed Simon as "the great power of God" because of the many supposed "miracles" that he had performed were, no doubt, looking upon Philip's activities in much the same way (Ac.8:9,10). Perhaps that is why Peter and John had to come later to present the Gospel message again with prayer for their conversion. There is no mention of Peter or John performing any miracles or signs, as did Philip. We read that the apostles had heard that the Samaritans "had received the Word of God" (Ac.8:14). It is also said that they had "…believed ***Philip*** preaching the things ***concerning*** the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ…" (Ac.8:12). They were therefore knowledgeable about Jesus and what He had done, but they had not yet accepted Him as their own savior. Only when they received the Holy Spirit were they truly regenerated and became genuine believers.

Therefore, we may conclude that hearing (or baptism in) the Word of God can only bring forth intellectual assent ***leading*** one toward the moment of faith, while baptism in the Holy Spirit alone brings forth true spiritual rebirth and regeneration (Jn.4:24). Ritual baptism is at best only a testimony to that fact. Again, we cannot dogmatically contend that the Samaritans did not receive ritual water baptism from Philip or even afterward when Peter and John arrived, but merely point out that those verses do not specifically state that to be the case since water is never stated or even strongly implied.

We have just uncovered three ways in which the word "baptism" is utilized in New Testament Scriptural text with regard to the Christian faith. First, we found that baptism in the Word or Gospel can bring us to the brink of the moment of faith through intellectual assent (Ro.10:17). Secondly, we find the all-important baptism of the Holy Spirit through which comes the moment of regeneration, faith, and assurance as He makes the Truth real to us. Finally, we find ritual baptism in water that provides an outward visible seal to satisfy the need of our human frailty through a form of tangible evidence.

The Great Commission

One place, in particular, that many say Scripture not only indicates but also commands ritual baptism by Jesus Himself is in a verse found in the text generally known as the "Great Commission." This verse is found first in the Gospel according to Matthew that reads, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:" (Mt.28:19). Again, however, we can find no textual reason to assume that the word "baptizing" here refers to an application of water to the human body since water is never directly mentioned or even implied in any way. It should be obvious that the baptism is not to be in water, but rather in a "name" which is the object of the preposition "in."

What this verse really says in its proper context is that the disciples must go forth and teach all ***nations***, immersing, overwhelming, submerging, and engulfing them in the ***name of Jesus***. The term "nations" here implies the Gentile nations outside of Israel. Therefore, this commission goes beyond the necessity of witnessing to

individuals, but states that it must be extended to entire nations. By so doing, entire nations would be converted into God's kingdom.

This commission was given directly only to the eleven apostles as is apparent by its reading. By principle, however, we can also ***apply*** this commission to all believers of every age. We are to baptize all ***nations*** with the amazing revelation that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent to earth to die for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised again the third day from the grave through the Holy Spirit that we may be fully justified before God the Father in Him (1Co.15:3,4).

Text not to be used as a Mantra

We fail in the commission if we merely go about baptizing men outwardly with water in some mysterious ceremony by reciting "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." If we merely consider this expression of the Godhead as words to be recited in ritual baptism, the argument could easily begin over the exact phrase to be recited. That is, should we be baptized "in Jesus name" as is stated in Acts 2:38 or "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" as is stated in the Great Commission? To argue over this is, of course, to misunderstand the proper use of the word "baptism" altogether since both of those verses refer to a true Spiritual identification with Christ, not a ritual. The words were never intended to be used as a "mantra" during a ritual immersion in water.

Ritual Baptism Does Not Bestow Salvation

Let us now examine the companion verses in the other Gospels. First, we read in the Gospel according to Mark, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk.16:15,16).[81] The question to be answered first is, baptized in what — in water? Hardly, because we already know that an application of water has nothing to do with

[81] Again, we must remember that verses 9 through 20 of Mark 16 do not appear at all in the better Greek manuscripts.

attaining salvation, as that interpretation of the text would assert. Rather, this verse expresses the necessity for baptism in the Holy Spirit to attain absolute assurance through faith, and the inadequacy of mere intellectual assent.

The word "baptized" is actually used in this verse to amplify the word "believeth" to the level of personal certainty. Intellectual assent alone cannot bring forth faith, firm belief, or trust; nor does it bring forth a changed life with reliance placed solely on God's promise. Therefore, only those who are baptized in the Spirit of Christ shall fully believe and be saved, while all others shall remain under condemnation for their sins.

Even ***if*** we could somehow determine that "baptized" in this verse refers to ritual baptism, it could only be seen in the sense of accompanying saving faith since the second part of the verse does not state that we shall be damned if we are not baptized ritually, but only if we do not believe (Jn.3:16). Water is ***not*** stated nor is it implied by the context of this verse. Ritual baptism could only be understood through the reader's own interpretation if he already had such a bent because of long standing tradition or other extra-biblical bias.

Jesus the Only Source of Salvation

Finally, in the Gospel according to Luke, we read, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in ***his name*** among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lu.24:47, emphasis added). Jesus alone is the source of salvation and the remission of sins. Only in Him can we hope to repent and have Him turn our lives around to serve the purposes of God. The significant preeminent thought in all of those passages is that we are to ***preach the Gospel*** to all nations and to the ends of the earth that all may know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to atone for our sins!

However we may personally feel about the ritual of water baptism, we must not miss that important point. We could baptize men and women in water until the rivers, lakes, and oceans run dry and still see no one saved if they are not first regenerated through spiritual immersion in the Holy Spirit.

Construing "water" in connection with the word "baptism" everywhere it is found, results in many erroneous interpretations that can be very destructive to the understanding of Truth. The Gospel of grace itself can be masked by placing a strong and erroneous emphasis on the act of ritual baptism since if salvation comes even in part from a totally voluntary act of ritual baptism by man, then we must admit that salvation is at least in part earned by mans' works. If that were the case, we should be led to wonder why man did not merely satisfy God's dictates all along by obediently conforming to the Law of Moses. The fact is, man was ***unable*** to do so, and he is ***still*** unable. The death of Christ was not merely a "shock treatment" to wake us up to the necessity of obedience, nor was it merely an example for us that we may be taught through observation how to be obedient through emulation. Let us humbly admit that salvation is all the work of God, and that we are saved solely by his grace plus ***nothing else***, not even the ritual of baptism.

Water Baptism as a Subordinate Ritual

Therefore, we can see that the Scriptures indicate that the traditional act of water baptism is allied with yet always subordinate to Spiritual baptism. Nevertheless, when a person receives baptism in the Holy Spirit will it then become invalid just because ritual baptism in water does not follow it? There is no way that this is possible since the Holy Spirit was given of God ***freely*** long before that individual could have had any power to save himself by the addition of a ritual. Could one suggest then that a man must guarantee or seal salvation for himself through the works of a ritual ***after*** God has already saved him by sovereign grace totally apart from, even in spite of, his faulty efforts to save himself? Surely not, for that would declare grace itself invalid. We certainly realize that a saved man is never elevated to a state of self-righteousness so that his own works then become effective to save him, but instead obtains the finished righteousness of Christ by imputation through baptism in his Spirit by the grace of God alone (Ro.4:3–5).

Chapter 15.3 Today's Practice of Baptism

Having studied baptism from a Scriptural viewpoint, it now becomes necessary to look into the modern practice of baptism that takes place in various contemporary churches. In doing so, we shall discover how far tradition has drifted us away from baptism's true spiritual moorings.

The Controversy over Baptism

Unfortunately, to many the subject of water baptism is equated with the Gospel and by far too many more it is elevated ***above*** the Gospel in importance. It is indeed ironic that a simple physical act that was intended to be a universal token of our union with other believers in the body of Christ should result in such division. It is when ritual baptism is elevated in importance above the unity of the elect, or seen as a mystical ceremony that must be performed to the letter in order to achieve or complete our redemption, that such strife occurs. Baptism must finally be recognized as a mere symbol of our unity through our common personal identification with Christ and not allow it to become a means for deliberately injecting controversy and separation.

Even among those who correctly understand the expression of unity that the privilege of ritual baptism represents, there are still often open, frequently warlike, controversies regarding the physical mode of water baptism as well as the time in a person's life when ritual baptism should take place. As a consequence of trying to determine the proper time in one's life, we must also ascertain who can be legitimately baptized at all. For instance, should young children and even babies who as yet have insufficient mental capacity to grasp the true implications of the Gospel be baptized? While it may be apparent to most that the baptism of rank unbelievers would only make a travesty of ritual baptism, the question of baptizing mentally deficient adults, young children and infants is less clear. While it is necessary to rely exclusively on Scripture texts to find answers to the questions of mode and time, established tradition will most certainly seek to undermine that effort.

Modes of Ritual Baptism

There are three modes of baptism practiced by various churches today. Those are immersion, pouring, and sprinkling. Immersion, in general, is only administered to believing adults, while pouring or sprinkling (collectively referred to as "affusion") is usually associated with the baptizing of infants (pedobaptism). We can readily see the practical problem of totally immersing an infant though even that is far from impossible. For instance, Eastern-Orthodox churches practice the old Trinitarian tradition of "triple immersion" of both adults and infants. Other churches practice baptism by affusion of all believing adults as well as infants. In addition, affusion is sometimes substituted for immersion when the person to be baptized is bedridden or for some other reason is physically unable to be immersed in a body of water.

The difficulty we encounter when attempting to verify procedural matters concerning ritual baptism is that Scripture does not spell out in specific language or through consistent examples exact details for this practice. The obvious conclusion we can reach from Scripture not describing it in precise detail is that matters such as mode are just not that important. If they were, God would have spelled it out clearly and in detail in the same manner that the ceremonial laws were to the Jews in the Old Testament.

The main reason Scriptural controversies arise with regard to baptism is that most continue to incorrectly interpret the word "baptism" to always mean ritual baptism in water everywhere it is found in Scripture (as we have already seen). The consequence of that error is attempting to formulate a method of ritual baptism from verses that do not describe ritual baptism at all. To fill the void of information, many seek to contort those verses to fit their own particular concept of baptism. There is no reason to assume that God ever intended any of those particular passages to be used as an allegory for the mechanics of ritual baptism. Therefore, in this study we must only examine those verses that specifically state or clearly imply ritual

baptism in water if we wish to discover any information about the technicalities of this practice in the New Testament church.

The Immersionist Position

Two passages in particular bolster the immersionist view of the practice of baptism in the early church outside of the more common definition of the Greek word *baptizo* that literally means to immerse. For some that definition is a sufficient basis for immersion in itself.

John's Baptism

We read that John baptized Jesus in "water." John's baptism was a symbolic act of purification signifying repentance. Christian baptism symbolizes an immersion in the Holy Spirit with the resultant identification with the body of Christ. While Christian baptism is not practiced for the same purpose as that of John's baptism, there is no reason to believe that the method or mode of the ritual practice would have differed among early Christians (Jn.4:1). We must note that in the early church we first find Jewish believers baptizing non-Jews. This could have been practiced as a continuation of the purification rite that was long practiced by Jews upon Gentile proselytes to Judaism. That is likely how the rite of baptism first entered into church tradition.

We read in the Gospel according to Mark that "…Jesus was baptized of John ***in*** the Jordan" river (Mk.1:9 emphasis added). Again, we read in the Gospel of Matthew that many were "…baptized of him [John] ***in*** the Jordan" (Mt.3:6 emphasis added). From the preposition used in those verses, we can be reasonably certain that John was down ***in*** the water of the Jordan River, not standing on its banks. Baptism by affusion would not have required John to be down in the river, but only **at or *by*** the river.

We also find that Jesus was down in the water of the Jordan along with John by the verse: "And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water" (Mt.3:16; cf. Mk.1:10). Therefore, we observe that both John and Jesus were down in the water and from that could easily ***assume*** that immersion was the mode employed inasmuch as baptism by affusion ***could*** have been as easily

performed on the banks of the river. This inference does not provide us with precise evidence however.

Philip's Baptism of the Eunuch

We also find that when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch they "…went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. "And when they were come up out of the water…" (Ac.8:38,39). Again, we notice that baptism took place down ***in*** the water. The actual meaning of the Greek word used in verse 38 is "into" which implies that they were "enclosed" by the water. We also know with certainty that this is an instance of Christian baptism, not "John's baptism" from the text (Ac.8:37).

In this passage, we see that we are clearly talking about ritual water baptism and that the strongly implied mode is immersion. While immersion is highly probable from this text, it must be admitted that it is by no means impossible that both men stood waist-high or even knee-high in the water and the ritual took place by the pouring of water over the head much as ritual anointing with oil was performed in that day. Furthermore, if we take the word "into" too literally, we must conclude that Philip was immersed as well as the eunuch since both went "into" the water.

The Affusionist Position

The affusionists point out that *baptizo* does not always indicate complete immersion of the human torso. An example is seen in the Gospel according to Luke: "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner" (Luke 11:38). The word "washed" here is translated from the Greek word *baptizo*. That could literally mean that the ***hands*** were immersed in water, although it is significant to note that the washing of hands was customarily performed in that day by first pouring water over the hands into a basin.

The root word of *baptizo* is *bapto*, which means literally "to dip." (Again, no implication is made in this word as to what is being dipped in what). The hands could have been dipped into a basin as well as having water poured upon them. We still see, however, that the

hands would still be made "fully wet" or "baptized" by pouring alone. Ritual baptism by affusion (as it is practiced today) does not ordinarily make an individual "fully wet" head to toe, of course.

Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel in saying that God would "…pour out in those days of my Spirit…" (Ac.2:18). We need not relate God's pouring out of the Holy Spirit here directly with the ritual of water baptism. Peter in the New Covenant context is actually referring to the "outpouring" of the ***Gospel*** from his fellow apostles (Ac.2:15,16). However, if God pours out his Spirit as a river or a flood tide (which is what this verse suggests), wouldn't those that are ***caught up*** in it be ***immersed*** in that Spirit, or be "baptized" in it? It is not the pouring out, but the immersion in the Holy Spirit that identifies us with Christ. Therefore, pouring would only be a fully accurate picture of Holy Spirit baptism if the pouring resulted in total immersion of the believer.

Impracticality of Immersion

The affusionist also sites several examples in Scripture saying that the mode of immersion would not have been practical and therefore was quite unlikely. We have already discussed the possible difficulty of Peter baptizing three-thousand people in the middle of Jerusalem in one day. Admittedly, affusion rather than immersion would have surely sped up this procedure. However, we cannot assume that Peter's words "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ…" specifically and directly referred to ritual baptism in water at all as we discussed before (Ac.2:38,41; see Chapter 15.2 The Tradition of Ritual Baptism, page 405).

The affusionist also points out the practical problem concerning immersion of an individual in a desert land where there are no large bodies of water. Certainly, that was not the case in Jerusalem in the days of Christ with the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River near by. Considering the nomadic nature of people in those days, it would have been possible for them to at least be immersed at some point in their lifetime. However, in truly desert lands today there would be little enough water for sprinkling let alone immersion and the affusionist often makes that point.

Likewise, in extremely cold climates it is apparent that baptism by immersion would not be reasonable in a lake or river. It would require a large basin of water in a well-heated indoor area. That would seem to exclude many from ever receiving ritual baptism, which seems unreasonable to the affusionist. If God required immersion as the only mode, then He would seem to be arbitrarily excluding many by that method.

Baptism of Paul

What can we determine if anything from the baptism of the Apostle Paul? "And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized" (Ac.9:18). The affusionist would suggest that Paul was baptized with a small amount of water poured from a pitcher or bowl in the house. One must hasten to mention that it is also possible that only his eyes would have been washed (baptized) in water, which is certainly in keeping with the context of this passage of Scripture.

Could we believe there was a tub or pool in the house suitable for immersion in Damascus? Possibly so, but most probably not. Rather than dispute a mode of immersion here, we must first ask again whether ritual baptism was ever even implied by this verse. There is no need to add water to this verse to see the conversion of Paul and to convey the full meaning of this passage. In fact, we read in Ac.9:17 that Ananias had just told Paul that he would receive his sight and that he would also be filled with the Holy Spirit. In verse 18, we find that Paul indeed received his sight and he was "baptized." It is apparent and without doubt that he was immediately baptized into the body of believers when he received the Holy Spirit just as God had promised. Therefore, it would seem obvious that Spiritual baptism into the body of Christ is primarily being referred to here.

Baptism of the Philippian Jailer

In another place, we read that a Philippian jailer took Paul and Silas, after seeing their miraculous release by an earthquake from the stocks, "…the same hour of the night and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway" (Ac.16:33). Water is never

mentioned explicitly in relation to ritual baptism. It is implied only in connection with the washing of the wounds of Paul and Silas, not in the baptizing of the jailer and his family. If ritual baptism in water was meant, we may again very well wonder where a large enough body of water was found in the middle of the night immediately (i.e. straightway). That is not impossible, of course, but we first must honestly ask ourselves if ritual baptism in water is being referred to at all in this passage.

Covenantal Baptism

The Roman Catholic Church as well as many purportedly "reformed" Protestant churches see baptism as "covenantal baptism." That is, just as circumcision was the sign of the old covenant with the Jews, baptism is now seen as the "sign of the new covenant." Therefore, the Covenantalist believes that infants should be baptized in a manner corresponding to the circumcision of infant males as they were born into the Hebrew nation. The parallel breaks down at several points as we shall see, but one major break with this analogy is obvious at the outset inasmuch as infant females are to be baptized as well as infant males.

Nevertheless, the Covenantalists correctly point out that a Scriptural connection between the words "circumcision" and "baptism" was made by none other than Paul the Apostle in his epistle to the Colossians, though they miss the sense of the comparison.

> **"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead"** (Col.2:11,12).

We must understand that the word "circumcision" was used in this verse in a special sense only relating it to ritual inasmuch as we see that Paul referred to a "circumcision made without hands" or the cutting off of all the sins of the flesh from the body. While circumcision was but a shadowy sign, this was accomplished in reality

by "the circumcision [cutting off] of Christ" from the flesh in his death, not through a mere ritual of circumcision or cleansing in water.

We plainly see that ritual baptism in water is done with the hands of men the same as was physical circumcision, but baptism of the Holy Spirit is totally "the operation of God." We are identified (i.e. baptized) with Christ in his burial (buried with Him) as well as his death to the end that we are now dead to the authority of sin. Likewise, we are also fully identified with Him in his resurrection that we may have eternal life. This passage has nothing directly to do with determining any prerequisite or means for ritual baptism itself and it should not be used as a proof text for that purpose.

It would seem that the main flaw in the reasoning of the Covenantalists is to ignore one major difference between the old and new covenant. The ***old*** covenant was made exclusively with the ***nation*** of Israel. They were to be a holy nation that witnessed to a sinful world. Therefore, when a Hebrew child was born, he was automatically born into that nation according to the Mosaic Law. However, the ***new*** covenant is not made with a specific nation, but with a called out assembly of believers of many races and nations, as they are Spiritually born anew forming a "Holy Nation" without physical boundaries (cf. 1Pe.2:9).

Covenantalists generally consider the Church as a mere extension of Israel of the old covenant into the new such that there is little or no distinction to be made between the nation of Israel and the Church. All that applied to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament still applies by extension to the Church. Thus, only the sign of the covenant has been changed from circumcision to baptism through the blood of the new covenant and baptism therefore must apply to infants as well as adult converts.

Unlike the nation of Israel, however, individuals do not automatically enter into that new covenant relationship nor do they enter into that "Holy Nation" at the time of their physical birth, but when they are born from above through the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. Obviously, Jews could not be circumcised ***before*** they were born! Likewise, it is only after men are "born again" into the new

covenant that they could legitimately receive the physical seal of the new covenant which is ritual baptism.

Pedobaptism

Nevertheless, the Covenantalists point to several passages of Scripture to justify their position regarding the baptism of infants. Those verses state or imply that a "household" (Gr: *Oikos*) was "baptized." The primary verses are to be found in the book of Acts and include 10:47–48, Cornelius' household; 16:14–15, Lydia's household; 16:31–33, the Philippian jailor's household; and in 18:8, Crispus' household. Also, in 1Co.1:16, Stephanas' household is often used as another proof text for that view.

We have discussed most of those passages before in regard to whether ***ritual*** baptism could be properly interpreted from the context. In the case of Lydia's household, we determined that water could be implied though not proven. Therefore, we cannot dogmatically prove anything from this passage regarding pedobaptism. In the case of Cornelius' household, water is expressly stated so that we must believe that ritual baptism was administered to all upon whom the Holy Spirit had empowered to ***believe*** (Ac.10:47). In the case of Crispus' household as well as that of the Philippian jailor, it is also stated that their entire households had become ***believers*** (Ac.18:8; 16:34). Those last three texts would automatically exclude infants from being baptized since it is apparent that infants do not have the mental faculty to believe in any rational sense or to express that belief.

In the case of Stephanas' household, Paul is apologetic about the fact that he ritually baptized anyone because of the division it had caused when others also baptized converts (1Co.1:12–17). That is because those who were baptized saw themselves as identified more with Paul, Apollos, or others rather than with Christ. In much the same way, many today see themselves as being identified with a denomination or local church rather than the greater body of believers in Christ because of their ritual baptism. In any case, it seems unreasonable in the light of other Scripture to state that the Greek word *oikos* ***proves*** or even implies that infants were baptized. "Household" could just as easily refer to all adult members who came to a saving

knowledge of Jesus Christ. In fact, we have no way of knowing whether infants or children were present in any of those families or not since neither is ever stated.

Finally, some proponents of pedobaptism point out that God never specifically prohibited pedobaptism. Inasmuch as the new covenant is erroneously seen by Covenantalists as a ***continuation*** of the rituals of the old covenant (cf. He.8:13) and ***infant males*** were circumcised under the old, it is supposed that Jesus would have had to make a clear statement prohibiting the baptism of infants. However, we should also point out that Jesus never specifically stated that ***female infants*** should be baptized in addition to infant males, which varies greatly from the old covenant ritual of circumcision. It is obvious that we could run into all kinds of error if we accept doctrine based upon what God did ***not*** say.

Persistent Error of Baptismal Regeneration

We must be very careful not to fall back into the Roman error of baptismal regeneration. That is especially easy to do when infants are being baptized. If ritual baptism is erroneously seen as an absolute requirement for attaining salvation, children must be baptized at an early age so that they will not be condemned to Hell by omitting this sacrament in the event of an early death. At first, the Roman church delayed baptizing infants, since after baptism they were considered to be held fully accountable for their sins — and all children commit sin because of their immaturity. Because children are born sinners and quite naturally sin, it was necessary for the church to devise a formula that allowed for children up to a certain age to commit sin without having it accounted to their record. The reasoning was that children would commit sin without any awareness that it was sin. That is the origin of the term "age of accountability," that is still used by many churches today (See page 428). Only when the death of un-baptized infants became a greater concern was this changed and baptism was then administered at as early an age as possible.

Ritual baptism does not ever result in a spiritual regeneration. The baptism of an infant can only be considered a promissory hope toward the day when the Holy Spirit will come upon him or her and

can in no way secure or ensure the child's salvation in advance. For that reason, the child cannot be considered an instant member of the church, but as a child over which the church undertakes a special responsibility to nurture, teach and inform until such a time as he or she is mature enough to make a decision about Christ and church membership for themselves. Recognizing that fact, most churches that practice pedobaptism do not consider the child a communicant member, which means that they have no voice in the church, nor do they have the right to partake of communion until they have made a proper personal confession of faith. Only then do they become a full member, and their prior baptism is recognized as a true seal of their faith.

Pedobaptism as Infant Dedication

Ritual baptism can be seen as a sign as well as a seal. Therefore, it can be demonstrated that most Protestants who practice pedobaptism actually only see the baptism of infants as a ***sign*** of the new covenant, not a seal. That is, a child born into a Christian family should receive the sign of the covenant at or soon after birth. This act cannot yet symbolize a spiritual rebirth, but only applies the sign of the new covenant with the sincere hope that the child will come to a saving knowledge at a future date. Only if and when that realization comes about, and a personal confession of faith is made, can the baptism that was earlier only a sign then also become a seal. Of course, the parents' profession of faith is actually at issue here since children of unbelieving parents are not ordinarily baptized in Protestant churches.

Even churches that do not practice pedobaptism often have a dedication ceremony in which the parents and the child are presented before the congregation of the church (1Sa.1:24–28; cf. Lu.2:22). Just as in pedobaptism, the child can make no confession of faith or take any vows in that dedication ceremony. However, the parents and the congregation vow to rear the child in the presence of God and to guide him or her toward that point in their life where he or she is in a position to accept Christ as their savior. The similarity between this

ceremony and infant baptism is striking since the only real difference is the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of the infant.

Believer Baptism

The word *baptizo* literally means to immerse or make fully whelmed, as we have previously seen. When water is the medium, that means to immerse in the water or make "fully wet." For that reason alone, it would appear that we must side with those who practice baptism by immersion. That is, we must agree with them that immersion best ***symbolizes*** Holy Spirit baptism as we have learned earlier from the comprehensive meaning of the word *baptizo*. Moreover, there is no ***explicit*** instance recorded in the New Testament of infant baptism, which would make immersion impractical or even impossible. Furthermore, infant baptism must be excluded on Scriptural grounds, if ritual water baptism is to be seen only as a physical seal witnessing a ***prior*** baptism in the Holy Spirit since there is no way for an infant to witness or even to understand any significance in the ritual. What is more, there are no instances in Scripture expressly proving that other than professing believers were ritually baptized in water as a means of Christian witness. If the object of ritual baptism must ***exactly*** mirror our baptism in the Holy Spirit, immersion would appear to be the best mode — though that is certainly no valid reason to insist that it should be the ***only*** acceptable mode since ritual baptism is only symbolic.

Baptism Not Symbolic of Physical Death and Resurrection

Many have erroneously come to see ritual baptism by immersion as a picture of our physical death and future resurrection. That has come about from an excessive zeal to prove immersion as the exclusive mode for ritual baptism. Paul said,

> **"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"** (Ro.6:3,4).

Water baptism can be made to appear to symbolize burial by inclining the believer under the water, and resurrection by raising them again out of the water — although it is important to note that Christian burial is normally under earth, not water. We must first question if Paul was even thinking about ritual baptism here at all since he is really talking about our full ***identification*** with Christ in ***His*** death and resurrection. The word "water" is not used, nor is it implied in this verse. Therefore, it is improper to interpret this verse in such a way that it becomes a proof text for ritual baptism by immersion. In so doing, we completely lose the impact of Paul's assertion, which we dare not do.

Paul is talking about us living godly lives free from sin, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin" (Ro.6:6,7). The word "baptism" is used here in the broader sense of its meaning and denotes the believer's ***identification*** with Christ in his death by the indwelling Holy Spirit to the end that sin has no more dominion over us. Being "raised up" to "walk in newness of life" refers to our new birth in the Holy Spirit, not our physical resurrection at the last day. Paul is trying to get us to resign our ***old nature*** as being identified with the body of Christ on the cross, the "body of our sin" crucified with Christ, not our physical bodies being lowered into the grave. Paul is not discussing ritual baptism here at all, and as such, this verse should not be used as a proof text to determine an acceptable procedure or mode.

Who Should Baptize Believers?

Traditional churches insist that the baptism of infants or adults must be administered only by ordained clergy. Those of the reformed faith, while claiming no unbroken chain of apostolic succession of authority back to Peter or any other apostle, still reserve the administration of baptism to ordained ministers of the church or denomination.[82] Strangely, the Roman Church with its bent upon

[82] A line of apostolic authority back to Peter is a myth, not a fact, Roman tradition to the contrary.

political control of every aspect of a believer's life eventually allowed nearly ***anyone*** to baptize infants. That decision arose when it was decided that infants should be baptized at birth to ensure their salvation through the error of supposed baptismal regeneration. While they could normally be baptized in the church a few days later, what of a child that lived only a few minutes after birth. For that reason, a midwife was commonly allowed to baptize the child as soon as it came out of the womb.

Aside from any erroneous notion of a hierarchical succession of bishops that arises with infant baptism and the baptism of unbelievers in order to regenerate them, the question remains regarding ***who*** should baptize ***believers***. The real line of authority is not through a mortal genealogy, but through the Holy Spirit back to Christ. This is a Spiritual descent, a line of believers ordained by a chain of grace that truly cannot be broken. We observe the apostles baptizing in the New Testament and see other disciples baptizing as well, an example being Philip the evangelist.

Does it really matter at all who baptizes a believer? Only in one sense: the one administering baptism should, himself, be a believer of unquestionable standing in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. For that reason, the person who administers baptism is usually a minister, evangelist, or elder of an organized church — but not exclusively so under any mandate of Scripture. In the physical sense, the one who baptizes another represents Christ who in the Spiritual reality baptizes with the Holy Spirit and thus with his continuing personal presence.

For that reason, a believer would not want to be baptized by a rank unbeliever or someone of questionable spiritual integrity; it is far too important a moment to allow that. Ritual baptism is intended through tradition as a tangible seal and confirmation of faith, a witness to other believers and the world of Spiritual rebirth. The ritual ceases to have value at all, if it does not accomplish this no matter who conducts it or how it is conducted. Thus, both the believer and the one who baptizes him must maintain the purpose and integrity of the ritual for it to be of any value. How the individual believer views the baptismal ritual matters greatly. After all, it is ***his*** witness and a source

of ***personal*** assurance through the means that God has graciously extended to him for that purpose.

Age of Accountability

Though the error of baptismal regeneration remains the primary motivation behind the early tradition of Pedobaptism and therefore dictates the adoption of affusion as the only acceptable mode of baptism in many churches, that same error also carries over into the baptism of believing adults as well. While some churches restrict baptism by immersion to professing adults only, the pervasive error of believing that ritual baptism somehow results in the regeneration of the soul continues on such that an un-baptized individual is either considered a false professor, or he is considered obstinately disobedient and out of the will of God regarding the supposed necessity of this ritual.

Those who insist that ritual baptism is necessary for salvation but also hold to believer baptism by immersion are forced to admit that children who die below a certain age are saved by a means that excludes baptism. That generally characterizes the dilemma of various churches springing out of the Campbellite Movement such as "The Church of Christ," and several "Christian Church" denominations.[83] Therefore, some will say that children below a certain age are sinless or are accounted sinless because they are below an "age of decision" or "age of accountability." Otherwise, they would need to immerse infants to avoid their condemnation, which they cannot safely do.

Yet, how could a specific age of accountability be universally determined since all children mature mentally at a different rate? Furthermore, can we really say that acts of disobedience in children are innocent ones when the same or similar acts by adults are sin? Is sin not always sinful or does ignorance of God's law provide a cloak of innocence?

This view of baptism also brings much consternation to parents of children who die before they receive ritual baptism. Such concern

[83] Those movements shall be discussed historically in Book III of this work.

is, of course, totally unfounded for we are ***all*** saved by grace alone when we come to Christ Jesus. ***None*** of us comes to Him by a choice of our own will, but by God's own invitation; therefore, which of us can suffer a little child not to come to Him into his Kingdom by a similar act of grace (Lu.18:16)? Surely, not one of us!

Rebaptism

As there is one Spiritual birth, there should be only one ritual baptism. However, if a believer perceives that an earlier baptism was not an accurate testimony of his conversion but was so filled with error that it cannot be recognized in his mind as an effective witness, he should not be restrained from being re-baptized since he views this "second baptism" as his first and only. That is often the case if a believer was baptized earlier into a cult or by a church that held baptism or other doctrines in gross error. In addition, if an individual was baptized as an infant, or when his understanding of conversion was not mature, he may wish to be re-baptized. However, if he still sees that earlier baptism, in good conscience as his witness before the world and a sign and seal of his salvation, we as other believers should let it stand unchallenged. Rebaptism should not be imposed on anyone under any circumstances.

Most churches require baptism as a condition of membership. The logic behind this requirement is based upon the local church being a physical representation or microcosm of the true Church in total. When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit, we immediately become part of the Church Universal. In like manner, ritual baptism is seen to automatically make us a part, a member, of the local church. Often however the believer finds that he must undergo rebaptism in order to join a new church, particularly if he was previously baptized into a church that held even slightly different doctrines. Even within the same denomination, rebaptism is often required for membership unless a letter is accepted from an ***approved*** previous church certifying their baptism and membership.

It is much more appropriate to have a new member of a church affirm their position regarding doctrine by signing a statement expressing the basis for their belief after being interviewed by church

elders or an ordained minister. That would serve to keep proper order in various churches that hold slightly different doctrines, help to weed out the make-believer, and prevent ritual baptism from ever becoming an issue of division.

The Cheapening of Baptism

Ritual baptism should be exercised only as a ***personal*** witness and privilege by the individual believer apart from any church membership requirement. It should never be used as an exclusive initiation rite into a local church or denomination lest we find that we have degraded its true significance to serve a far lesser purpose.

Church or denominational requirements for rebaptism ultimately undermines the ritual of baptism altogether because it denigrates it as only being an initiation rite into a local church or denomination while at the same time declaring it mandatory. We have already seen how the exclusive control of baptism by a temporal church or denomination can allow it to gain authority over believers to an excessive degree in Romanism. It actually denies fellowship with other believers unless the other believer is baptized into ***their*** particular church or denomination. Only then can the temporal church be sure of the believer's loyalty — not to Christ, but to their own governance.

That claims far too little for the traditional ritual of baptism. Baptism is mostly seen today in exactly the same way that we view an initiation into a secular club — an ordeal to be suffered in order to reap the benefits of membership. Christian baptism should only be seen as a witness of our relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit and that alone. However desirable that may be, it is almost impossible to receive ritual baptism without at the same time swearing loyalty to and joining a local church. That is because each church has claimed the tradition of baptism as their exclusive territory. The ritual no longer serves to identify the believer with Christ, but with a local church or denomination. Considering the growing renunciation of the true faith by many of our churches today, that requirement can soon force the believer to choose between the dictates of the church and his allegiance to Christ.

Ritual baptism, as it is practiced today, has become far too common and cheap, as churches have used this ritual just to swell their membership roles. As many individuals are enticed to join churches for all the wrong reasons, any allegiance to Christ that is expressed in the process of ritual baptism is treated as mere window dressing. The object is to join a church for various social reasons, and ritual baptism is just a means to that end. There are probably by far more atheists and rank unbelievers walking around with baptismal credentials than there are believers.

The tradition of ritual baptism has all but lost its true significance in the United States. That, of course, is not true in many foreign lands where the believer's enemies see ritual baptism as a seal of authenticity. That which we take so lightly here is a matter of life and death to those true believers who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. If open persecution should come here, there would be few going about and freely claiming to be "baptized" born-again believers. Ritual baptism would then take on the significance that it had for persecuted first-century believers. It would no longer be common nor cheap.

Can Ritual Baptism Ever Be Wrong?

Since ritual baptism is not necessary in any way for our salvation, and that practice is so wrought with error today, are there any circumstances under which we could consider water baptism as being improper? The Quakers and the Salvation Army are examples of denominational groups that do not baptize in water; they simply see no need based on the absence of an absolute Scriptural mandate to do so. Organizations and religious sects aside, however, ritual baptism is a ***personal*** decision, as we are led by God. One person may see baptism in water as an aid and witness to his faith, while another may see the ritual of baptism as being so abused and full of erroneous interpretation today that he cannot participate in such a ritual without denying the sufficiency of his existing baptism in the Holy Spirit into the universal body of Christ. Moreover, if one cannot hold perfectly and in detail to the doctrines of any particular church, he must often forego the privilege of baptism to avoid compromising his faith. To

that person, ritual baptism has become an obstacle of narrow legalism that seeks to frustrate grace and it further denies him fellowship with other believers.

Should that tradition which was graciously allowed by God to aid Christian assurance and unity in Christ now be used to break down and divide it? Should that which was intended to identify us outwardly as God's elect destroy communion with other believers in Christ Jesus? The witnessing of our relationship with Christ is a very serious matter that must be engaged in without any reservation. Baptism that does not bring personal assurance and is not a truthful witness to others is meaningless. Therefore, let him who is restrained by conscience from ritual baptism refrain from it until such a time should come when water baptism is found right in his own heart. Only then can his witness be honestly expressed without compromise or mental reservation. Until then, the grace of God is not restrained, for by grace alone are we saved through faith alone.

The Purpose of Ritual Baptism

The ritual of baptism is somewhat similar to a wedding ceremony. The wedding ceremony is only an outward sign of an inner joining of two beings, while the true union is to be found in the heart of each man and woman, their devotion to each other, and God's spiritual blessing upon that fusion of two into one flesh. The ceremony only serves as an outward token and an open witness to others of the fact of that union.[84]

There is a story told about a Roman Catholic priest who went to Alaska many years ago as a missionary and discovered that the native men and women were living together without the benefit of a Christian marriage ceremony, and therefore, as he saw it, "living in sin." When he directed everyone to be married in a ceremony, every man seemed to be enthusiastic about it, which greatly encouraged the priest. However, when one of the locals was asked about their enthusiasm, the priest was informed that they were not so much

[84] Christian marriage is fully discussed in Chapter 16.1, page 474

enthused about having a wedding ceremony, but that they were all taking new wives!

The point to be made, of course, is that the natives were already man and wife in every practical sense if they were faithful to each other. The ceremony was intended to be but a token of the marriage that had already existed in fact. The ceremonies were not really intended to change anything, but merely to affirm the relationships that already existed.

Ritual baptism serves a similar purpose for the believer. Just as the validity of a marriage ceremony is not to be found in the externals such as the bride's dress, lit candles, beautiful flowers, or magnificence of the building in which it takes place, baptism's value is not to be found in an external application of water, but in the public confession of faithfulness to Christ. Ritual baptism does not change anything about the spiritual relationship that we already have with Christ, but it merely serves to attest to it before God and affirm it before men that it may be recognized outwardly by others. The spiritual relationship exists in fact with or without the ritual of baptism.

Therefore, we cannot fault true believers who feel the need of the ritual of water baptism to express their inner conversion outwardly any more than we could fault the ceremony of marriage. It is a means of public expression that Christ has allowed us inasmuch as there is no record that He ever faulted his followers from having baptized other followers. It could even be encouraged (but not commanded) as a response that is both proper and necessary to express our faithfulness before men, but our trust of redemption must rest exclusively ***in Christ***, not in ritual baptism.

Chapter 15.4 The Memorial to Christ

Unlike the tradition of baptism, the Lord's Table is far more than an adopted human tradition it having been personally instituted by Jesus Himself on the evening preceding his death. Although strict dietary practices and traditions can be found in various occult religions that predate Judaism, the celebration of the Lord's Table in its specific form has its foundations deeply rooted in the old covenant Jewish Passover that it was predestined to supersede. Jesus firmly introduced this new ritual at the conclusion of the last Passover meal as an act of remembrance of Him that could be viewed earlier only in type through the old covenant Passover ritual. The shadow of eternal redemption found within the Mosaic Passover was soon to pass away in the presence of brilliant reality as the old covenant was fulfilled in Jesus' own body on the cross — his own blood replacing the blood of the lamb that the destroying angel had passed over. Therefore, we have very clear Scripture evidence verifying the fact that the Lord's Table is a well-established intrinsic Christian ritual, and not merely an adopted tradition that is being externally applied to Christianity, as is the case with ritual baptism.

Many today have gone over into error in the Lord's Supper memorial in much the same way as they have the tradition of ritual baptism. Both rituals have been subjected to considerable misunderstanding and mysticism because of general ignorance of the Scriptural accounts concerning them and their proper contexts by most believers through the dogmatism surrounding those rituals associated with inbred Churchianity. That error is certainly not new, but is a continuation of harmful dogma imposed out of spiritual ignorance and the infiltration of paganism into Christianity in the Middle Ages that has continued long after the main thrust of the Reformation Movement subsided.

As we have already seen, tradition and dogma dies hard even in the face of overwhelming Truth that opposes it. We must consider the two rituals correctly without engaging in fantasy whether that flight of imagination is based upon some extra-biblical mysticism, a

"new revelation," or ancient tradition. Scripture and Scripture alone must always be our sure guide in every matter of doctrine in every age.

Comparing the Lord's Supper with Baptism

We have already determined that ritual baptism through tradition can be viewed as an outward sign and seal undertaken by an adult believer as a testimony to the spiritual cleansing that has already occurred within him. Therefore, ritual baptism is "a visible sign of an inward grace" within a believer. However, we have also seen it is an outward ritual signifying nothing in the case of an unbeliever that is baptized but was never brought to the realization of saving faith through the sovereign choice of God.

Therefore, the ritual act itself does not actually have a redeeming quality, but merely ***infers*** a grace already received. The physical act by a believer is like affixing an insignia worn as an ***external*** testimony to others and to himself of the saving faith living within him. In a similar way, the Lord's Supper is a physical and ***tangible*** act that signifies an existing and ongoing relationship with Christ in his death for sin that is seen only in the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit through faith. Both rituals are ***physical*** acts undertaken by the believer that witness to a particular relationship to Christ.

However, the ritual of baptism and the ritual of the Lord's Supper do not make the same statement nor do they have the same level of authority. The ritual of baptism is an ***individual*** act that testifies of the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell the believer at the time of his conversion. It testifies of the "new birth" that we each have received when, through the wooing of the Holy Spirit, we placed our trust in Christ for salvation and is for that reason of ***personal*** significance to the individual. It points to a past event in our lives that cannot ever be repeated again since Christ will never abandon us or leave us even for a short period of time; his presence is always with us. We cannot be saved or reborn repeatedly. While the tradition of baptism serves to witness to others of our inward conversion, it is even then our very own ***personal*** witness to them since it is we who declare it.

The Lord's Supper testifies of the ***death of Christ*** and our identification with Him in his death for the remission of our sin. It testifies of a continual spiritual cleansing of sins past, present, and future in and through his blood. In complete contrast to baptism, the Lord's Supper is a ***communal*** act with an emphasis upon our common relationship with other believers with whom we share unity in the body of Christ. In addition, the Lord's Supper, as we shall see, is primarily an act of remembrance that also points to a future expectation for the return of Christ for his bride, the Church. For that reason, the Lord's Supper may be properly repeated many times in a believer's lifetime, while ritual baptism should only be engaged in once.

While there is no Scripture record stating that Jesus ever commanded his disciples to baptize followers, as regards the Lord's Supper Jesus said face-to-face to his apostles "this do" (Lu.22:19). The Lord's Supper was directly instituted by Jesus and is recorded in sufficient detail in Scripture that there can be no doubt as to its origin in Christ, of what it signifies, or its authority in Christian practice. It is much more reasonable to give credence to the Lord's Supper as a purely ***Christian*** ritual than it is to ascribe the same to the tradition of baptism that predates both Christianity and Judaism.

The Passover a Precursor of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper immediately brings to mind another ceremonial meal that took place in Egypt at an earlier time. That meal was referred to as the "Passover" that has a very special and direct relationship to the Lord's Supper inasmuch as the last Passover meal that Jesus shared with his disciples ended in the institution of the Lord's Supper ritual in which we engage today (Lu.22:15). A lamb had been killed (sacrificed) for the Passover according to the ceremonial law of the Jews (Mk.14:12).

When the people of Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God brought forth ten plagues upon Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. That event was also representative of a greater drama of much wider proportions as well since Pharaoh depicted Satan, the Egyptians portrayed the children of Satan, and the Hebrews represented the children of God.

The Hebrew people were being kept in bondage and were not free to worship God because of the heavy toils inflicted upon them by Pharaoh and their close association with the ungodly Egyptians (Ex.9:1).

We must realize that the Hebrew people were caught up in the Egyptian customs and way of life including many of their pagan religious activities as well as their civil customs, as was Lot in the city of Sodom. The Hebrew people were not only being held in physical bondage, but in spiritual bondage as well. Their own iniquities against God were added to those of the Egyptians. Because of their depravity, they could not free themselves in order to escape destruction and, therefore, needed to be torn free and led from bondage by the hand of God Himself (Ge.19:15,16). Furthermore, it was necessary that the Hebrews be separated, or set aside (i.e. sanctified), from the sins of the Egyptians in order that they might serve God.

In all of the plagues that God brought forth on the Egyptian nation, He favored the Hebrews so that the plagues did not fall upon them. However, the tenth plague, unlike the earlier plagues, brought forth death. Death was isolated to the first-born of ***all flesh*** "…from the firstborn of Pharaoh… even unto the firstborn of the maidservant… and all the firstborn of beasts" (Ex.11:5). The "first-born" represented Adam and the sons of Adam that were born of his old fallen nature. The Hebrew people were not naturally exempt from the last plague since they also fell under the condemnation of sin. They were sinners by their position in Adam and by commission through their own actions. The Hebrews were hardly righteous to the extent that they should be delivered, yet God through an act of ***grace*** chose to spare them by a unique means: the blood of a lamb!

> **"In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb"** (Ex.12:3,4).

This meal was to be a family oriented ceremony unless the family was very small; then, a group of small families or of individuals participated together under one roof. It was not something to be undertaken alone, and the lamb was to be completely consumed. The sacrificial lamb was to be "without blemish." It was to be as the sinless Messiah would be: a "lamb without blemish or spot." It was to be separated from the other sheep (and from the goats) and kept aside especially for the purpose of sacrifice. In like manner, the Messiah would be kept aside by the Holy Spirit and "sanctified" by God for the specific purpose of being a pure offering for sin in the sacrifice of the crucifixion (Ps.91:11).

The blood of the slain lamb was to be smeared on the "…two side posts and on the upper doorposts of the house…" inside which the Hebrew families were partaking of the lamb (Ex.12:7). The blood was to be applied with hyssop[85] even as the blood of Christ is applied to our sinful condition through faith. The lamb was to be "…roasted with fire…" (Ex.12:8), which symbolized the judgment of God in his fiery wrath upon the flesh of the lamb. Symbolically, the Hebrews' sins were to be destroyed by fire in the lamb's flesh as they placed their trust in the protection of its blood. The purified flesh of the lamb was then to be eaten by the Hebrews so that they would be fully identified with the sacrifice.

The lamb was to be eaten with "…unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs…" (Ex.12:8). As we have seen before, leaven always represents "sin" or "personal pride" in the Scriptures. The unleavened bread represented the humility of Christ and the sinlessness of his flesh. The herbs represented the bitterness of Jesus' soul as He took our sins upon Himself (Mt.26:38,39). In the eating of the lamb, the Hebrew people actually were identifying themselves with their coming Messiah (the Christ).

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[85] Hyssop (He. e*zob*) represented a family of plants that could be used for scrubbing, painting, or sprinkling. Its detergent properties and aromatic scent aided in the cleansing process. It was also used for the ceremonial application of blood since blood could be applied without touching it with the hands.

The blood of the lamb was to be "a token" or "a sign" upon the houses of the Hebrews so that the plague of destruction from the LORD would not destroy them as the angel of death passed over their house (Ex.12:13). What we must understand is that the Hebrew people were ***not*** to look upon the blood during the Passover; their doors were to be closed shutting them inside their houses. God saw the blood of the lamb and hence declined to execute judgment upon their house by the destroying angel. He would "pass over" them when He saw the blood. Here we perceive, symbolically, those whom Christ has purchased being saved from the destruction of death by the blood of Christ, which God sees as they apply it by faith to the portals of their souls through that ritual act.

We read that so significant was the time of the Passover that it would be reckoned as the first month of the year to the Hebrews from that day forward (Ex.12:2). It would mark the beginning of a new life for them, because Pharaoh would be forced to free them and let them leave Egypt. At that same time, a new theocratic nation (one called out and ruled by God) would be created. It would be as if time, itself, began anew for the Hebrew people from that date — just like a "new birth." So much so, that they were to remember it from year to year with a Passover feast.

In like manner today a "new assembly," a "holy nation" of believers, the Church Universal, consisting of both Jew and Gentile, has been called out by God's grace through the sufficiency of the blood of ***The Lamb*** to serve Him. Moreover, for him who is called out of Satan's bondage, it is also the beginning of a new life through a spiritual rebirth.

Institution of the Lord's Supper

Even as God employed Moses to deliver the Jews from the bondage of Pharaoh and the godless Egyptians, how much more are we ***all*** led from the bondage of sin and from the power of Satan and the evil of this world by Jesus Christ! How much more does the blood of the Sinless Lamb still the wrath of God against us? We may wonder how we could ever forget about Jesus who delivered us from death, yet man is so very weak in the flesh. The world dictates to us in this

life, and we may come to take our freedom in Christ for granted and our liberty may eventually degenerate into license. Between the time of our conversion and our death is a long walk for most of us. For that reason, Jesus instituted a very simple practice during his last supper with his apostles that was to act as a consistent ***tangible*** reminder of Him and the work that He was soon to accomplish for us all upon the cross.

Let us look at the recorded account of Jesus establishing this practice in the Gospel according to Matthew. The passage given in Mark 14:22–24 gives a parallel account. While they were eating the Passover meal, Jesus brake bread and gave it to the apostles saying "take, eat; this is my body" (Mt.26:26). Jesus often clarified spiritual matters using physical illustrations, and was misunderstood by men who had no spiritual insight as we have discussed before (Jn.3:12). Jesus was saying that his body is broken and allotted for us, and unless we partake of his flesh, we will have no part of Him. Not that we could or should actually eat of his physical flesh, but that we should share in his death by identifying our old nature with his dying body on the cross (Jn.6:51–56). We, as Christians, no longer partake of a paschal lamb, since Jesus is that Lamb of whom we partake vicariously, but in the Lord's Supper memorial, we do eat of bread that Jesus symbolically identified with his own flesh.

Further, we read that He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, "Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Mt.26:27,28). The apostles apparently did not question Jesus about his statements regarding his flesh and blood, since they must have understood them symbolically. Put yourself in the place of the apostles in that upper room. They knew that it was not actually Jesus' flesh that they were given to eat, but the bread that was identified with the flesh of the Lamb through the Passover feast. It would have been obvious to them since Jesus was right there with them offering them the bread! By that action, Jesus impressed upon them that his blood would soon be shed for the remission of the sins of many, and through his blood, God would make a new agreement (a new covenant) with mankind.

As we saw in the Passover ritual, the blood of the lamb was not ever to be a drink for the communicants, but a sign to God. In fact, the Jews were totally forbidden to ever drink blood. The Hebrews ***participated*** in the blood of the Passover lamb without actually drinking it. The symbolic identification with the blood of the lamb would have been through the "blood of the grape" in the Passover feast much as bread was symbolic of the lamb's flesh of which it was associated. In the new ritual, the drinking of the juice of the grape provides an identification of the believer with the shed blood of Christ just as does the partaking of bread with the flesh of his body.

Significance of Sharing a Meal

It would be well that we pause at this point to consider the significance of sharing a meal with someone else in biblical times. Today, most do not ordinarily find too much difficulty in eating with others regardless of whether we agree fully with their attitudes and motivations or not. We usually see meals as necessary for sustaining physical life and as a means of enjoyment of the food, such that we often give little thought about whom we share it with when we eat in a restaurant or cafeteria.

In biblical times, to eat with another signified agreement and identity with that individual. Eating with others was a form of communion since the word "communion" means "having or holding something in common." As a result, meals in those days represented communion one with the other in a common bond; it signified complete unity. We clearly see that those eating of the same food shared the same sustenance. Often, people ate from the same bowls with their hands, and bread was broken in parts and distributed by hand as was meat and fish. The one loaf that was divided and eaten would eventually become a part of the body of all those who shared in it. Nevertheless, to eat with another in those days was to share much more than the food itself; symbolically, it was to share a part of ones life with the other and, therefore, to be identified with them.

The significance of sharing food is still recognized today by various organizations, religious and secular, as they engage in a banquet to commemorate or begin a special event or effort. Families

also share special meals for special occasions such as Thanksgiving Day with turkey and all the trimmings or to celebrate birthdays and weddings with the traditional cake. We actually share more than food when we engage in those special feasts; we also share a part of ourselves with others. Conversely, there could be individuals or groups that clash with our ideals sufficiently that we would never consider dining with them especially in a formal setting. That is because we would not like to be associated with their aims, objectives, or ideals in any way. To be associated in such a personal way with others is to give de facto approval of all that they stand for.

We read in Scripture that Jesus was admonished for eating with "publicans and sinners" (Lu.5:30). In so doing, Jesus symbolically identified Himself with them, which was something that the strict religious rulers in that day would never have done lest they be considered ceremonially unclean. However, that was not done without a purpose since as Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Lu.5:32). What those who criticized Jesus could not understand is that Jesus was ***purposefully*** identifying Himself with sinners and taking upon Himself the burden of their sins that He might bear their sins for them in his own body on the cross.

Communion of Believers

Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians that the Lord's Supper represents communion with Christ. "Communion," as we have seen, is an act of sharing that which is held in common in complete unity (1Co.10:16). Paul is saying that we all have the blood of Christ in common and the body of Christ in common. We are participants together as believers and the elect of God. "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1Co.10:17). Here, we find Paul using the practice of the Lord's Supper as an illustration to demonstrate how we are all one in Christ. That is precisely how we should see the Lord's Supper.

He goes on to say that the Hebrew priests that ate of the sacrifices of the altar were partakers of the altar; even so, we as a priesthood of believers are partakers of the body and blood of Christ (1Co.10:18). Furthermore, the communion that we have in the Lord's

Supper has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. We not only engage in fellowship with our fellow believers, but we individually and collectively have fellowship with Jesus Christ as well as all the saints that have gone on before us.

Having said that, we must understand that the physical ritual of the Lord's Supper only ***symbolizes*** our union with Christ. The ritual testifies to an existing Spiritual unity with Him and other believers. We actually partake of Christ only in mind and spirit as we remember Him in our flesh; it is not some mysterious act of cannibalism. We must not fly to some fantasy by thinking that the bread, which we eat in the Lord's Supper, has actually become Jesus' flesh! For, that which is carnal remains carnal and that which is spiritual remains spiritual (cf. Jn.3:6). Jesus, at this very moment, is present, both body and Spirit, at the throne of God.[86]

An Act of Remembrance

The account given in the Gospel according to Luke carries an additional statement: "this do in remembrance of me" (Lu.22:19). Jesus desired them to engage in that simple act as a memorial to Him. That again parallels the purpose of the Passover in that it also was to be kept as a memorial of the event of deliverance. After the "passing over" of the destroying angel, the Hebrews were to recall that day year to year: "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever" (Ex.12:14). The Jews were commanded to observe the Passover in order that future generations would be told without fail of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. How much more significant is it that we remember that time of our release from the horrible bondage of sin and the deliverer that was one far greater than was Moses (Jn.1:17)?

The Apostle Paul reiterated that which he had already told the Corinthians before regarding what he had received concerning the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus:

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[86] See Error of Transubstantiation, page 450

> **"…That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do *in remembrance of me*.' After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye as oft as ye drink it, *in remembrance of me*"** (1Co.11:23–25, emphasis added).

Paul twice used the phrase "in remembrance of me" since that is the true significance and purpose of the Lord's Supper observance. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1Co.11:26). Paul further reveals in this statement that the observance is an act of remembrance that is appropriate to ***repeat until Jesus comes again***. While we may argue about whether some things that were practiced in the early days of the Church are still appropriate for today, there can be no doubt about the suitability of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, we conclude that the Lord's Supper is to be a repeatable memorial service to the death of Christ and the identification of our sins and old nature with his death, as well as being a testimony in anticipation of his sure return.

The Lord's Supper is a fitting memorial to Jesus' life, work, and death, and the apostles apparently complied without question. Even so, we must understand that the apostles could not have fully understood the significance of that act at the time it was instituted. We must remember that this observance was instituted before the cross, not after, and that the full sorrow of the crucifixion and the joy of the resurrection had not yet overtaken them. It was not until later that this practice would really have profound significance for them. Now, two-thousand years after the cross, our response to that practice should not stem from ignorant mysticism or from a thoughtless or legalistic mind, but from a regenerated spiritual nature in an act of thankful remembrance of all that Christ has done for us.

We do not belittle the Lord's Supper by claiming that it is to be an act of remembrance, for it is extremely important that we remember and proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again in his glory. The ritual itself is quite uncomplicated as we have seen, and yet because of

that very simplicity, it is also extremely profound. If all Christians did but remember, faithfully, in their daily lives the death of Christ and anticipate his certain return; the world would be a far different place, for that is our great hope, and this is the substance of the Gospel that we are to take to the entire world. Let us therefore wait for that day of his return for us who are his body, the Church, by remembering Him in all that we do.

Chapter 15.5 Abuses of the Lord's Supper

We need only look at Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to determine that there was extreme disorder in the young Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper. No doubt, a large reason for that was the fact that the believers had been so recently removed from rank paganism. The tendency was for them to worship the true God in a similar manner to that which they had earlier worshiped their pagan deities. Apparently, drunken food orgies were one such pagan practice that had been retained by the newly converted and was being superimposed upon the Lord's Supper. Rather than observing the solemnity suitable for the memorial, it was elevated instead into a party-like atmosphere.

Abuse was further influenced by the fact that this ceremony was ordinarily observed at the beginning or end of a regular meal where the elements were already present as a common staple of their diet. In his epistle, Paul only discusses the Lord's Supper in the context of a gathering of the greater church, telling them to eat and drink at home to satisfy their physical hunger, but it is also likely that the simple ceremony would also have been observed at individual family meals in those days because of the availability of the elements. If so, it would appear that the greater error actually occurred primarily when many believers of different families came together in one place. Of course, that does not mean that isolated abuse could not have occurred when it was celebrated by families and smaller groups as well, but it is apparent that men tend to gravitate to and tolerate error more easily when large numbers of people are involved in it.

It is indeed amazing how a little leaven will so soon leaven the entire loaf just as Truth is so easily overwhelmed with the smallest corruption. The common excuse for wrongdoing of all kinds today is that "everybody else is doing it!" By not wishing to offend other men, they instead offend God. Even those who hold to the Truth soon tend to distrust their own faith and therefore frequently give in to collective judgment. When we associate in any way with error, a little or much of it always rubs off on us. If everyone else is participating in error, it

tends to make error seem the norm and Truth the extreme. Eventually, Truth is suppressed and the individual conscience is quieted by the false assurance of the multitude. Error then becomes widespread and commonplace.

The Love Feast

Early Christians often gathered to share a common meal that has been referred to as a "love feast" or "feast of charity" in the book of Jude (Jude:12). That would have been a natural thing for Christians to do because of the significance of eating a common meal with others of common conviction in those days. The love feast was probably being held for the purpose of deepening their sense of unity and cooperation in brotherly love. They did not realize however that as they communed with each other, Christ was absent from their midst. In today's churches, we often call such meals "fellowship meals," or "fellowship dinners." The purpose of these banquets is much the same today as it was for the earlier love feast and is often still referred to by that same name in some churches.

Such practices seem quite harmless on the surface, and in fact can be so if exercised properly and within reasonable bounds. However, there is also a real and present danger in such an elaborate meal, because Christians may soon come to replace the Lord's Supper observance with the "love feast." That is, the Lord's Supper may be displaced in the believer's thoughts if not in fact. Many churches have discovered that church attendance increases on those Sundays when they hold a "love feast" following the morning worship service, while no such increase is in evidence when it is announced that there will be a communion service held, particularly if it is known that it will extend the morning worship service fifteen or twenty minutes. For that reason, churches tend to have regular love feasts and a lesser number of communion services, and some churches have done away with the Lord's Table altogether.

Though those partaking in those love feasts may very well have a form of fellowship or communion with each other in that they share the same food, they may also very well have considerable division in thought and background regarding the things of Christ. For

that reason, conversation is generally about more mundane and "less controversial" matters as they eat. They actually have nothing in common but food and mortal existence if Christ is not being remembered, and they are not engaging in true Christian fellowship in the biblical sense. The profound act of remembrance we seek cannot take place in a banquet of food and drink where the believer's mind is more on the fulfillment of their physical appetites than their spiritual discernment of Christ.

Equality

In Corinth, many members or families brought their own food to the feast and greedily ate their own food while other members, being poor, could not even bring enough food to satisfy their basic hunger. "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken" (1Co.11:21). There was, therefore, no unity, no fellowship, and for that matter ***no love*** in those feasts. True love after all is a gift from God and is exemplified by Christ's death on the cross.

The modern method of assuring that everyone is treated equally in the love feast, is to put all the food that is brought by individual families into a common hold and then have it distributed equitably. While that approach would seem to eliminate Paul's objection regarding the poor going away hungry, it often only assures that everyone will be overfed — especially those who happen to be first in line! Gluttony is still not eliminated and Christ is still most often forgotten entirely. In like manner, the early love feasts had degenerated into drunken orgies of food and drink that had displaced the Lord's Supper ritual as a form of Christian communion. It is also evident that the Corinthians had come to think of this meal as actually ***being*** the Lord's Supper. As a result Paul rebuked them saying, "When you come together therefore into one place, this is ***not*** to eat the Lord's Supper" (1Co.11:20; emphasis added).

Paul went on to say, "What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not" (1Co.11:22)? The phrase "despise ye the church of God" should not be lifted out of context from this verse as it so often is today. It has

been used for everything from admonishing people for poor church attendance to tithing. The context is quite clear. The Church, as a body, was being despised by the elaborate and outrageous food orgy that was being used to displace the Lord's Supper. When the poor among them were so despised, the whole body was dishonored.

What Paul said is that we should eat our regular meals at home before coming together for the Lord's Supper so that other believers in the church would not be ashamed because they have brought no food. Nor should we offend Christ by such blatant disregard for the basic simplicity and profound significance of the Lord's Supper. The immediate offense was against the poor who were denied communion with Christ and their fellow believers in that corruption of the Lord's Supper. However, the real offense is not against some institution called a church, or even against a few local church members, but rather against the transcendent Church as a whole, the elect, and the body of Christ! When the Church is offended, Christ is offended. Of course, Paul could not praise them for the terrible error that they thought of so highly regardless of the numbers of people that it may have brought into their congregation (1Co.11:22).

Simplicity of the Elements

Paul then carefully restated the utter ***simplicity*** of the Lord's Supper and its true significance, which they were ignoring (1Co.11:23–26). It is also here that Paul emphasizes the importance of ***remembering Christ*** in this practice. It is in remembering Christ that believers have true communion, regardless of their social backgrounds or their economic status. The Lord's Supper is not to be a gluttonous meal of sumptuous culinary delights for the affluent or for the poor either for that matter. It consists of the very simple and basic elements of bread and drink: the staff of life, and the necessary life-sustaining fluid. The elements are purposefully simple in order that we may focus all of our attention upon ***Christ*** and not upon food. It consists of the simplest of fares, because the power is not in the elements themselves, but in what they are associated with Spiritually in the hearts and minds of believers, Christ's body broken for our sins and his blood that was shed for our redemption.

Error of Transubstantiation

As early as A.D. 831, a Benedictine monk by the name of Radbertus Paschasius wrote a treatise on the Eucharist wherein he stated that through a miracle the elements were transformed through ***spiritual means*** into the body and blood (*substantia)* of Christ — they therefore appeared unchanged to the senses. That miracle occurred only for those who believed such that the body and blood of Christ became present in them when they partook of the elements. In all this his views did not differ greatly from that of the forth century theologian Augustine. However, the Roman Pope Innocent III at or about 1200 A.D. further decreed that Christ was ***physically present*** in the elements. That is, during the ritual, the bread was actually transformed into the physical body of Christ, and the wine became his actual blood. The substance of that decree therefore also meant that Christ was sacrificed repeatedly each time the liturgy was performed.

There is no sound biblical basis for this mystical idea of transformation, but it could be improperly inferred by the text of 1Corinthians 11:24 where according to Paul Jesus' exact words were "this is my body." When Jesus' words are placed in context, however, it is quite apparent that Jesus was saying that the bread only represented his body since He was most likely holding the bread in his hand apart from his body as he offered it to his apostles. That He was not offering them a part of his physical body to eat as an act of cannibalism is quite apparent. Moreover, Jesus never characterized the juice of the grape as his blood in the same way. Rather He said that the "cup" (representing his body that held his blood) was soon to be offered up in testimony of the new covenant that was to be written in his own blood (1Co.11:25).

Transubstantiation may be further extrapolated from the verses of John 6:53–56 if they are considered in isolation. Jesus often used metaphors in his dissertations and parables such as when he characterized the evil of the Pharisees and Sadducees as leaven (Mt.16:6) and when He referred to Himself as being a door (Jn.10:7). In broader context (Jn.6:22–59) it is clear that Jesus is demonstrating through a metaphoric allegory with manna (bread from heaven) that

He is the "true bread of life" who came down from Heaven to offer up his body and blood for the sustenance of mankind so that those who accept Him and closely associate themselves with Him through his death would have eternal life.

The doctrine of transubstantiation was vigorously refuted by most all of the reformers including Luther and Wycliffe, but some still held that Jesus was somehow spiritually present in the elements much as did Radbertus Paschasius. It is apparent that since Jesus is now present in body on the throne of God in Heaven that He cannot be simultaneously divided up such that He could be physically present on earth in the Eucharist. His spirit without question ***does*** have the omnipresent properties of God. Even so, the Spirit of Christ is not present in the elements themselves, but within the hearts and minds of every true believer that partakes of the elements inasmuch as the Holy Spirit already indwells them.

Danger of Self-Condemnation

If we should eat of that bread and drink of that cup in an unworthy manner, that is, without spiritual discernment, we "…shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1Co.11:27). If we do not rightly acknowledge the grace of redemption exemplified in the ritual of the Lord's Supper, we are in effect denigrating the death of Jesus, for we only show our responsibility for his death at our own hands not recognizing his act of atonement. We only eat and drink damnation to ourselves because we dishonor Christ, and the ritual itself cannot benefit us in any way. By that physical act, we outwardly proclaim the death of Christ: if we believe, unto justification; if we don't believe, unto our ultimate judgment leading to perdition.

We have shown before that both the Jew and Gentile are equally guilty of the crucifixion of Jesus through our common sin. We ***are all guilty*** of the death of Christ just as if we had been there in that staring howling mob as He was nailed to the cross. Nevertheless, as redeemed believers, we now recognize Him as the Lamb of God that we ignorantly offered up in our stead to be judged by God for our sins, an offering of which we were not then and cannot ever be worthy, yet have received through grace.

If we turn the Lord's Supper into a wild orgy of food and drink and exclude the poor or any other believer from fellowship, how is the Spirit of God in us or what do we have in common with our savior? We are ripe for judgment. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1Co.11:28,29). For, we should remember how the Jews mindlessly cried out: let "…his blood be on us and on our children" (Mt.27:25). Has his blood redeemed us or shall we instead be condemned by it? "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1Co.11:31). Let us then examine ourselves, being very sure that we are truly in the faith in order that the judgment of God need not fall upon us. Let us, rather, accept God's chastening if we have been careless in that respect so that we will not be condemned with the rest of the world (1Co.11:32).

Paul concludes by saying that when we come together to eat in true fellowship (in unity with Christ), we should wait for each other (1Co.11:33), and, if we are hungry (desiring or needing a large meal), we should first eat at home before coming together. That is so that our physical appetites will not overcome us and overshadow our thoughts of Christ and the redemption He provides us through his broken body and shed blood. Only the simple elements of bread and drink should be shared in this ritual, as did our Lord as He instituted it at the end of the Passover meal. Otherwise, if we eat gluttonously, we will not discern the body of Christ and so will only eat and drink to proclaim the condemnation of our souls (1Co.11:34).

Church Restrictions on the Lord's Supper

In ritual baptism, we find no ***direct*** identity with Christ's body or his blood since ritual baptism symbolizes the receiving of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a spiritual awakening or "new birth" in which we are born anew from above. Ritual baptism models that birth by symbolically substituting water for Spirit. There is, then, a marked difference in meaning and mission between those two practices, and there is no reason to link the two together such that one must become a prerequisite for the other.

Nevertheless, some insist that those who have not first received ritual baptism be prohibited from participating in the Lord's Supper. We must remember that we are discussing symbolic rituals here, not the actual objective events they symbolize. Since ritual baptism in itself does not bring forth the gift of salvation or even the receiving of the Holy Spirit, there is no reason to restrict the Lord's Supper only to those who have gone through a baptismal ritual.

Conversely, we could as easily argue that he who has no understanding of Christ's death, of the atoning power of his blood, of the realization of the death of human sin in his flesh to which we attest in the Lord's Supper ritual, should receive ritual baptism. After all, we clearly observe that the Holy Spirit was first given in power and abundance on the day of Pentecost only ***after*** the atoning death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ while our Lord instituted the Lord's Supper ritual ***before*** his crucifixion and a full fifty days ***before*** Pentecost. Therefore, we could as easily make an argument denying ritual baptism to those who have not first engaged in the Lord's Supper.

However, let us not foolishly give in to such ritualistic ***legalism*** regarding those privileges. That only results in unnecessary entanglement and strife within the body of God's elect. The rituals were handed down from Heaven to us to provide a sense of ***unity*** through a common testimony and to provide us the assurance of God's salvation in our lives. Let us always see them that way and not place conditions upon them that separates those practices from believers who seek their spiritual benefits.

A Matter of Grace

Let us never view the Lord's Supper as a commandment that was given to the Church that requires our strict legal obedience. When we look closely at that wonderful privilege, we see that we are the ***recipients*** not the initiators of the act. The Lord's Supper and ritual baptism are, in fact, Jesus' endowments to us; they are offered to help us in the solidification of our faith; they are given to help us overcome the ***failings*** of our flesh, not to elevate its supposed perfection. We do not elevate ourselves to God's level when we engage in those rituals.

Rather, it is Christ who bends down low to aid us in our poor estate by allowing us to enter into fellowship with Him in our flesh.

There is no threat of God's wrath in those practices — that is, to do them, or else suffer his anger. Nowhere are they written in stone by fire like the ten words of the Decalogue. They are the symbols of God's grace, not of his wrath. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Is.55:1). The abuses that some men have put on those practices have made them an obstacle to man's faith rather than being an aid to it. In so doing, they have attempted to build a rigid wall of ritual around the fountain of God's grace.

Some denominations even refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as being further "steps" that are required for attaining or at least securing salvation. Surely, it has been successfully demonstrated in this work that no additional "steps" are required of men in order to be saved from destruction other than simply trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Jesus did it all, paid it all, and ***that is all***. Therefore, we must firmly reject any notion that either baptism or the Lord's Supper are additional "steps" that man must climb in order to be saved.

Just as many have seriously erred in assuming that Jesus commanded all men to be baptized in water as a prerequisite to salvation, we error again if we assume that Jesus commanded us to partake of the Lord's Supper ritual in order to ***maintain*** our salvation. We should look on those ritual practices in such a manner that they extol the grace of God, not elevate the acts themselves as a means to salvation or even procuring God's favor. Too many denominations and individual churches today have lost their first love for Jesus — that thankfulness and devotion they felt when they first came to Christ. Instead, they have turned their thoughts to earning their own righteousness and salvation through various sacraments, ordinances, and rituals. In so doing, they have fallen from grace and have given in to futile works.

Therefore, we conclude that we must avoid all abuses that would render the Lord's Supper harmful to the Church and offensive

to Christ. On the one hand, we must avoid building up this simple act into an elaborate and mystical ceremony and avoid debasing it through ignorance and superstition. We must not think that the physical act in and of itself has intrinsic power; we should avoid seeing the simple elements as being something magical. On the other hand, we must not attempt to make it into a legalistic ordinance when it actually exalts our salvation by grace through faith in spite of, not because of, our decrepit works. We must honor it as an act in which we redeemed sinners collectively remember Christ. By faith, through that simple privilege we, as Christians, reverently remember the One who bore our burdens on the cross that we might live. Through that simple act, we, by faith alone, are drawn closer to Him, not of his commandment, but of his wondrous love and invitation.

Chapter 15.6 The Lord's Supper Today

In this chapter we shall consider contemporary observances of the Lord's Supper and in doing so discuss matters such as by whom it should be observed, the frequency of observance, the mechanics of the practice, who should preside, and where it should be observed. Again, how various churches answer those questions largely depends upon whether they consider the Lord's Supper as a loving act of remembrance or, erroneously, as a mystical sacrament of the temporal church by commandment of law. All contemporary practice must be laid directly upon the foundation of Scripture that we studied in previous chapters so that the Lord's Supper will not be abused, and that the ritual itself will not be elevated so that it displaces Christ and replaces the grace of God with Churchianity.

Who May Participate?

There is no Scripture prohibiting any true believer from participating in the privilege of the Lord's Supper; in fact, every true believer is openly invited to participate. We have seen only that the Apostle Paul has said that we should "…examine ourselves before we eat of that bread and drink of that cup" (1Co.11:28). It is, therefore, very important that we each examine our ***own*** hearts to see that we are in every way right with God's will before partaking of the Lord's Supper. Nowhere in Scripture can we find any grounds for withholding the Lord's Supper from anyone who claims Christ as his savior merely because he lacks some particular ritual or other deficiency of fulfillment in a temporal church, including water baptism.

Professing Believers

Some say that the elders of a church should forbid and even physically restrain some from partaking because they either have not properly examined themselves or have not fulfilled some requirement established by the local church. This restriction is commonly referred to as "fencing the table." To that we must say that exhortation to self-examination is one thing, but to actually withhold the elements

from certain individuals based on our personal judgment regarding arbitrary rules is another. We can surely see that many who may easily pass all the requirements established by the church elders could still "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself" while some of those the elders would restrain for technical reasons, being children of God, go away hungry and unfed (1Co.11:21,29).

We must ask ourselves, who can truly know the condition of the heart of a man except God Himself. Therefore, while we, indeed, should exhort other Christians to survey their legitimacy and position in the body of Christ before they partake, we should seek to examine only our ***own*** hearts, not the hearts of others. We must never keep any who fully trusts in Jesus for their salvation away from that privilege which is fully theirs by their identification with the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

The Uncertain

A person whose salvation is in question to himself should be discouraged and warned of the consequences of partaking of that in which he has as yet no part, but not restrained. He may only lack the assurance that this very ritual could provide. Who can know but that even in the very act of the Lord's Supper the Lord may soften his heart and call him to Himself that he need not be condemned with the world (1Co.11:32)? We read that "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (Jn.3:18). We see that the difference is personal faith, not ritual. It is because the unbeliever does not discern the body of the Lord and his own redemption in the cross that he is condemned. We must understand that the unbeliever who engages in the Lord's Supper is already condemned ***before*** he partakes. He merely adds the confirmation of that fact by engaging in the ritual of the Lord's Supper.

Flagrant Unbelievers

Nevertheless, what of a person who publicly states that he or she is either not in Christ or openly rejects salvation through the body

and blood of Christ yet persists in partaking in the ritual believing himself to be "as good as any other man in his church?" Shouldn't he be restrained? Even in this extreme case, we must align ourselves on the side of grace over legalism or mysticism. Of course, he should be warned clearly and candidly that if he participates with that state of mind, he commits sin by proclaiming the Lord's death at his own hands without any claim to the redemption from that sin through the blood of Christ. He is in effect pleading guilty without remorse or repentance and he begs for judgment to be executed. Because he will not judge himself, he must be judged by God (1Co.11:31).

The Mentally Deficient

In all of this discussion so far, we have been talking about ***adults*** (men and women) who are of mature mind and able to judge their own faith. What of young children who may lack the maturity to participate with knowledge, and what of the mentally handicapped who may also lack the intellect to grasp the significance of the Lord's Supper? Those are, indeed, gray areas requiring a large dose of sanctified common sense and an abundance of God's grace. If we are not careful, we may find ourselves wrestling with the "age of accountability" question again, which we discussed earlier with regard to baptism.

Here it is best that children and the mentally handicapped counsel with their parents and/or with a church elder or their Bible school teacher. If those youngsters have professed a personal trust in Christ for their salvation and they are able to understand even the basic facts regarding the crucifixion and resurrection, they should not be restrained since it is always best to error on the side of grace. Which of us would dare to keep a young child from coming to the foot of the cross (cf. Mt.19:13,14)? Surely, God's grace covers all ignorance in that instance.

Protecting the Sanctity of the Ritual

Having said all that, it is important that we do not allow the Lord's Supper to become a shambles because of the misbehaving and rowdiness of children or adults who have no spiritual discernment

regarding it. For that reason, many churches avoid holding the Lord's Supper at times when young children must attend. They often have a youth church service that children attend until they are able to comprehend the sanctity of the worship service with parents and other adults. Youth services should not merely provide a baby-sitting service, but be a time when children are carefully taught the basics of the faith with their questions candidly answered. At such a time that children are able to engage in worship with adults, they should also be considered eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper as long as they willingly profess Christ.

There is no way we can set a specific age on maturity or the ability to understand spiritual things. Children do not all mature at the same rate, and God often calls some of us at a very young age (cf. 1Sa.3:1–10). Children do not need to be restricted from participating in the Lord's Supper so much as they need to be carefully and prayerfully counseled regarding the condition of their hearts. Furthermore, we must always remember that their salvation can never be placed in doubt because of a ***lack*** of participation either in the Lord's Supper or in ritual baptism. While the believer does engage in those rituals, it is not the ritual itself that makes him a Christian, but his personal faith and trust in Christ.

Frequency of Observance

We find no strict mandate in Scripture stating that the Lord's Supper must be observed daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly. That accounts for the wide variation in thought regarding the frequency of observance as it is practiced in many of our contemporary churches. The first place that we could hope to see anything regarding frequency is at the first Lord's Supper in the upper room. However, in looking at the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) nothing would indicate that this act should be perpetuated beyond the initial event with the immediate apostles as a one-time act (Mt.26:26–29; Mk.14:22–25; Lu.22:15–20).

A phrase in the Gospel of Luke could be interpreted to mean more than one time. However, that is far from being clear in the Greek. The word "do" in Luke 22:19 "…this do in remembrance of

me," need not imply any repetition. Even the phrase "do in remembrance" could mean a single act by the apostles that would not imply more than a single immediate memorial. (John gives no direct account of this Passover meal at all in his Gospel).

It is in the writings of the Apostle Paul, as he clarifies the Lord's Supper to the Corinthians, that a word is used that indicates that this act was being properly repeated as a common practice among believers.

> **"…This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"** (1Co.11:25,26).

Here we encounter the words "oft" and "often" in verses 25 and 26. Both of those words are derived from the Greek word *hosakis*, which means multiple occurrences or many times. Paul is actually quoting the words of Jesus in the upper room here. Lets look at still another verse: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ" (1Co.10:16). This verse would indicate that the Lord's Supper, as a reoccurring practice, was taking place in those days, and that Paul also was a participant. We must conclude, then, that Paul considered the repetition of this practice appropriate, and as we have observed before, an important act of remembrance.

We find one other mention regarding the frequency of observance in the writings of Luke. "And they [the three thousand] continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Ac.2:42). We could assume, of course, that "breaking of bread" could just refer to the eating of a common meal with the apostles. However, the fact that "doctrine," "fellowship," and "prayers" are also mentioned as those things which the three thousand also continued in participation with the apostles, along with "breaking of bread," provides us a more significant overall context. That context implies that this was, indeed, the Lord's Supper memorial being repeated.

The Case for Yearly

Where does that leave us regarding the actual frequency of observance? On the one hand, from some of Paul's writings and the synoptic Gospels, we may assume that the observance is appropriate only once a year, since that specifically is as "oft" as the Jewish Passover was observed. Yet, from Luke's account (Ac.2:42), we could assume a greater frequency of observance. Moreover, we must remember that non-Jews (Gentiles) would not have observed the Jewish Passover leaving them no time to participate at all. Paul seems to imply a greater frequency in First Corinthians, Chapter 10, verse 16 as well: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

The Case for Weekly

In the book of Acts, we find verses that could suggest that the Lord's Supper was observed weekly: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them…" (Ac.20:7). We see that this verse does not say the first day of ***every*** week. Yet, that could not have been referring to the time of the Passover either, because the Passover had already been concluded (Ac.20:6). Furthermore, we know that the Passover meal, at which Jesus instituted the practice of the Lord's Supper, was not on the first day of the week at all, but three days before, since our Lord arose on the third day and that was the first day of the week (Mt.28:1–6).[87] We do know that it was common for Christians to assemble on the first day of the week (1Co.16:2). Yet, we also know from many temporal writings that early Christians also met together at an early hour daily.

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[87]There has always been some question by some about whether Christ was crucified on Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. Nonetheless, the exact day of the crucifixion does not change the fact that the first Lord's Supper, with our Lord presiding, was not on the first day of the week.

The Case for Monthly or Quarterly

Therefore, from examples taken from a very few verses, we could conclude that weekly observance was the norm for assembled believers in the early days of the Church. Even so, what does that tell us about today? We can see that we are not faced with any Scriptural mandate regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper. We even see that the Corinthians saw it as being such a common occurrence that they fell into error by trying to embellish it with the love feast. Could it be that we could observe the Lord's Supper so often that it loses its significance? Furthermore, who will take the time to properly "examine himself" that he may soberly partake if we should assemble to partake daily or, perhaps, even weekly?

For that reason, some churches today have the Lord's Table celebration only on the first Sunday of each month or even quarterly. On the other hand, do we not desire to meet together often to remember the Lord's death in full expectation of his second coming? Therefore, each assembly must decide in all conscience the frequency of observance in order that it neither becomes a commonplace that degenerates to an empty ritual without meaning, nor, conversely, that it should be neglected so that the Lord's death is not properly remembered.

Where Should the Lord's Supper Be Observed?

We have every reason to believe that the Lord's Supper began among Christians as an observance held in individual Christian homes. We read in Acts that "they [the three thousand] continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from ***house to house***, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Ac.2:46 – emphasis added). Here we observe that the new disciples broke bread in their own homes, in one house the same as the next. We can see that it would probably have been impossible for all three thousand to assemble under one roof in a building since there was no church building to house them in those days.

While we read that the disciples continued to witness in the Temple, they certainly would not have been allowed to engage in the

Lord's Supper ritual there. The Jews at large, not to mention the religious rulers, would not have allowed it. For that matter, even the Hebrew Passover was never held in the Temple, but in individual houses, as was the last Passover meal of our Lord during which He instituted the Lord's Supper. We recall again that the Hebrew Passover was a family oriented observance (Ex.12:3), yet if a household was small, a neighbor could be invited to join with them. Therefore, it is quite evident that small groups of Christians consisting of family and some guests would also have commemorated the Lord's Supper together in various homes.

The simple instruction that Jesus gave his apostles, "…this do in remembrance of me" (1Co.11:24), did not specify that a church building was necessary to house them in order that they may "remember Him." The very first Supper memorializing the Lord took place in the upper room of a common house. Surely, we realize that the very elements, themselves, which Jesus chose were also the simple staples of the common meals of the Jews in that day, which was bread and the juice of the grape. The apostles and other disciples in fact would eat of those elements as a part of their daily diet. What, then, did our Lord mean when He said, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Lu.22:19). Moreover, what did Paul mean when he said, "as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1Co.11:26). Do we not eat and drink daily?

For that reason, we cannot help but see a relationship between the Lord's Supper and the "saying of grace" before a meal. Who can look on the bread that we eat for our physical sustenance and not remember Jesus' flesh that was broken on the cross that we might live, and who among the disciples in those days would not have thought of Jesus' body as they broke the loaf of bread at each meal? In like manner, who among them would not see the daily table juice of the grape as his blood shed for their atonement? For that reason, we must understand that the Lord's Supper would actually have been remembered at each meal by first century Christians. As the head of the house distributed the bread and the juice for the daily meal, so our

Father in heaven distributed the flesh and blood of his only begotten son that we would be nourished to eternal life through Him.

Many today would object to holding the Lord's Supper in homes merely because a member of the clergy is not presiding. However, some churches today do allow various lay elders to preside over the Lord's Supper within their churches. Still others allow lay elders to bring the elements to the sick and the shut-in in their homes. Unfortunately, most of the churches allow elders to take the elements into homes only because they are strict Sacramentalists seeing the Lord's Supper as a necessity for maintaining ones salvation. For that reason, none of their church members dare be left out. The elements taken into homes have most often been previously presided over by a member of clergy in a church service and, therefore, are seen as having been "sanctified" by that means.

Shut-ins from other churches often do not have the opportunity to participate at all because this ritual is restricted to church buildings. Yet, we clearly see that our Lord never said that this should be an elaborate ritual presided over by clergy in a church building. It is true that the one who breaks the bread and distributes the cup ***symbolically*** stands in the position of Christ at the last supper as one who humbly serves. However, the fact remains that Christ Himself truly is the one who presides when we remember Him in this ritual. The one who presides here on earth is only a servant of Christ and is also a recipient and participant in the Lord's Table as well.

What can we say about this then? Is celebrating the Lord's Supper appropriate only in ecclesiastical surroundings, and must we be housed in a church building to partake without violating our faith? Must we be presided over by an ordained minister or a priest to validate the act? Can we remember Jesus' death and our part in it only if we partake of a "blessed" wafer or drink sanctified ceremonial wine? Certainly not, the Lord intended it to be a memorial to Him as often as we eat of the staff of life, and as often as we drink of life-giving liquid. We should not be overly restrictive about the surroundings in which a believer partakes as long as he partakes in true remembrance. Together in an assembly of fellow believers or in a smaller assembly of believing family members, we should not find

fault provided that those who await his appearing again remember the death of our Lord in a reverent way.

The Bread

We now need to consider the elements that are used in the Lord's Supper. The practice of highly traditional churches is to always use unleavened bread and fermented grape juice, while other churches use leavened bread and unfermented grape juice. Still others may use unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice. That brings to question how strict we should be regarding the elements themselves.

Let us begin by looking first at the bread. We read regarding the Passover that all leaven was to be completely removed from the house. "Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel…Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread" (Ex.12:19,20). Since there was to be no leavened bread allowed during the time of the Passover, there surely could not have been any leavened bread present on the table at the Lord's Supper when Jesus instituted the memorial. The bread that our Lord gave his disciples as representing his flesh would most assuredly have been unleavened.

For that reason, many would say that the bread used in the Lord's Supper today must always be unleavened as well. Some choose leavened bread over unleavened just because unleavened bread can make a crunching sound when eaten. To them, this sound is an offense to the solemnity of the ritual — although unleavened bread can be made so that it is soft. That is hardly a valid reason for using leavened bread since that puts the aesthetics of a mere ritual before the objective fact of Jesus' body that was broken for us.

Jesus was totally without sin in his flesh and as innocent as the unblemished lamb of the Passover, but when He hung there on the cross the wrath of God was upon Him. He suffered the punishment for sins that He bore in his flesh — not his own sins, but ours. For that reason, many choose to use leavened bread in the Lord's Supper in order that we may perceive our sins borne in his flesh. Certainly, to see Jesus dying on the cross in all his innocence without recognizing that

He bore our guilt and shame is to misunderstand the purpose of his death.

Therefore, to use unleavened bread is to see Jesus' sinlessness, while to use leavened bread is to see ***our*** sins in his flesh as his flesh was "roasted in fire" on the cross to destroy all sin — it is to see the full purpose of the act of atonement. If we are to be legalistic regarding the elements as in the Hebrew Passover, we must only use unleavened bread, but if we are to be understanding of Jesus' true work as He hung on the cross, we may choose instead to use leavened bread. Whether we use one or the other, we should not be contentious as long as all understand the atonement and Christ is remembered. Whether the bread is leavened or unleavened is not nearly as important as the absence of "leaven" in the heart of those who are remembering the sacrifice of Christ.

The Fruit of the Vine

What about the "fruit of the vine" that Scripture states was used on the Lord's Table? Was it the wine that we think of today that contains a large percentage of alcohol? It is completely inconsistent to think that fermented grape juice would have been used in the Passover meal, while at the same time only unleavened bread could be present. The fermentation in wine is symbolically similar to leaven in bread. It must be pointed out that the Scriptural accounts of the Lord's Supper never use the word "wine" at all, but "cup" and "fruit of the vine." It is highly likely that the "fruit of the vine" was indeed the pure juice of the grape. If that is so, where do so many get today's notion of fermented wine, an alcoholic beverage, from the accounts? That misunderstanding again has its origin in faulty tradition that attempts to override the statements of Scripture.

The term "fruit of the vine" can be understood in three phases: unfermented grape juice; fermented grape juice or wine; and finally wine vinegar. Wine vinegar is wine in which the alcohol has been oxidized by exposure to the air that has caused it to go sour. Therefore, it sometimes is referred to as "old wine." Fermented grape juice is often referred to as "new wine" since the alcohol has not been allowed to oxidize into acetic acid by sealing it in bottles and storing it in a

place with carefully controlled temperature. We see however that in each stage, the juice can still be referred to as the "fruit of the vine."

From both Old and New Testament Scripture accounts of the Passover meal it is consistent to think that only unfermented grape juice would have been used in connection with the Lord's Supper because fermentation represents corruption as does leaven. While it is impossible to prove that there was not some inadvertent fermentation of the juice in the Lord's Supper, we can only assume that if fermentation had begun, it surely would have been unintentional. The "fruit of the vine" represents the life of that "true vine" of which we are the branches (Jn.15:5). Though Jesus bore our sins in his flesh, his blood was innocent and his life blameless. He bore our sins in his body, but ***not*** in his blood, which He sprinkled in all its purity upon the mercy seat of God for us. For that reason we cannot accept fermentation of the juice in the same way that we could accept leaven in the bread as being symbolic of our sins that He bore.

In the light of the overwhelming weight of Scripture against the abuse of alcohol and against drunkenness, there is no valid reason to use alcoholic wine in connection with the Lord's Supper today. While there may be little evidence of anyone ***becoming*** an alcoholic by merely partaking of a small amount of sacramental wine, the principle of evil that fermentation represents makes fermented wine totally inappropriate in remembering Christ. Furthermore, the partaking of even a small amount of sacramental wine containing alcohol, perhaps, could derail a "recovering" alcoholic. However, the greater damage may well be done to those who are led to believe that God sanctions the regular partaking and even abuse of alcoholic beverages because they are regularly used in the Lord's Supper. It becomes a snare of the devil to them.

It has often been argued that it was impossible to keep grape juice preserved in biblical times without resorting to the fermentation process. Arguments to the contrary, there is considerable evidence that grape juice was kept in sealed jars in cool caves and in underground cellars to preserve it for a time without fermentation. Frequently, freshly crushed grapes could have been used at each meal. It seems apparent that those who insist that alcohol was used in the Passover

cup and therefore should be used in the Lord's Supper are merely trying to excuse the use of alcoholic beverages on false biblical grounds. Such a basis is totally unfounded. Furthermore, there is certainly no difficulty in obtaining the "fruit of the vine" in a pure unfermented form today.

Substitution of Elements

It can be argued that adding leaven to the bread and fermentation to the juice of the grape is only another way that man has injected his sinful desires into the simple ritual in order to dress it up or enhance it to make it more palatable. After all, leaven makes the bread tastier, and alcohol spices up the juice. The amplification of the elements to make them taste better has sin as its root. The simple elements have also been subjected to various substitutions on a similar basis. Bread is not as often subjected to substitution, as is the drink. Although bread can be made from various grains and prepared in various ways to make it taste better, it remains bread. While wheat is the most common grain used today, it may be that barley was more commonly used in biblical days. While various grains may at times be substituted in making the bread, the main controversy over bread centers on leaven as we have already discussed at length.

In like manner, we have discussed the "fruit of the vine" with regard to fermentation, but have concluded that the cup was most certainly juice from the grape because of its availability in that part of the world. That leads us to the question of substituting other fluids for grape juice. First, we must realize that grape juice is highly suggestive of blood because of its color and consistency, and it seems most appropriate to use the juice of the grape if only because that was what was almost certainly used in the first Lord's Supper. However, if grape juice is unobtainable for some reason, another juice should not be automatically ruled out as inappropriate in much the same way that we cannot rule out various grains in the bread that is used. Many other "fruits of the vine" would seem to be appropriate substitutes if grapes are not available in that particular part of the world lest the ritual become extinct there.

Water, being a clear fluid and already being closely identified with the Holy Spirit as exemplified in ritual baptism, is not an appropriate substitute at all for that reason. Furthermore, the "fruit of the vine" represents the blood of Christ who is the vine of which we are the living branches, and water does not convey that relationship in any way. The Mormons (Church of the Latter Day Saints) use water instead of the fruit of the vine in their communion service. That came about because of an incident in the early days of the movement when their sacramental wine was believed to have been poisoned by those who did not appreciate the activities of that cult. There is no reason to believe that wine cannot be obtained that is safe today. Nonetheless, water is still used in the place of the fruit of the vine by Mormons to this very day through tradition.[88]

Such obvious substitutions should be avoided in our Christian churches since it tends to confuse the meaning of the Lord's Supper with ritual baptism. We must see our new lives as existing in the "fruit" of that Vine who gave his life-blood that we may partake of it and live. Since it is both Scriptural and traditional to use grape juice in the Lord's Supper, that always is to be preferred, but again, we must not become overly occupied with the symbols themselves and, by so doing, fail to remember Christ and his atoning death.

Finally, we should not be concerned that by failing to use a precise element in the observance that the Lord's Supper will become invalid. That is, we should not, as the strict Sacramentalist, be concerned that the bread does not exactly represent Jesus' flesh, and that the "fruit of the vine" does not exactly represent Jesus' blood. After all, we are not preparing a potion, formulating ingredients for some magic act, or preparing a chemical experiment whereby some small error will result in a failure of transformation.[89]

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[88] Mormonism is discussed historically in Chapter 18.7 of Book III of this work.

[89] See Error of Transubstantiation, page 450

Serving Procedure

Let us now consider the exact procedure of the observance. Should the bread be prepared and "broken" in advance? Should the bread be in the form of prepared crackers or wafers? Should the juice be passed around in a single vessel, poured out or distributed in smaller cups?

When a large number of people gather together, it is probably better that the bread and the juice be prepared in advance so that unnecessary delay is avoided when the bread and the cup is distributed to all present; that is merely a practical consideration. In smaller groups, or in family gatherings, the head of the house, standing in the place of our Lord, can actually break the bread, pour the juice, and distribute it to the participants. We must always participate in the simplicity of this act with due reverence to God and in remembrance of Christ, regardless of the method or surroundings.

Many Christians seem to be almost paranoid that all should partake of each element of the Lord's Supper at exactly the same moment. That stems from Paul's admonishment of the Corinthian church that had fallen into error.

> **"When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken"** (1Co.11:20,21).

However, Paul was obviously speaking of their "love feasts" that they had erroneously substituted for the Lord's Supper. Likely, all were in fact, eating at the same time. The obvious meaning of his statement is that some were eating food in abundance in the presence and in clear view (i.e. "before") others who had meager rations or no food at all. That was both inconsiderate and embarrassing.

Nevertheless, we ***should*** partake together in unity of mind and purpose. If everyone ***deliberately*** partook at a different time, it would spoil the sense of communion and unity we enjoy with each other. All, who are in Christ share in his flesh and partake of his death as one. Yet, in a larger sense, we can see that not all believers can truly partake together at once because we are scattered over the face of the

earth. It is only in the immediate gathering of believers that we can share at the same moment. Regardless of that fact, we do share and commune symbolically with all believers in common fellowship, though some may be asleep on the other side of the world. Let us not fear that if someone does not partake in "lock-step" with others that some calamity will befall them or us.

We see that in the practice of the Lord's Supper we commune together as one with Christ, partaking only and fully through faith of his flesh and of his blood. We remember his death; we see our sins destroyed in his flesh on the cross; we rejoice in our salvation that we have in Him. We partake in fellowship with Him and with each other. "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1Co.10:17). Together, we also express our hope and our confidence in his return at the appointed time.

In Conclusion

There are many ways we can define the significance of the two foundational Christian ritual practices: "a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward Him" (John Calvin) or conversely "a tangible commemoration engaged in by the believer in recognition of the spiritual gift of redemptive grace we have received in Christ." Stated still more simply, Calvin also defined them as, "an outward and visible form of an inward and invisible grace." Here we must be careful to realize that Calvin's use of the word "form" must not be construed to mean that both are merely two forms of the same substance since one substance is fully physical and the other fully spiritual. That which is spirit is spirit and that which is flesh is flesh (cf. Jn.3:6). Water remains water, bread remains bread, and the juice of the grape remains juice.

The benefit we as believers attain from those practices is spiritual, not physical, since the physical act itself cannot profit us in any way except through the outward cleansing of our flesh or the insignificant nourishment of a small amount of bread and juice. While the physical ritual can be seen to ***represent*** a spiritual reality, it remains a purely physical act separate of the spiritual. If we fail to

accept that fact, we could easily fall head-long into rank superstition — deeming the physical ritual itself to be supernatural reality.

We must avoid mysticism, thinking that the physical activity has somehow transformed us into the spiritual realm. Furthermore, to think that the "elements" of those practices: water, bread, and juice of the grape are somehow transformed into the Holy Spirit at baptism, and into the actual body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper is highly erroneous whether we perceive that transubstantiation to be physical or merely spiritual. Water is water, not spirit; bread is bread, not flesh; and grape juice is grape juice, not blood. Nor can we even say that Jesus is spiritually present in the elements, but rather that He is present in us through the Holy Spirit as we partake of them.

Therefore, the true significance of those practices is not to be found in the tangible elements of water, juice of the grape, and bread, or even in the act itself. It is in our hearts and minds that, through physical rituals, we acknowledge ourselves as having been immersed in the Holy Spirit through ritual water baptism. It is in our inner thoughts alone that we partake of our allotment of the flesh of Jesus as He hung on that cross in our place and drink his blood that was poured out for the sustenance of our soul in the Lord's Supper. Any benefit obtained in such practices is purely spiritual as it is made real to us by the Holy Spirit for increasing our faith.

Moreover, we must understand that both of those practices were established for the express benefit of the believer, not to glorify God. Those practices therefore are not, in themselves, acts of worship since it is we who receive, and God who gives. They are both acts of our testimony before other men and a means by which an objective internal spiritual certainty can be realized subjectively through the senses of our flesh. It is not because of our great spiritual insight that those practices were established for us, but because of our spiritual poverty. They act as a physical sign and seal that we can see, touch, taste, and experience that are affixed firmly to God's promise — the promise of saving grace that we can also read about and cling to in his Holy Word.

Section 16, Christian Life Issues

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Christian Marriage

Beginning of Life Issues

End of Life Issues

Chapter 16.1 Christian Marriage

In this section, we shall discuss important life issues from a Christian perspective. Inasmuch as it is fully apparent that Adam and Eve were created by God as adult beings, we find that the institution of marriage predates the first instance of childbirth as Eve brought forth Cain. Accordingly, in this section we shall discuss the institution of marriage first, followed by issues concerning conception and childbirth, and finally conclude by discussing various issues concerning the death and final disposition of the human body once life has departed from it.

Marriage is the oldest institution known to man having its origin in creation itself (Ge.2:22). Marriage also constitutes the deepest human relationship known to mankind, and is fundamental to the maintenance of any successful society. Since that custom predates Christianity, it is therefore an institution that is universal to all mankind and not just a privilege granted to Christians alone.[90] However, as we shall discover, Christianity sheds great light upon it and restores the blessings for mankind that God originally intended for marriage. For that reason, the ritual ceremony connected with the union of a man and a woman into matrimony has become an accepted Christian tradition.

The First Marriage

When God created Adam to have dominion over the earth, He saw that it was not good that man should live alone (Ge.2:18). God walked in the garden with Adam and spoke with him, but their relationship could exist only on the spiritual plane since God is a spirit and Adam was flesh. Though God had populated the earth with various animals, not one of them was found to be suitable to meet Adam's need for physical companionship (Ge.2:19,20). Man needed a being with whom he could confide intimately on a human level and with whom he could fully share the joy and benefits of human life.

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[90] Marriage is therefore not a sacrament of the church as the Romanist would impose.

This must of necessity be a physical being very much like Adam himself, but also different in a way that his companion would complement rather than conflict with his own abilities.

Rather than create this second being from the elements of the earth as He had Adam, God caused a great sleep to come over Adam during which time He formed the companion from one side of Adam's own body (Ge.2:21,22). Therefore, the companion, Eve, was not an entirely new creation, but was formed out of and thus a part of the first creation. "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Ge.2:23). Through that means, God had made the physical relationship between Adam and his helpmate the most intimate relationship possible: two independent beings constituting one physical creature. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Ge.1:27). God saw the man and his wife as the one flesh that they had previously shared in Adam's body, and both were created in God's own spiritual image as salient autonomous beings — having the ability of independent thought and action.

Adam had been given his intimate helpmate to be at his side throughout life, and in that relationship, man first experienced human love on the same order as that which only the three persons of the Godhead had previously enjoyed. "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" because they were of the same flesh and sin had not yet entered into their relationship (Ge.2:25). We see that this was indeed the first marriage between a man and a woman, and that it was not only approved and ordained by God, but was created by Him.

Sin Entered through Marriage

Satan, seeking to destroy God's beautiful creation, chose to divide and conquer it. To gain that end, he chose to interfere in the highly personal marriage relationship by singling out Eve and pitting her against Adam. Satan successfully deceived Eve into eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was forbidden (Ge.3:1–6). We find no written record that God had directly expressed

that prohibition to Eve, but if not it would have been Adam's duty to protect Eve by passing it on to her (Ge.2:16,17). It is evident that Adam must have done so from Eve's communication with the Serpent, when she added that they were not even allowed to touch the tree (Ge.3:3). (God had said nothing about touching the tree). Through lies, Satan fostered distrust in the marriage by suggesting that in collusion with Adam, God was withholding a wondrous knowledge from her to protect his own throne. He hinted that God had not really said that they would surely die if they ate of it, but that their eyes would be opened to know good from evil (Ge.3:4,5). This, he lied, would make them on a par with God. Eve apparently failed to trust that Adam had given her the full truth of the matter regarding the sentence of death and seeing that the fruit was very desirable, she ate of it (Ge.3:6).

When Eve subsequently gave the forbidden fruit to Adam to eat, he sinned knowingly to please his wife out of a mixture of guilt, love, and jealousy — guilt for not having better protected her, love and fear of losing her in death, and jealousy of her new-found knowledge that he lacked and which seemingly gave her superiority over him. Unlike the second Adam (Jesus Christ) that was to come, the first Adam did not seek to redeem Eve by offering his own life as a sacrifice in exchange but chose instead to share in her iniquity. Therefore, when we speak of original sin, we appropriately speak of Adam's sin not that of Eve.

The first marriage was now characterized by distrust, blame, and shame as the spiritual radiance that gave it God's approval was snuffed out. In their mutual shame, Adam and Eve then hid from God who had once sanctioned their close intimate physical relationship (Ge.3:8). They attempted to conceal their sinfulness by covering themselves with fig leaves, but the true nature of their nakedness was much more than physical — it was actually spiritual nakedness through which their sin was exposed (Ge.3:7). God asked them how they knew that they were naked — knowing that they had eaten fruit from the forbidden tree (Ge.3:11). In response, Adam blamed his terrible betrayal on Eve. Moreover, Adam even suggested that God was equally at fault inasmuch as He had given Eve to him in the first place (Ge.3:12). Eve responded that it was entirely the serpent's fault

for beguiling her (Ge.3:13). Neither was willing to admit their own responsibility in disobeying God.

Adultery

When Adam and Eve joined Satan in his rebellion, they committed spiritual adultery in their sacred union with God. With the fall of marriage from its high spiritual plane, the sin of adultery also entered into the human relationship as well. Not only did unfaithfulness exist in the spiritual and mental sense, it soon manifested itself in the physical body as well. Consequently, we find that the act of adultery often has its origin in seemingly harmless verbal exchanges and relationships that are already violating the marriage vows on a mental level. Adultery not only wrecks the marriage relationship, it shames and condemns the very soul of those who commit it.

> "**Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent… But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away"** (Pr.6:27–29,32,33).

With the failure of the first marriage, the human relationship in marriage was degraded for all future generations of mankind. Marriage is often a strained relationship requiring great efforts to maintain it and is subjected to attack from within and without. In order to protect marriage and the integrity of a man's soul, God gave the seventh commandment of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex.20:14). We surely see that this commandment was given for man's benefit and happiness in the security of marriage, not for his condemnation. However, he who commits this sin most assuredly brings condemnation upon himself.

Fornication

Some seeing marriage an extreme burden that would be placed upon them, due to the permanent commitment they must make to their spouse, choose to remain single. The Apostle Paul chose to remain single so that he would be free to serve Christ without the need to divide his attentions between the Gospel and the duties of a husband. "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (1Co.7:8).

Therefore, while the Apostle Paul sanctioned single living for those who seek to do God's work and can control themselves, for all others he said that they should marry since it would be better to marry than to continually "burn with desire." Such uncontrolled desire ultimately leads to the sin of fornication. "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1Co.7:2). Unlike adultery, fornication is a sin that is committed among the unmarried. Some therefore erroneously think that this is a lesser sin than that of adultery, but it is the basis for prostitution and the spread of sexually transmitted disease. Furthermore, fornication destroys the foundations of the institution of marriage at the outset inasmuch as it encourages some couples to live together without the commitment, sanction, and protection of marriage. A man who abuses a woman in such a way makes her no different from a harlot and he is no less than an adulterer.

Fornication must never be sanctioned or found among Christians since our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us (1Co.6:19).

> " **Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body"** (1Co.6:15–18).

Fornication, as this text makes clear, is a terrible sin that is committed against ones own body, while other sins may be committed without actually defiling ones own body in the process. That makes fornication along with adultery the two most personally damming sins that one can commit. Therefore, fornication is an unrighteous act that is fully on a par with the sins of idolatry, adultery, and homosexuality, and it ranks one who commits fornication along side thieves, drunkards, revelers, and extortionists, none of whom can inherit the Kingdom of Heaven (1Co.6:10).

Christian Unity in Marriage

When God joins a man and woman in marriage, the union takes place on three levels: spiritual, mental and physical. Since the fall of man however, the spiritual component has dissipated in natural man inasmuch as God cannot abide with sin. Therefore, in today's so-called civil marriages where God is excluded, the marriage can only take root within the mental and physical planes. The loss of the spiritual presence of God in a marriage greatly weakens it since it is solely dependent upon the laws of unrighteous men to bind it together. Christian marriage vows, in complete contrast, are commonly presided over by clergy and made in the presence of many witnesses before God himself — seeking his witness of their vows as well as his approval, ordination, and continual blessing through its maintenance.

The spiritual fellowship with God that was lost in the fall of mankind is restored in the fellowship a Christian enjoys with his Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, when a man and a woman that already share that common bond in Christ enter into marriage, their combined faith becomes an integral part of it. The Christian comprehends marriage as a sacred spiritual bond that far exceeds that of a mere mental and physical relationship to cohabit legally as husband and wife. A marriage that was established by God is seen as being more important to maintain and protect than the fulfillment of any personal desires for the happiness of either the man or his wife. In response to that commitment, God welds the marriage together with the divine love that He endowed for it in the beginning.

Adam failed to give up his life for the salvation of Eve but joined in her sin, while Jesus, the second Adam, willingly gave his sinless life for the salvation of his bride, the redeemed of the Church. Therefore, it is in Christian marriage that the full significance of marriage is unveiled out of the mystery surrounding it when it is presented as the example of Christ and his love for his Church. Though God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, Jesus so loved the Church, his wife to be, that He lay down his life for her. Human marriage should similarly be characterized by that kind of sacred sacrificial love.

Unequal Unions

In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that a believer must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2Co. 6:14). In context, we observe that Paul referred to any enterprise in which a Christian may be associated with another person. Certainly then in Christian marriage, the two that become joined together as one must be equally established in their spiritual faith in Christ. God cannot bless religious diversity in marriage. The two so joined would always pull in different directions, and the common yoke of marriage would wear sorely on the necks of them both. Under severe stress, the yoke may even break in two, severing the marriage. Therefore, a Christian should never knowingly seek to marry an unbeliever lest his or her own faith be severely tested and the marriage becomes destined to failure from the outset.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians Paul addressed the difficulty that arose when long after the wedding has taken place one or the other of the spouses became a believer and the other remains an unbeliever. By extension, we should also include one who may have falsely professed their faith when they were first married, deceiving the other. In either case, they found themselves uncommonly yoked and the question arose whether or not the marriage should be terminated for that cause.

> “ **… If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not,**

> **and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy"** (1Co.7:12–14).

Therefore, we see that the believer has no cause to annul a marriage or to divorce an unbeliever under those circumstances as long as the unbeliever chooses to peacefully remain with them. Though the unbeliever cannot join spiritually with the believer, he or she is not openly antagonistic toward the believing spouse's faith. In that case, the marriage is still spiritually valid based on the original vows taken by the believer alone thus sanctifying also the vows of the unbeliever in order that their children will not be brought up as heathen.

> **" But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife** (1Co.7:15, 16).

As long as the unbelieving spouse peacefully remains, there is always the possibility that the believing spouse may be the instrument that God uses to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. For that reason, the Christian spouse should never be the one to institute divorce proceedings. Nevertheless, if the unbeliever chooses to abandon the marriage based on his or her antagonism against the faith, the Christian must often let them go for the sake of maintaining peace.

Unholy Unions

Numerous passages of Scripture beginning in Genesis make it clear that marriage is a state that can exist only between one man and one woman. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul states that all men know instinctively that God exists, but that they suppress that knowledge so that they may commit wicked acts with imagined impunity. Men have no excuse for that inasmuch as God's existence and power is obvious merely by observing his divine works of nature all about us (Ro.1:19–

22). Because of their rejection of Him, they also defy his divine laws, and since they do so, God gave mankind over to a reprobate mind to engage in sexual impurity and the degrading of their bodies one with the other (Ro.1:24,26–28).

The first marriage that God created in Genesis consisted of ***one*** man, Adam, and ***one*** woman, Eve, and it fully defined marriage. All attempts by man to fabricate a union between more than two persons or between persons of the same sex is an abomination that God cannot bless since it is destructive to his own purpose in creating marriage in the beginning. God sanctioned marriage not only for companionship but also for the begetting of children in order to perpetuate the human race. Those who engage in homosexual unions ultimately condemn themselves to death inasmuch as they cannot procreate. They defy their own human nature and purpose as well as God. Any attempt to evade that fact through adoption only magnifies their sin by involving innocent children in their folly as they strive to perpetuate their sin through them.

God's definition of marriage stands firm regardless of man's attempt at circumvention. Such "civil unions," as they are commonly referred to by sinful man, between those of the same sex have absolutely no standing before God and are not, therefore, marriage at all. So-called civil unions are but a legal contrivance by the ungodly that attempts to justify the sin of homosexuality, perpetuate it by example, and gain the approval of mankind in order to achieve various social and economic benefits that were intended to encourage legitimate godly marriages.

Divorce

Marriage is a sacred institution that is ordained by God, whereas divorce is an abomination contrived by man, or as it is often said, "marriage is made in Heaven, and divorce is made in Hell." A man and a woman are joined in marriage before God in the presence of witnesses, and it is a time of great rejoicing, but divorce comes about before a human judge in the seclusion of a courtroom and it is a time of terrible grief and pain as man attempts to tear apart bonds that go far beyond a mere legality. Interestingly, we find no place in

Scripture where divorce was ever initiated by the wife, but only by the husband. Inasmuch as it takes two to maintain a successful marriage, there is a sense in which neither party can be completely absolved of responsibility, and today it is more often the woman who institutes the divorce proceedings. In fact most men encourage their wives to do that rather than seek a divorce themselves since it appears to make them out as the offended party.

> "**The Pharisees also came unto [Jesus], tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder"** (Mt.19:3–6).

The word "asunder" in Matthew 19, verse 6 means to "separate," but a secular divorce only grants permission for the husband and wife to live apart from each other; it cannot be a termination of a sacred marriage in which God declared them to be one flesh. We can engage in no sacred ceremony before God to dissolve a marriage because any separation or divorce is in direct opposition to God's will. Furthermore, joining to another after divorce through an act of remarriage is a further break of sacred trust and is sin of the same magnitude as adultery.

> **"They say unto [Jesus], Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so"** (Mt.19:7,8).

Jesus said that it was only because of the hardness of the hearts of men that Moses allowed a letter of divorcement that the woman could be "put away" (Mk.10:4,5). "But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and ***cleave*** to his wife; and they ***twain*** shall be ***one flesh***: so then they are no more twain, but ***one flesh***" (Mk.10:6–8;

emphasis added). We must ask ourselves, since a man and a woman are made one flesh by an act of God, how their one flesh can be divided again into two by the acts of men.

Because Christians continue to live in an age where most men's hearts are still hardened against God and likewise in marriage toward their spouse, circumstances arise where it may become necessary to terminate a marriage relationship to maintain peace. Actions committed by either or both spouses against the other are grounded in sin, are often impossible to reconcile with ideal marriage, and thus form justifiable grounds for divorce. That action is never to be undertaken lightly realizing that divorce is ***always*** offensive to God regardless of circumstances. Nevertheless, three conditions constitute such a travesty of marriage as a creation of God that it fails to live up to the lofty goals that God intended for it and wrecks it internally. So much so that it is effectively nullified making any semblance of its continuance as a genuine marriage only hypocritical mockery.

Adultery

We see in Scripture the sanctity of marriage inasmuch as sexual infidelity is the only valid reason for divorce given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:32). We must ask ourselves why divorce is allowable even for that cause. It is because the guilty party has joined himself or herself to strange flesh and in doing so has already broken the bond of marriage through the sin of adultery, which has also broken the Law of God for marriage. For that reason alone, a man may decide to separate himself to live apart from his wife and have no further responsibility for her welfare.

> **"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery"** (Mt.19:9).

We must understand that since death was the legal penalty for committing adultery in Israel, it was never addressed as a justification for divorce. Under the Mosaic Law, if a person was found guilty of having committed adultery he or she was immediately stoned to death. The innocent party was then free to remarry inasmuch as the death of

their spouse released them from the marriage bonds with them. In most parts of the world today, adultery does not result in the death of the offender. Nevertheless, a man or woman who commits adultery effectively becomes dead to their spouse, and a secular divorce becomes the only legal remedy in the absence of capital punishment to confirm in the eyes of man that which has already taken place in the eyes of God.

However, if a man divorces his wife merely because he tires of her and desires to marry another, or if a woman divorces her husband merely because she grows tired of him and desires to marry another, it constitutes the sin of adultery on their part even if physical infidelity has not yet taken place (Mt.5:28). Therefore, to merely state that one no longer loves his or her spouse and is instead in love with another is not a just reason for divorce. That was made very clear when Jesus' said, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery" (Mk.10:11,12). The offending spouse is guilty of adultery, and the innocent party in such a divorce is free to remarry just as if an act of adultery had been committed while they were still living together. It follows however that if neither spouse is faithful but have agreed together to divorce that they may both marry other spouses, they are both adulterers and there is no innocent party.

Abandonment

A husband or wife may legitimately seek an annulment of their marriage in the event of abandonment. Annulment means to declare the marriage invalid. This is not the same as divorce, and it should not be used to circumvent the Scriptural requirements of divorce. The justification for annulment is the entering into the marriage bonds under false pretense. That is, one party is already married to another, or he or she never intended to carry out the obligations of the sacred institution of marriage. Some, declaring themselves to be believers, may have lied to form an unequal union with a true believer to benefit their own evil ends. In those cases, the vows taken by either or both

were a lie before God, and the bearing of false witness before man renders the marriage itself invalid.

Annulment should not ordinarily be permitted after physical consummation of the marriage has taken place except in the case of polygamy (including bigamy) since polygamy constitutes adultery plain and simple that takes place outside a valid marriage. If a child is conceived from such a relationship, it further compounds the sin. Polygamy is a criminal act not unlike rape if committed against an innocent party who sincerely entered into the relationship unknowingly.

In the event that a spouse in a marriage of long standing leaves his or her spouse and refuses to honor their wedding vows making reconciliation impossible, divorce by the innocent party is often the only recourse since annulment is no longer a valid remedy. That is what Paul referred to when he said that Christians must often let the unbelieving spouse go his or her own way to maintain peace (1Co.7:15).

Spousal Abuse

Spousal abuse is directly related in many ways to abandonment inasmuch as it perverts the wedding vows by leaving them unfulfilled. When a man and woman marry, they are to be mutual helpers working together for the glory of God, not antagonists bent upon destroying their God-given relationship. Abuse can take two forms, physical, and mental. Physical abuse is commonly committed by the husband who is ordinarily the stronger of the two, though physical abuse by a wife is not unheard of in some marriages. Continuing to live together with a violent spouse endangers the health and may very well risk the life of the innocent party.

Mental abuse is as damaging to the marital relationship as is physical violence, and it may be equally committed by either spouse. Though the man and woman continue to live together, we find that the vows of the marriage have already been shattered by their animosity toward it and each other. That situation does not constitute marriage in the biblical sense, but only makes a mockery of it. For that reason, the

offended party should be free to seek a legal divorce from a marriage that is not truly a marriage to begin with.

Remarriage

Marriage was intended to be a permanent bond that would exist forever, but it was instituted before the sentence of death was pronounced upon the human race because of sin. Therefore, marriage is now binding only for the life span of both spouses, until God breaks asunder marriage relationships through the death of one of the spouses. When He does so, the marriage bond is completely dissolved by Him thus permitting the remaining person to remarry with his blessing, as we observe from the following text written in the epistle to the Romans.

> **"For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man."** (Ro.7:2,3).[91]

Following a divorce the only marriage that is legally permitted is re-marriage between the original divorced spouses, and then ***only*** if adultery has not taken place through marriage to another person by either party in the interim.

> **When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. And if the latter**

[91] In context, Paul was using this statement regarding marriage to illustrate how we are now dead to the Law that ruled over Adam's race because of sin so that we now are free to be joined to grace in Jesus Christ who dissolved the bonds of the Law in his act of atonement. Whereas we once were in Adam, we are now in Christ.

husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD… (De.24:1–4).

Paul said regarding this, "And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife (1Co.7:10,11). The Apostle Paul did ***not*** say that they must divorce their second spouse in order to be rejoined to their first spouse as some falsely accuse him of saying. As the passage in Deuteronomy makes clear, that would be an abomination before the Lord. It would only compound the sin of adultery. What has been done cannot be undone, and it is not possible to reverse sin by committing more sin to gain that end.

Applying the Doctrine of Grace to Marriage

As Christians, we are no longer bound under the law, but we live in an amazing state of grace wherein God forgives our sins on the same basis that we forgive others (Mt.6:12). We must apply that same principle to the law concerning marriage and adultery as we do to the other nine commandments of God. That does not mean that we should intentionally break the law concerning marriage or minimize the seriousness of doing so, but that we so often do so out of our weakness in the flesh and the selfishness of our hearts. Therefore, we desperately need to apply God's grace to all questions regarding the marriage relationship and not seek to condemn others for human faults that we all have in common. There but for the grace of God, stand we as well.

Repentance

The laws of marriage just as all other divine law is impossible for sinful man to fully understand much less live up to. Man remains a sinful creature even after his redemption, both born in sin and with an incurable appetite to commit sin. That should not be since in all things we should seek to please God and allow the love of Christ to constrain

us in our thoughts and actions (2Co.5:14). However, as with any other sin that man commits, the grace of God can provide forgiveness and healing through the atonement of Christ for failures to comply with the law of marriage when one genuinely repents of their evil and turns to Him.

Forgiveness

Following repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are highly commended even in the worst of situations in order that a marriage may be saved and allow love to prevail. In the days of Hosea the prophet, Israel had become like a wife guilty of prostitution. Nevertheless, God sought to woo her back and cleanse her of her sin by redeeming her to Himself even as she repeatedly rebelled against his love. God demonstrated his own dilemma in doing so by directing Hosea to marry Gomer, who was a prostitute, to bear the prophet's children (Ho.1:2,3). In reading about their marriage, we gain understanding into God's holy desire to redeem men and women and his overwhelming love for mankind. There is little doubt that Hosea loved Gomer in the same manner that God loved Israel. God never gave up on Israel saying, "…I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her" (Ho.2:14).

Sadly, many today due to the hardness of their hearts cannot bring themselves to take a similar view as God did toward a wayward spouse, since to forgive is in the providence of divine love and the ability to commit sin is only an all too common human failing. The injury and hurt is just too severe to swallow. Furthermore, it seems unfair and unjust that the offended party should suffer the terrible loss and debasement upon themselves in order to forgive their spouse unconditionally. Nevertheless, we see that God suffered the loss of his only Son in order to forgive mankind for their sinful debts against Him for which they could never make restitution themselves. Therefore, the offended spouse must also be willing to forgive on the basis of grace alone, as does God, and suffer the injustice and shame for the sinful act upon themselves because of the love that they have for the other.

Reconciliation

Nevertheless, forgiveness does not automatically bring forth reconciliation in marriage. The breach of trust is just too deep to accept a return to the prior conditions of marriage until assurance and trust is rebuilt between the two parties. That often takes considerable time, and may require a period of separation wherein true repentance can be demonstrated. During that time, the spouses may choose to court each other and attempt to re-establish the basis for their marriage before they can again live together under one roof. If the offending party has truly repented and the other party has truly forgiven, the marriage that is reestablished may be much stronger and more rewarding for both parties than was the marriage originally inasmuch as the component of redemption has been added to it. In like manner, the relationship we have with God has been made much stronger and surer than was Adam's because of the redemption price that was paid for us by Him who loved us.

The Family Unit

As we discussed marriage in this chapter thus far, we concentrated on the relationship as if it regarded only the man and the woman thus joined. However, the consequence of that relationship most often brings forth offspring that cements the marriage relationship into a greater family unit that consists of a father, a mother, and any number of children. Thus, any abuse of the divine law of marriage seriously affects not only the two principals directly involved in marriage, but also their immediate offspring and even future generations to come.

Since divorce is so devastating to the larger family unit, it must be avoided regardless of any costs to individual comfort or convenience. For that reason, many marriages continue on in a broken form without repentance, forgiveness, or reconciliation until children reach the age of maturity. While the sense of responsibility that is being demonstrated for the sake of children is laudable, the sin of the broken relationship continues to be felt by all parties of the family unit throughout their entire lifetime, which includes the children. That is

why reconciliation based upon true repentance and genuine forgiveness is so important to stress.

Second Marriages

All too often, reconciliation fails and a marriage ends in divorce. That is especially so where physical abuse was present or true repentance by the offending party is not clearly demonstrated to the offended spouse. At other times, the stain left by sin is just too deep to eradicate from the mind even for the sake of their children.

There are many living today in a second marriage that came about following an earlier divorce — quite often an unscriptural one. Those who find themselves at fault in this situation should seek divine forgiveness and through repentance seek to live out their lives with their present spouse in the fear of God and in full recognition of his grace to heal their iniquity. Those that do so often find the blessings that were absent in their prior marriage and find peace with God and their second spouse.

In Summary

Today, with Godless marriages and frequent divorce, the divine law concerning marriage is not easy for us to accept, nor was it in the days when Jesus addressed the people of Israel. In this study, we viewed the complexity of the divine law concerning marriage and the difficulties encountered in applying it to our sinful lives in today's world. It was of course impossible to consider every eventuality and circumstance. This complexity accounts for the many interpretations being made from Scripture concerning divorce today — often in an attempt to bend the Law to one's own liking.

The quality of God's love and mercy is not constrained by man's sinfulness, but his grace amazingly rises up to cover it all. The sexual sins of fornication and adultery are in many ways the most egregious and damning sins that one can commit because of their highly intimate and personal nature. Yet, for every sin that a man can commit, God has provided a cure that was purchased at great price through the death of his Son. Sins that violate the law of marriage are no exception. Therefore, it is not only important that a person who

commits such terrible acts be reconciled to his or her spouse if that be at all possible, he or she must first and foremost be reconciled to God whose divine law he or she has broken. Though acts of sin harm others, they also harm us as well. True repentance and reconciliation to the salving of our souls cannot ever occur on the human plane. Even when reconciliation is effected between spouses, past sins can remain like a lead weight to drag a marriage down again. Ultimately, only God can forgive sin and it is to Him that we should and must turn to heal us of us our sins and to fully repair a breach in marriage. He is willing and He is able to do so if we will but turn to Him exposing the broken and contrite heart of a truly repentant sinner in need of his grace.

Chapter 16.2 Beginning of Life Issues

Adam and Eve were created through the exclusive and divine action of God Himself without any human agency being involved in any way. Their human bodies were molded directly by Him out of lifeless physical organic elements, and only then did God breathe the gift of life into them such that they became living souls having individual being and identity apart from yet contingent upon their Creator.

Within the intimate unique relationship of the first marriage, God created a reproductive function within and between the bodies of Adam and Eve in order to produce physical offspring that would eventually populate the earth with an entire race of men to glorify God's Name and purpose. "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Ge.1:28). "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living" (Ge.3:20).

Procreation of the Human Race

The human physical existence of Adam's offspring therefore begins at conception when the very first physical elements of a living human body come into being within the womb of the mother. There can be no serious doubt of that. Modern medical science has found no point in time where a human fetus[92] is not a living human body or where it suddenly becomes one. Conceived by human parents, it was and is a living human body from the moment of conception.

Formation of the Living Soul

The significant issue is whether the physical body growing in the womb has the ***spiritual*** properties associated with human life and the self-awareness of a human ***soul*** prior to birth. That is, does God

[92] *Fetus* from the Latin means "unborn child."

breathe the breath of ***spiritual*** viability into the unborn child at conception, at some later stage during its development, or still later at the moment of its emergence from the womb into the physical world?

The human spirit of life has always been equated with breathing since earliest biblical times as we have discussed earlier in this work. The spirit of man was seen to leave the human body along with the last breath at death. In like manner, as the baby takes the first breath of air following birth, God simultaneously breathes the breath of spiritual viability into the child much as He did Adam such that the physical body only then gains the full properties of a living soul.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that the human fetus as a living body prior to spiritual viability has at least some rudimentary sense of physical awareness in the later stages of its development well before its birth into the world takes place. It is most certain that it can experience physical comfort, has a sense of well-being, and can feel physical pain in a rudimentary sense at least.

Sanctity of the Human Body before Birth

It is apparent that without the formation of living physical bodies through the natural human process that God has ordained, God's mandate for the procreation of Adam's race would be thwarted and his own glory would be abridged. Therefore, it is evident that God himself oversees and supervises the development of each human fetus to prepare a body for each unique human spirit to occupy at birth. The writer to the Hebrews declared that fact regarding the human body that Jesus occupied in this life as being uniquely prepared as a sacrificial offering for the sins of mankind: "Wherefore when he [Jesus] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me" (He.10:5).

Likewise, David also marveled regarding the time that his physical body had developed in his mother's womb, from the moment of conception to birth, as being in the providence, foreknowledge, oversight, and will of God until his spirit had come forth to occupy the body thus formed at the time ordained for him to walk upon the earth:

> **"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully**

> **and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them"** (Ps.139:13–16)**.**

Therefore, the physical development of the human body from the moment of conception up to and including physical birth into the world must be carefully protected by mankind and held to be sacrosanct as the living physical vessel that combined with the spirit at birth will comprise the soul of each human being as God has ordained. For that reason, the mother must take exceptional care that she takes no undue risks that could cause it any physical harm. She must eat well and avoid the partaking of drugs, alcohol, or any other harmful substances that could impair the proper development of the unborn child (cf. Jud. 13:1–24), but instead provide in every way for its proper nourishment and care while it remains within her own body.

Feticide

The taking of a human life while still in the womb whether deliberate or inadvertent as a consequence of committing a violent act is technically referred to as feticide. Because the Latin word *fetus* is commonly used instead of its English translation, which is "unborn child," the killing of an unborn child is often viewed as a lesser crime than murder. However inasmuch as a fetus is a human body, the act does not differ in any appreciable way from murder and was not treated differently by God under the Mosaic Law. In Exodus chapter 21 verses 22–25, we find feticide listed with other personal injuries that men may commit against another such that if the fetus is harmed by any violence to the mother the penalty is quite similar. If the mother miscarries and the child has not been harmed in any way the perpetrator of the act may only be heavily fined as compensation. However, if the child has suffered any serious injury a range of physical penalties would be levied against the perpetrator

corresponding to the degree of injury, and if the unborn child died, the law also demanded life for life (Ex.22:23).

Murder we must note is always an act committed against a physical body alone inasmuch as the soul and spirit of a human being is eternal and is not subject to time or the presence of the body for its continued existence. The spirit of life and of the soul is within the providence of God alone (cf. Mt.10:28; Lu.12:4). Therefore, to argue that the deliberate killing of a fetus in the womb is not murder based upon it not yet holding a spirit or soul until birth takes place will not stand up to close rational scrutiny. It is murder of the same order as is killing the body of any other human being merely to satisfy ones own selfish ends.

At times during the development of a fetus in the womb, the pregnancy is spontaneously cut short because of some serious anomaly that is beyond human control or prevention. In that instance, we find that God Himself for his own purposes has chosen not to bring the fetus to full term, and we say that the woman has "miscarried" or that a "spontaneous abortion" has taken place. Since God has not yet breathed the spirit of life into the body, a living soul was not ever created nor was it lost. This all takes place within the divine providence of God, but when mankind attempts to take that divine right upon themselves to deliberately abort a fetus by any means, they find themselves opposing God's will and therefore commit a grievous sin on a par with the murder of a living human being that consists of body, spirit, and soul.

Due to the widespread sin of fornication, many women and even young teenagers find themselves pregnant as a consequence of the sinful act of "recreational sex" outside the bonds of marriage. While the women find themselves with child, their male partner who is complicit in the committing of such a sin is often free to continue his sinful acts with still other women. The extent to which many men will concede any responsibility at all is to provide funding for the child to be aborted thus compounding sin. Still other men see pregnancy as the woman's sole fault and responsibility.

Women and especially young teenagers without proper means to care for a child alone are often directed into accepting feticide

through clinical abortion by their wayward boyfriend, their parents, friends, and the unsound advice received from organizations such as "Planned Parenthood" and its supporters. Women today are being deluded into thinking that an unborn child is merely "a lifeless product of conception" much as if they had developed a tumor that must be cut out so that they can continue on with their own lives. The primary motive for perpetuating that delusion is money. If a woman commits sin by giving into that delusion, how much more guilty of sin are those who commit the actual acts of serial murder cloaked in medical terms for monetary gain. God have mercy on any nation whose laws allow that immoral practice to continue.

In the aftermath of conceding to the killing of their unborn child, a young woman often suffers serious physical consequences endangering their future health and/or rendering them barren. Furthermore, mental consequences of the sinful act can haunt them for a lifetime. The good news is that God will forgive this terrible sin even as He will forgive all other sins when we humbly turn to Him in genuine and contrite confession. Only when this sin is placed under the blood of Christ can there be any peace of mind and hope for the future.

Rape and Incest

Other unintended pregnancies are brought about through the criminal acts of rape or incest. Rape is an act of physical violence, often sexual in nature, committed against a woman who in turn resists the act with all the resources available to her. In this instance, the woman is completely innocent of fornication in the sinful act, but she unfortunately still bears the stigma of the act and may become pregnant with the rapist's child. In the case of the involvement of an underage child, an act must be considered rape when it is committed by an adult who has full authority and control over the child regardless of whether the children make any attempt to defend themselves.

Incest is an act of sexual union committed with a blood relative. Most commonly, such an act is committed by a parent upon a child whose natural love and innocent trust for their parent often makes such an act possible without resorting to physical violence.

Incest with a child is a tremendous violation of maternal or paternal love and makes such an act equivalent to the act of criminal rape.

In both the cases of rape and incest, feticide through clinical abortion is often committed to hide the act or in an attempt to somehow erase it. However, one sin cannot ever erase another. The babies brought forth from such acts are completely innocent of the acts that have brought them into existence. Therefore, in those two situations, it is far better that babies resulting from such acts be offered up for adoption immediately after childbirth rather than committing the sin of feticide. In doing that, the child loses the stigma associated with their conception as they become adopted by another family who has no knowledge of its origin. It goes without saying that the perpetrators of such heinous acts should be vigorously prosecuted by the laws of a just society.

Viability of the Fetus

There is some evidence that the early church considered the fetus to be a viable human body three months after conception. This was likely an arbitrary academic assumption based upon the general human appearance of the fetus by the time that it had reached that stage of development in the womb. For that reason some civil laws prohibit clinical abortions following the first trimester of pregnancy. There is absolutely no reason to believe that intentional forced terminations of human pregnancies was being sanctioned by the church prior to three months. Instead, that ruling would only have affected how the physical remains of a human fetus was to be handled after a miscarriage had taken place by considering an aborted fetus fully deserving of traditional Christian burial if it had reached the first trimester. In recent years even that limited prohibition has been lifted by liberal court rulings allowing an unborn child to be aborted at any stage of development. Living bodies of children are even being killed as they emerge from the womb just prior to their first breath of air through so-called “partial birth abortions.”

Along with the technical advancement of medical science, we now have the ability to learn much about the fetus during its development from conception to birth. Often it can be determined that

some physical defect has occurred that would render the life of the child difficult or impossible after birth has taken place. So advanced has medical procedures become that it is often possible to correct such a defect while the child is still in the womb or at least to prepare to immediately repair the defect as soon as birth takes place. At other times, no remedy is humanly possible.

It is at that time that a woman is often ill advised to terminate the pregnancy through deliberate abortion — thus killing the unborn child rather than having it suffer from a life-long disability. As we have discussed previously, God Himself often brings forth a spontaneous abortion when He deems that the malformation is sufficiently severe. However, if God does not choose to do so, it is sinful for mankind to assume that they should overrule his decision. That is because every human life that God has deemed viable remains paramount to his will.

Most often the decision to clinically abort a fetus is not based upon the supposed suffering of a child in bearing a life-long disability at all, but upon the supposed ordeal that the parents would face in raising up such a child and providing for its future. Thus, it is deemed acceptable by sinful man to commit murder to protect a "normal" lifestyle that has no place for the extraordinary. However, those that humbly accept the great responsibility that God has placed upon them through embracing such a child are often rewarded in ways that they could not even imagine beforehand. God has often supplemented various human disabilities with extraordinary attributes and abilities in other ways that are highly beneficial to mankind.

Self-defense of the Mother

A common issue that is brought up by advocates of unrestricted clinical abortion is the matter concerning the health of the mother. The intentional killing of another human being for selfish personal benefit is always a sinful act in the eyes of God. Yet when faced with a situation in which the loss of human life is inevitable as a consequence of violence committed against oneself or the life of the attacker who initiates the act, one is faced with defending himself. Though it is often possible to do so without inflicting irreparable harm

upon the attacker, in the extreme case it could mean committing murder or forfeiting ones own life by not defending oneself. For that reason human civil laws are more lenient. There may be quite unusual instances in which the mother's life could be seriously threatened by a pregnancy brought to full term. However, that would be very rare indeed, and in that instance every available medical effort should be made to save the life of both the mother and the child.

Today, an imagined self defense is commonly put forth for committing feticide on the basis of childbirth causing some supposed mental or minor discomfort or inconvenience for the mother that in no way threatens her life physically yet is called self defense. In the eyes of God, a woman who kills her unborn child or willfully permits it to be killed through forced abortion is guilty of murder regardless of the civil laws of the land.

A Woman's Right to Choose

A common issue today is clinical abortion of a fetus based upon a woman's right to choose how her own body will be used by another. The U.S. courts have upheld such a strange notion as a constitutional issue based on a person's right to personal privacy. Up to the moment of conception, a woman does have the basic right not to bear children inasmuch as God has not specifically mandated that every woman must marry and bear offspring. As conception takes place, however, that choice is immediately and irrevocably surrendered by the woman in favor of the basic right of the unborn child within her to breathe in the spirit of life at birth.

It is interesting to notice that those who favor abortion as a means of liberating themselves from the birth of an unwanted child prefer to call themselves "pro-choice" advocates. This "choice" of words is merely an attempt to free them from the stigma of what they really advocate. Freedom to choose is not the issue; life or death of the unborn is the issue. "Pro-choice really amounts to "pro-murder" of children before they are born.

Procreation is a significant consequence and purpose of marriage between a man and a woman. For that reason, some women may choose to live an unmarried life in order to pursue a career or

some noble cause that honors God through a chaste lifestyle. Nevertheless, just as God saw that it was not good that man should be alone, most women desire the close companionship of one man for whom they were created even as was Eve for Adam (Ge.3:16). That basic need is fully satisfied only through the institution of marriage in which the man and woman become one flesh. In committing herself fully to her husband, a woman implicitly agrees to bear children as God wills through that intimate relationship to form the core of a family unit. In return, the husband offers his good name and reputation to protect it from harm.

Birth Control

In two specific places in Scripture we find God ordering mankind to be "fruitful and multiply." One of those instances is immediately subsequent to the creation of Adam and Eve (Ge. 1:22,28), and the second instance is directed to Noah and his sons after the great flood had destroyed the human population of the earth (Ge.9:1,7). Historic context is very important here. We find in both of those instances that mankind was extremely few in number thus necessitating God's mandate to replenish the earth with others of their own kind.

From the beginning it was God's purpose that mankind subdue and dominate the earth both through their abilities and through their increasing numbers (Ge.1:28). Today, the human race exists in every inhabitable place on the face of the earth, and in some areas, the population even exceeds the ability of the land to support them. Quite obviously, we cannot take this commandment as a general mandate for mankind to procreate at every opportunity or we would find ourselves pushing the population growth to the point of extinction. Furthermore, we could even find ourselves commending the sins of fornication, adultery, and polygamy if this mandate is carried to an extreme. Therefore, God is only mandating responsible procreation that is to take place only within the bonds of legitimate and sanctioned marriage relationships between one man and one woman.

Even within the institution of marriage, some couples may choose to delay the formation of a family until they have the financial

means and resources to properly care for their offspring. The Roman Catholic position is such that any means of artificial birth control by Christians is to be viewed as opposing God in bringing forth additional subjects into the world to populate the church. However, total abstinence in marriage is contrary to its purpose in cementing two into one flesh. The Protestant position therefore is in general less stringent granting that a husband and wife should be allowed some means to control the size of their family short of abstinence in order to properly ensure an intimate marriage relationship (cf. 1Co.7:5) and still allow for the proper development and well-being of each of their offspring.

In earlier agrarian societies, a greater number of offspring provided for the perpetuation and prosperity of a family farm as each of them contributed their own labor to that end beginning at an early age. Life was hard, and human mortality was high. In a modern urban society, however, far greater family resources must be expended to ensure that each child has a proper start in life through careful nurture and education, while the child's own contribution to that end is limited to receiving its benefits.

Furthermore, living conditions as well as medical science now ensures that infant and child mortality has been greatly reduced over that of earlier days thus making larger family units unnecessary. Therefore, while life must be protected and considered sacrosanct from the very moment of conception onward, mankind has no inherent responsibility to ensure that every marriage produces an unlimited number of offspring.

The Miracle of Birth

At the moment of birth, a miraculous transformation takes place as the breath of life is breathed into the emerging infant body. Immediately after the long awaited event has occurred, the mother of the child is washed over with an overwhelming love in order that she may tirelessly care for the child in the very difficult days just following birth up until the child is weaned. As the first gasp of air is breathed in, the infant becomes a living soul taking on the full stature of Adam's race through the flesh. Unfortunately, that means that the infant also takes on the sin-nature of Adam as well. As a consequence

of that nature, the growing child must soon be continually corrected as well as nurtured by parents to prevent the child's own fallen nature from overcoming him or her in the adult years ahead.

Infanticide

Due to the sin nature of fallen mankind, the miraculous birth of a child is not always received with the great joy that it deserves. To many married couples the birth of a child is only seen as a hindrance to the furtherance of the carefree life-style to which they have been previously accustomed. In all too many instances, the life of the child has already been forfeited through feticide. In other instances, however, the child is frivolously born and treated as chattel much as one would treat a toy or a pet dog or cat. Unwanted toys and even pets can be easily discarded when one tires of them, but an unwanted child is not so easily disposed of because of the conflicting laws of the land wherein killing a child that is born is murder whereas killing a child in the womb is legal. That distinction is, of course, impossible to rationally justify as we have discussed earlier. Consequently, many children are merely ignored, uncared for, and even openly abused or enslaved. Carried to an extreme, the child's life becomes endangered and infanticide could soon follow.

The Canaanites of old lived in a corrupt society wherein the human sacrifice of infants was common through their worship of Baal. Cloaked in religion, their sinful desire to be rid of unwanted children was readily accomplished by putting their babies in the arms of an idol of Baal that was heated red-hot by a fire built at its base. Not only was infanticide acceptable, it was religiously encouraged. It was that unredeemable and corrupt people that God ordered Israel to totally exterminate as they entered the land lest any trace of their sinfulness remain to taint them as well. That extreme order clearly demonstrates God's position on infanticide. God Himself (the pre-incarnate Christ) was in command of the Israelites as they took the land of Canaan by force (Jos.5:13–15).

Due to widespread fornication among our youth today, children are often born to unwed teenagers. Some of those young mothers will hide, deny, or ignore the fact that they are pregnant until

they spontaneously give birth. Lacking the spiritual maturity to understand what they are doing, a teen-age mother will often dispose of a newborn baby in any way possible – such as discarding them in dumpsters or trash cans. Much the same as a person will deny that they have a serious disease at first, those young girls merely deny in their own minds that they have ever delivered a baby into the world. The liberal abortion laws in the United States and other nations of the world only adds to their lack of understanding of the seriousness of the crime and their sin against God.

Adoption

If feticide and infanticide are an abomination before God, adoption is both a grace and a wondrous blessing. Children are frequently left orphaned as a consequence of the death of both their parents. Due to the sin of fornication, unwed mothers often give up their baby to the state because of the social stigma of bearing a bastard child, or because they are physically or mentally unable to care for it. Though the stigma of the sin of fornication continues, it is not compounded by committing feticide or infanticide.

In an extreme case, children may be placed in foster care or in an orphanage by civil authorities. Siblings are often divided up from each other in such cases thus further severing natural family ties. The child is fortunate if he or she is placed in the care of another close family member who truly seeks after their well being rather than being placed in the care of strangers. In that instance, siblings have a better opportunity of staying together. Nevertheless, foster children are often seen as outsiders by their state appointed custodians and, unfortunately, the children often see themselves as unloved and without value.

That unnatural disaffiliation can be avoided through the process of legal adoption wherein the child is given the new family's name as their own and are incorporated within the family without any deferential treatment regarding the circumstances of their natural birth. Like branches that are grafted into a living vine, they become part and parcel of the family unit such that they belong to a new creation much in the same way that a believer is translated from Adam's race into the

family of God through the person of Christ. They are not only assured that they are wanted, but that they are loved as well.

The Power of Grace

Just as is the case concerning the divine law of marriage, the circumstances surrounding the care of children from conception onward provide many opportunities for the commission of terrible sins. Feticide, infanticide, and child abuse may often escape deserved punishment by human laws, but the sin-nature of such violations does not ever escape the notice of God. The consequences of such sinful acts demand the death penalty as does all sin in his sight. Many women and even some men suffer grief and sorrow throughout their lifetimes for the terrible act of feticide that they have earlier committed or encouraged — whether out of ignorance or willfully.

However, God has provided a means of forgiveness for those sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ even as He has with any other sin that mankind can commit out of their fallen nature. Though the regret may linger on, the guilt can be healed by turning to the One who is the author of the divine law that was broken. God is willing not only to forgive but also to redeem any sinner from divine penalty if we will but turn to Him with a genuinely broken and contrite heart.

Chapter 16.3 End of Life Issues

In this chapter, we shall discuss the value of extended human life throughout the time following birth, and the eventual and necessary death of the human body including various ways in which that end comes about. In addition, we shall discuss the requirement of honoring its God-given purpose, and finally we shall discuss the necessity of properly disposing of the physical body when its mission on earth is completed as a consequence of the spirit and the soul having departed from it. That disposition actually begins a process of decay in order that it may undergo a transformation from the mortal body to the immortal at the time of the resurrection of the dead.

Quality of Life Arguments

While all men are created equal in value by their Creator, it does not follow that all are born with the same physical and mental attributes. We are not clones of Adam, but his descendents through many generations. We should note that inherited physical and mental attributes are both in the realm of the physical body, and cannot therefore elevate or detract from the value of the human soul and the divine spirit through which God gives the physical body life at birth.

Therefore, the true value of human life is to be found only in its Creator. If that fact is discounted, human life has no intrinsic value at all. As someone has stated, mankind is but a rash on the surface of a minor planet revolving around an unremarkable star that is located on the edge of a vast galaxy that is itself dwarfed by even larger galaxies within the infinite regions of space. Moreover, many believe that the rash of human existence came about only from the evolution of a chance mixture of primitive physical elements that somehow found their way into a primeval ooze. Human thought and existence then has no purposeful reality, but is only the product of physical calculations of the human brain much as we find in modern-day electronic computers. Since it is falsely assumed that there is no Creator at all, man has no eternal soul, has no intrinsic value, and is responsible to no one but themselves for their actions in an otherwise meaningless life.

Accordingly, men often set their own standards for the acceptability of human life based solely upon the quality of the physical body while fully ignoring the eternal value of the human spirit and soul that occupies it. Various defects that may have been received at birth or encountered later as a consequence of injury caused to the body by various means may render the body incapable of achieving or maintaining that arbitrary set of standards. Under such circumstances, sinful man may reason that such a person is better off dead to end his own suffering, real or imagined, and to relieve society from the burden of tolerating or caring for them. Such thinking ultimately leads to the dreaded sins of suicide, euthanasia, and genocide based upon those arbitrary standards.

Suicide

Neglecting the spark of the divine, which animates and gives life all meaning, men and women who suffer great physical or mental pain in life often contemplate and resort to suicide to alleviate their suffering. Much of the mental pain that mankind suffers has been brought about by the fact that mankind intentionally ignores God's laws that teach us how to live our lives productively and peacefully. Additionally, physical pain is caused by the sinful condition of mankind that festers in the flesh and is therefore universal to us all as the physical offspring of Adam. Satan often takes advantage of such suffering to induce men to take their own life through convincing them that there are no eternal consequences in doing so. God Himself often relieves man's suffering by taking life from their body in his own providence, but mankind has never had that authority delegated to them.

In as much as suicide is the intentional killing of a human body to attain one's desired ends, there is no difference in God's eyes between suicide and murder, which is expressly prohibited in the Decalogue. While such an act is beyond the ability of man's civil law to exact punishment, inasmuch as death removes the perpetrator far beyond any human jurisdiction, the one who commits suicide must ultimately stand before a just God to answer for that deed which is in violation of the Creator's just Law.

Euthanasia

Euthanasia, also known as "mercy killing" is the intentional taking of human life to prevent long suffering of an individual that has no foreseeable end or relief short of death. Euthanasia is often committed with the permission of the sufferer, and for that reason is often referred to as "assisted suicide." Because of the supposed altruistic motivation for such an act, some would not consider it murder, but a compassionate act of mercy. Yet, God has never sanctioned such an act since to do so would put man's own supposed wisdom and authority regarding life and death above his own. Such an act therefore constitutes murder in the eyes of God.

Genocide

The "survival of the fittest" theory that is deeply imbedded within Darwinian evolutionism implies that some forms of human life are worth more than are others. Therefore, evolution itself mandates the extermination of inferior species and races in favor of the elevation of more viable ones until one ultimate race alone reigns supreme. While the classical evolutionist may only see this as occurring through natural processes over time, there have been those who have sought to give "natural evolution" a nudge by exterminating those who are considered in their own minds as members of inferior races. This practice is known as genocide.

The false differentiation of acceptable life over that which is unacceptable is all too often made upon the basis of arbitrary differentiation such as color of one's skin, a particular lifestyle, manner of dress, or various personal beliefs. Once that road is taken, its turns are often wide and varied. We should take note that Adolph Hitler's view of a superior Aryan race was largely based upon the theory of Darwinian evolutionism. In order for the Aryan race to evolve to its supposed pinnacle of perfection it was deemed necessary to first enslave and then exterminate all other races that were considered to be inferior to it beginning with Jews.

Institutionalized Causes of Death

Death sometimes comes about as the consequence of actions taken by governments to maintain control over sinful acts of mankind that seek to destroy a peacefully organized society. The two primary means through which that form of death comes about is the punishment of egregious crimes committed by individuals within a just society and the declaration of war against rogue nations that seek to subvert, undermine, or forcefully attack just and peaceful nations.

Warfare

Ironically, it is often necessary for Christians, who so highly value human life, to take up the sword in order to oppose evil and defend society against the organized efforts of evil nations and peoples to enslave and murder entire populations to attain covetous goals of world domination. While such evil desire for power is in the beginning contained within a nation, it must ultimately spill over into the world surrounding it as an evil nation hungers for increasingly more territory and spoil. When that occurs, it is the duty of just men to oppose such aggression with every political means available to contain it. When that fails, war becomes the inevitable recourse.[93] Even when war is waged for just means, many die on both sides of the conflict without apparent regard for innocence and the sanctity of life. For that reason, war must always be a last resort and never entered into lightly or used to evoke vengeance. Yet as is often said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."[94]

Many incorrectly oppose war for any reason on the basis of God's commandment prohibiting murder (Ex.20:13). However, a truly just war is waged to protect and perpetuate human life, not to take it

[93] The fifth century theologian, Augustine, put forth the unique and just circumstances for waging war, which has been accepted by Christian nations for centuries. Augustine and his teachings are discussed in Chapter 17.8 of Book III of this work.

[94] Attributed to the eighteenth century Irish philosopher and politician, Edmund Burke

indiscriminately for covetous personal benefit. Therefore, organized warfare in opposition to evil does not constitute murder. Rather, God's prohibition against murder is actually being upheld by opposing those nations that choose to commit that sinful act on a large scale.

Capital Punishment

In like manner, it is necessary for a just nation to enact laws to protect the life and property of its citizens to maintain domestic tranquility. Laws without penalties justly executed for their violation are meaningless. Therefore, penalties must be established that are appropriate for the violation committed. As God Himself said, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex.21:24,25) lest the penalty exceed the crime committed and government authority be found guilty of committing the very evil it professes to oppose.

Conversely, the penalty must not fall short of equity lest justice be thwarted and crime would be allowed to run rampant. We must realize that the commandment of God against committing murder does not prohibit capital punishment when just laws of the land are violated. God Himself has ordained human government as his agent: "Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil…if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Ro.13:3,4).

Nevertheless, capital punishment must be reserved only for the most egregious of crimes that culminate in murder. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Ge.9:9). God is the ultimate judge and arbitrator of life and death. He has nonetheless delegated the authority to execute his judgments on earth to man whom He created in his own image (Ro.13:1–4). When man takes the life of another through murder, his own life is automatically forfeit through just action of human government in turn lest the image of God be further tarnished by his sinful act.

Justice is best found in restitution, not in revenge. Nevertheless, restitution is not always possible to achieve in exact

kind. In that instance, justice must result in an equitable settlement that properly compensates for the loss. Men are often killed by another through an unintentional act in which there is no intent to take the life of another. That can often take place through general neglect, ignorance, or carelessness. At other times, the death of another may be unforeseeable and unavoidable. In all those instances, capital punishment is not appropriate, though lesser penalties may necessarily be extracted to provide for the proper care of dependents of the deceased.

Unfortunately, man's justice, unlike God's perfect justice, often falls short as serious mistakes in judgment are made. For that reason many criminals go free while some of the innocent are convicted and suffer punishment for acts that they did not commit. In our highly technical legal system, guilt or innocence is often determined by a jury of peers only after having listened to legal gymnastics presented by opposing lawyers and advised of obtuse matters of legal procedure by a presiding judge — all of which may have little direct bearing upon the fundamental guilt or innocence of the accused. The verdict is often dictated through the cleverness of the winning lawyer in presenting various points of law, and who is usually highly paid for his unique skills. That often puts the poor in the disadvantaged position of having relatively inexperienced representation by a court appointed lawyer, while the affluent can buy his freedom through representation by an experienced lawyer regardless of his guilt or innocence.

This situation is the most serious argument put forth against capital punishment. Once a person's life is taken, it cannot be restored to him or her, nor can he or she be compensated in any way. Having said that, it is just as impossible for many years spent in unjust imprisonment to be compensated for as well. For that reason, it is imperative that a person accused of a crime be considered not guilty until proven beyond any reasonable doubt to be guilty. As it is often correctly said, it is better for a thousand guilty persons to go free than for one person to be convicted and punished for a crime he or she did not commit. However, we should note that it is not the punishment that is at fault, but the failure of our imperfect justice system to consistently

determine guilt and innocence in every case. That is because regardless of any legal safeguards, our justice system is infused by fallible men from judges on down to jurors who by nature lack the spiritual discernment to carry out God's just dictates through human means. However, God with full knowledge of that fact has delegated that authority and responsibility to human government.

Differentiating Life from Death

Modern medical technology has led to the difficult question of determining what actually constitutes death. As long as there is some meaningful response from a person in reaction to external stimuli, it must be assumed that the soul and spirit is still present. When no external stimuli can create a response, it is then apparent that that person is in a deep sleep or coma that may be either temporary or permanent.

The human body can often be made to continue very basic cardiovascular functions and breathing by external mechanical means long after the soul and spirit that once inhabited it has departed for the eternal realm. The difficulty lies in determining when such a departure of the person has taken place. The usual means of detection is to measure the brain activity of a person that is in a coma and then comparing that activity with others who may or may not have previously recovered from similar comas.

Perpetual[95] Vegetative State

Unfortunately, the conclusions gained from that method cannot be absolutely certain. There have been those who have recovered from a deep coma months and even years after it began. Likewise, there have been those whose body has been kept alive for many years who never recovered. In this last instance medical resources and money has

[95] It should be noted that we have use the word "perpetual" rather than the commonly used word "persistent." Though the two words could generally be used interchangeably, it was felt that perpetual more properly described a state of unconsciousness that had no intervals of remission wherein the person may be lucid for brief intervals of time.

been expended in keeping a corpse alive in a perpetual vegetative state until the body can no longer be made to function due to spontaneous organ failure.

Because the decision to keep a person's body alive in a comatose state or to turn off a breathing machine eventually becomes a decision that must be made by a close loved one, we find that it is always a heart-wrenching one to make— especially so when the ailing person is in the prime of life and their condition has been brought about by a sudden unforeseen physical incident. At a time like that, the rational mind struggles against longing emotions for the person's recovery. It then becomes necessary to resort to prayer in order to seek out God's will. In the end, it is always God's will that must prevail. Keeping a corpse alive long after the soul and spirit has departed is a travesty just as much as is withholding beneficial medical procedures.

Living Wills

Though a person in a comatose state cannot make any decision to accept or reject medical procedures as they reach the end of their life, it is still possible for him or her to do so by proxy through a legal document that is attested to beforehand. Such documents are commonly referred to as "Living Wills" and are most often accompanied by a power of attorney giving a trusted loved one the right and authority to carry out the dictates spelled out in the Living Will when they believe its conditions are met.

Unfortunately, many see a Living Will only as a document that will allow someone to automatically "pull the plug" on them if they should become hospitalized and unable to speak for themselves. They see this as paramount to committing suicide or authorizing euthanasia. That is hardly true however inasmuch as no authority is expressly given for anyone to take his or her life. Rather it allows the signatory to determine for himself or herself the extent to which extraordinary efforts will be expended in keeping his or her body functioning in the event of a comatose or perpetual vegetative state in which there is no heuristic thought processes in evidence. It allows him or her to decide for himself or herself if he or she will continue to receive nourishment through feeding tubes or intravenously when they are no longer able to

eat or drink for themselves. We should note that this is not always desirable. In the case of some cancer patients, such nourishment may only feed the growth of the cancer that will ultimately kill them.

The benefits to be obtained by a Living Will are two-fold. Not only does it allow a comatose patient to speak through the words of the document, it somewhat relieves the burden of a loved one who must make the ultimate decision. They can know exactly what kind of treatment their loved one wants at a time when their own thoughts and emotions are in turmoil. Moreover, the elderly who may not have a loved one remaining to speak for them has some assurance that their wishes will be carried out by competent medical personnel in their place when and if the time comes.

Handling and Preparation of the Dead Body

Although human life is contained in the soul, not in the physical body, we must not neglect the importance or care of the body while living, nor should we ignore the proper handling and disposition of the body after death. It has acted as the physical vessel for the spirit and in combination with the spirit at birth formed a living soul that lives on eternally apart from the body.

Mutilation of the Body after Death

Though it is impossible to murder a body once life has departed from it, to intentionally dishonor or mutilate a body after death as an intentional act of vengeance, to make a political statement, to invoke additional suffering on the deceased's loved ones, or for any other reason is a despicable act. Fortunately, most states have criminal laws prohibiting such acts against human remains.

The body of the deceased should be handled with all the respect with which the Creator first endowed it in the womb before birth. That respect is particularly due a Christian's body in which the Holy Spirit has dwelled, though it must be extended to include all bodies that have held human life since all life was endowed by their Creator. In revering human life from beginning to end we also honor Him.

Post Mortem Examinations

Mutilation brings us to the subject of a post mortem examination that is performed on the remains of a deceased person to determine the cause of their death when that cause is in question. Historic evidence indicates that this procedure was first practiced by the Egyptians. In many cases an external clinical examination of the body will suffice to satisfy loved ones of the cause of death. Unfortunately, a thorough forensic autopsy usually involves the dissection of the body wherein various organs are removed, weighed, examined, and then placed back into the cavity from which they were removed. The cavity is then closed back up prior to release of the body for burial.

While a forensic autopsy does sound like a deliberate and brutal violation of the dead body, it is often a necessity and may still be performed by a pathologist with all the proper respect of the human body that is due. In the case of violent death or when there is a suspicion that a death is not from natural causes, an autopsy can bring forth valuable forensic evidence that can be used in a court of law to convict a criminal thus ensuring justice for the deceased. Though this issue does pose ethical problems, the need to know how a person died often outweighs the perfect sanctity of the body in order that human justice can be served and other lives saved through that means.

Organ Donation

The subject of mutilation also brings us to the subject of organ donations, which causes us to face another serious ethical dilemma as a consequence of our advanced medical technology. Not only does the removal of organs constitute a form of mutilation of a body, it is often also found necessary to keep a corpse functioning for a time in order to preserve the organs in a viable state for "harvesting" at the exact moment they are needed for surgical transplant.

Nevertheless, many people are living today because of the gift of extended physical life obtained from healthy tissue received from another man or woman whose soul had departed and could no longer lay claim to it. Therefore, as long as that procedure is carried out with

due respect to the donor's body and for the express purpose of giving life to another human being, it is hard to find fault with it.

As technology advances, however, it is quite possible that such organ donation could soon be made for purely cosmetic or nefarious purposes thus rendering the entire process vain and even sinful. There is not anything pure and good that man can do that he cannot also corrupt. Perhaps a day will come when the buying and selling of human organs will take place, or when laws are enacted requiring organ donation by everyone at or near death. At that point, the human body will have been denied its God-given sanctity and it will have become a mere commodity.

After having considered all of this, organ donation should remain a personal decision made by the donor while they are still living only after much prayer and after the diligent seeking of God's will in the matter inasmuch as this is a subject in which Scripture is all but silent.

Embalming

At the opposite extreme to mutilation is the common practice of embalming the body of the deceased and even cosmetically enhancing the body in other ways so that it appears healthy and only to be sleeping in calm repose. In the instance where death comes about as a result of physical trauma to the body, mutilation is often a consequence of that trauma such that it is impossible to restore that semblance of life. Even in that instance, some community standards may still require embalming as a means of controlling the spread of disease.

Embalming is not a new innovation. We note that myrrh and aloes were used by Nicodemus in preparing the body of Jesus for burial after the manner of the Jews (Jn.19:39–40). It is most probable that the traditional method of preparation employed by the Jews had been handed down from generation to generation from embalming arts learned from the Egyptians while the Jews were being held in captivity. However, the embalming of Jesus' body was never completed inasmuch as the process was interrupted by the coming of

the Sabbath at sundown and rendered unnecessary by his bodily resurrection on the first day of the week.

Today, embalming is primarily seen only as a temporary means of preserving and enhancing the body for public showing to friends and loved ones prior to interment. Any attempt to preserve the body eternally, as did the Egyptians, for the use of the deceased in an afterlife is of course futile. Eventually the mortal body must return to dust, the elements of the earth, from which it was created regardless of any attempt at preservation.

Return of the Body to Dust

Unlike the human body that is being formed in the womb to hold human life, the body after death has completed its mission. Whereas the body in the womb is being formed from very basic material elements, the body after death must return to the same elements from which it was first made through a process of decomposition. A mortal body once its mission is completed must not be simply discarded on a garbage heap as worthless refuse, but because of the nature of that process, the human body must be put away out of sight of the living both to spare them the terrifying experience of putrefaction and to prevent the spread of disease.

Three common methods for the disposition of bodily remains after physical death to achieve that end are burial, entombment, and cremation. In all three cases, the mortal body is being put aside to return to the dust from which it was created until God calls forth the elements to form a new incorruptible body suitable for eternal habitation. The Christian looks forward to receiving a new physical body that is both immortal and incorruptible at the time of the final resurrection, not the restoration of the old mortal body that could never support eternal life.

Burial

The preferred method of interment for Christians today and in the past is burial under the surface of the earth. In its basic form, this accomplishes the necessary mission of putting away the body out of the sight of the living in the simplest and most expedient way possible.

It is also viewed allegorically by many Christians as the planting of a seed that must decay underground in order to flower into life at a future time in similitude of the future resurrection of the dead.

Graves are often arranged and organized in cemeteries. The basic definition of the word "cemetery" from the Greek word, "*koimeterion*" is "sleeping place," and in the literal sense, it defines a temporary place for the mortal body to rest in a state of sleep until it awakes to new life. Commonly added to the burial procedure is a covering for the body prior to its burial. That may be a simple cloth shroud, a simple box that is hastily constructed of wood, or a casket that is elaborately constructed and ornamented by craftsmen. Such gravesites are commonly identified with a marker that may be made of various materials consisting of wood, metal, or stone. Engraved or embossed upon the marker is the name of the deceased and often the time of his or her mortal lifespan.

Because it is often not possible to preserve a body for any length of time aboard a ship at sea for future burial on land, burial under water is often substituted for burial under the earth. In this instance, the body is commonly wrapped in a shroud of some sort and weighted such that it will remain well below the surface for an interminable length of time until it returns to the elements of the earth.

Above Ground Entombment

Some today choose a sepulture that is prepared above ground in a mausoleum for the interment of the bodies of loved ones. In the Roman world at the time of Christ, only the very affluent could afford tombs that were carved out of the earth or natural caves that were used for that purpose. Jesus' above ground entombment was made possible when a rich follower allowed his body to be laid in his own family tomb (Mt.27:57–60). In those days, the body was first laid in a shallow crypt of the tomb that was then sealed. After a time, the flesh would have been turned to dust leaving only the bones. Later, as the tomb was opened in preparation for another burial, the bones of the deceased would be placed in a small box that was in turn stored further back in the tomb thus freeing up the tomb for the next burial. While there may still be a few places where burial crypts are rented for as

much as 100 years and are then reused, most modern entombment is within a mausoleum in which the mortal body remains for an indefinite length of time as the sole occupant.

Cremation

Because of the expense of securing burial rights in a cemetery or a mausoleum today, many choose cremation, which rapidly reduces the body to ashes rather than it taking place over a long span of time. The ashes are often presented to a family member in a decorative urn. The urn may then be buried or kept in the home of a loved one. In some instances, the deceased will have given instructions for his ashes to be dispersed over an area of land, body of water, or today even placed in a rocket and dispersed in outer space.

Often an unbeliever will choose cremation as being preferred in order to defy the possibility of resurrection. The erroneous belief that cremation will prevent resurrection is not a new notion. The Roman Church in a previous age often dug up the remains of supposed heretics, burned their bones, and distributed their ashes in a body of water for that very reason. Cremation is also associated with various pagan religions, which tends to make it odious to a Christian believer. However, as the expense of other interment methods continually increase, it is quite possible that cremation will become more commonplace for purely economic reasons.

Regardless of the method utilized, the bodies of all men and women will one day be resurrected from the dust to eternal life to enjoy the wonders of Heaven or conversely to suffer eternal damnation in the depths of Hell. No matter how the mortal body is reduced to its physical elements after death, it cannot prevent that momentous event from taking place. With that knowledge and in that sense, it does not matter how the mortal body is prepared or laid to rest as long as it is done respectfully.

Celebration of Human Life

Because the life of any man or woman touches the lives of so many others, close loved ones often gather together with other family members and their friends in remembrance of and reflection on what

that one solitary life has meant to them collectively as well as individually. That usually takes place as a memorial service that often coincides with the funeral of the deceased. Even as mourning inevitably comes forth at the death of a loved one, we also have cause to look back on their life as we attempt to attach a greater meaning to it. In doing so, we also find the need to examine our own lives when faced with the inevitability of the death of our own bodies in the future.

No life is ever a waste to God regardless of whether that person was created by Him as a vessel to hold his wondrous grace or as a vessel that has held the depths of his wrath (cf. Ro.9:21). Both have served God's eternal purpose such that some good comes forth from their existence upon the earth. A Shakespearian character phrased it thus: "the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones" (*Julius Cesar, III, II*). Nevertheless, the lingering evil that men do in their lifetimes is often temporarily set aside as their bodies are laid to rest in the grave — even as we struggle with difficulty to remember that which they did even indirectly for the benefit of anyone but themselves. That is particularly true of those who never accepted the death of Christ as atonement for their sins such that their sins continued to characterize and dominate their lifestyle to the very end.

It is indeed ironic that a memorial oration for the unrepentant sinner is often presided over by a church minister who must then struggle to present a reasonable eulogy for a man or woman who has lived without grace and has died without any hope. The best a man of God can hope to accomplish in such a disastrous situation is to comfort the living with the knowledge that their souls need not likewise perish if they will but repent of their sins and accept the salvation so freely offered in Christ (cf. Lu.13:2–5).

Blessed is the man or woman who has died in Christ and in whom there will be no second death involving the soul through eternal torment in the fiery confines of Hell. Rather he has attained the certainty of eternal life in the paradise of Heaven. For a believer in Christ, his human lifespan has been a grace-filled gift, and once that mortal journey has been completed and the eternal one is undertaken it

is indeed proper for us to celebrate and thank God for all of the good things that that one particular human life has provided for us all. Even as we do that, we must seek to comfort those who were intimately close to the deceased in the sure knowledge that genuine love does not ever die along with the physical death of the body anymore than does the soul. Rather, that love lives on in the certain hope of reunion with our loved ones that must follow when all things are restored in a sinless state of existence in the very presence of God who created all things for his glory.

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