

Doctrines of the Bible
J. L. Hall
and
David K. Bernard
Editors

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Editors J. L. Hall and David K. Bernard

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GOD

by David K. Bernard

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GOD

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I. THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The first verse of the Bible introduces God as the Creator of the universe and everything in it. The Bible does not try to prove that God exists; it assumes His existence as fundamental. Through observation and reflection, we can discover many logical reasons that compel us to believe in God.

- *Argument from cause* (cosmology). Creation itself bears witness that there is an intelligent, omnipotent, loving Creator (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20). There can be only one of three explanations for the existence of the universe: (1) it has always existed (eternal universe); (2) it came into existence by its own power (self-creating universe), or (3) God created it. Accepting any of these requires a faith that transcends scientific proof. It is more plausible to believe in an intelligent, eternal, omnipotent Creator than in the eternity or self-creative ability of non-rational matter.

- *Argument from design* (teleology). The orderliness and design of the universe require the existence of a Designer. The incredible complexity of even the simplest forms of life shows that life did not begin by accident or blind chance.

The force of this argument is illustrated by the visit of Robert Ingersoll, a noted agnostic, to the New York Planetarium. There he saw a scale model of the solar system with all the planets moving in orbit around the sun. Ingersoll marveled at the craftsmanship and asked who made the model. The head of the planetarium responded that no one had made it; it had suddenly appeared in the room one day by chance. The absurdity of this answer

was apparent; how then can anyone believe that the universe came into existence by chance when it is immeasurably more complex than the small model?

- *Argument from being* (ontology). How could the finite human mind even conceive of an infinite, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect God unless God imparted that concept? Every society in history has expressed belief in a supreme Being, and modern anthropological studies show that the earliest and most fundamental religious belief is not polytheism but monotheism.

- *Argument from morality*. Every human child develops a conscience, and every human society has a sense of morality (Romans 2:15). Our moral nature reveals that we are more than intelligent animals; we were created in the image of a rational, spiritual, moral Being.

- *Argument from congruity*. Critics may attack the preceding arguments and propose alternative explanations for each, but the cumulative effect of them is overwhelming. Taken together they are compelling. The existence of God is the best (and only) explanation that fits all the facts.

Clearly, atheism—the belief that there is no God—is erroneous. Agnosticism—the belief that it is impossible to know whether God exists or not—is also untenable. Reason tells us that God exists (Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

Most important, the testimony of the Scriptures and the confirmation of personal experience assure us that God indeed lives and communicates with humanity. Ultimately, we accept the truth of His existence by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

II. THE NATURE OF GOD

While human reasoning can deduce that God exists, it cannot fully ascertain the nature of God or the will of God. For humanity to know God, He must reveal Himself.

God has revealed Himself to humanity in a general way through nature, history, and conscience, but by themselves these means are incomplete. God has also revealed Himself in special, specific ways through miracles, prophecy, the man Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and personal experience.

The Bible (the Scriptures) is the written Word of God, and it reveals the way of salvation (II Timothy 3:14-17). The Bible is the sole authority for doctrine and instruction in salvation and Christian living. It provides the most complete revelation of the nature and will of God to the world today.

Consequently, we will examine what the Bible reveals about the nature of God. First we will discuss His fundamental essence apart from His moral nature; then we will discuss His moral nature. The two lists of attributes are not necessarily exhaustive, but they outline the major themes of Scripture relative to the nature of God.

A. Nonmoral attributes

- *Life*. God is not an abstraction or a principle, nor is He an inanimate object. He is a living being and the source of all life (John 1:4; I John 1:1-2).

- *Individuality*. God is an individual being with a unique, definite identity and personality (Genesis 1:1-3, 26-27). Pantheism—the belief that God is nature or the laws, forces, and manifestations of the universe—is wrong.

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- *Rationality*. God is an intelligent being with a will, reasoning ability, and emotions (Isaiah 1:18; Romans 9:19). The Bible describes God in terms of human feelings so that we may understand something of His nature, but His emotions transcend our own, and human terms describe Him imperfectly. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 32:21; Psalm 18:19; 103:13.)

- *Spirituality*. “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). This means He is not made of flesh, blood, bones, or physical matter (Matthew 16:17; Luke 24:39). Although He appeared to people in the Old Testament by temporary visible manifestations (known as theophanies), He does not have a physical body apart from the Incarnation. When the Bible speaks of the Spirit of God in terms of human or animal body parts (such as heart, eyes, nostrils, arms, hands, feet, and wings), it uses figurative language (known as anthropomorphism) to describe the infinite God in finite human terms so that we can understand something of His nature. (See, for example, Exodus 15:8; Psalm 91:4; Isaiah 48:13; 66:1; Luke 11:20.)

- *Invisibility*. God is invisible to the human eye unless He chooses to manifest Himself in some way to human senses. No one has ever seen God or can see God in His spiritual essence (John 1:18; I Timothy 6:16; I John 4:12).

- *Self-existence*. God has independent existence; He exists of and by Himself without any external cause, source, agency, or power (Exodus 3:14; Acts 17:24; Romans 11:35-36).

- *Eternity*. God is eternal, immortal, everlasting (Deuteronomy 33:27; I Timothy 1:17). He had no beginning, and He will have no ending.

- *Omnipresence*. God is present in all places at the

same time (Psalm 139:7-13; Acts 17:21-28). The Bible does speak of God being at certain places in the sense of His center of activity, immediate presence, fullness of glory, visible manifestation, or focus with respect to a particular individual or situation.

- *Omnipotence*. God is all-powerful (I Timothy 6:15; Revelation 19:6). He has unlimited power and authority; He can do anything. The only limitations God has are those He willingly places on Himself. For example, He will not violate the principles set forth in His Word. Of course, He cannot be or do anything opposite to His nature; that would be a logical contradiction. Thus God cannot lie, for truth is His very nature (Titus 1:2).

- *Omniscience*. God has all knowledge (Psalm 139:1-6). He has infinite knowledge of everything, including human thoughts (Job 42:2) and the events of the future (Acts 2:23). His foreknowledge does not mean He predestines individual destinies, however. While God foreknows the outcome of an individual life, He does not predetermine or force that outcome. He foresees the choices that a person will make, but the person's destiny is determined by his own response to God's grace (Romans 10:8-13; 11:20-23). As an analogy, a parent, spouse, or close friend may be able to predict with a high degree of accuracy how a loved one will respond in a certain situation and what the consequences of a certain decision will be. But while humans predict imperfectly, God knows with certainty.

God's foreknowledge does not mean that we should embrace fatalism. It is still important for us to exercise our freedom of choice in every situation and respond to God in faith. Our decisions make a difference, for God's foreknowledge is in accordance with our choices. For

example, it is awesome to consider that God already knows whether or not we will be saved in the end. Yet by faith we can have that same knowledge, for if we will continue to believe and obey God we have assurance of salvation.

- *Immutability*. God is unchanging (Malachi 3:6; James 1:17). Although His course of action changes to respond to the changes of people, God's character and attributes always remain the same.

- *Transcendence*. God's nature, thought, and emotions are far beyond our comprehension and experience, for He is infinite while we are finite (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-34). Yet through the Bible God has revealed to us many things about His nature and plan. Through the Incarnation God came to our level in order to save us, and through the operation of His Spirit we can have a personal experience and relationship with Him.

- *Oneness*. God is absolutely one (Deuteronomy 6:4). In view of the emphasis Scripture places on this truth, we will discuss it in a separate section.

Many of these attributes belong uniquely to God. For example, only He is self-existent, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and immutable.

B. Moral attributes

- *Holiness*. God is holy (Leviticus 11:45; 19:2). He is absolutely pure, perfect, sinless, and untainted by evil. He is totally separated from sin and cannot have fellowship with it. Because of God's holiness, sinful humans must have an atonement (covering or removal of sins) if they are to live in His presence.

Holiness is the fundamental moral characteristic of

God upon which His other attributes depend. In particular, God's holiness is the foundation of His love and gives direction to His love rather than vice versa. Because He is holy, He does not love sin or evil. Because He is holy, His love is impartial and eternal rather than arbitrary, capricious, or fickle.

- *Justice and righteousness.* Justice means that God is fair and impartial; righteousness means He always does what is right, correct, and lawful. God's justice causes Him to reward righteousness and punish wickedness.

God's justice is a fearful thing to the unrepentant sinner, because it guarantees that he will be punished in the end. But God's justice is a great blessing to the people of God. Christ purchased our salvation by His death and resurrection, and based on His sacrifice we can approach God confidently and boldly in time of need. Even though we were sinners, we are saved, blessed, and rewarded on the basis of the righteousness of Christ.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). God had no obligation to save us, but once He provided a plan of salvation and paid the price, He is bound by His justice and faithfulness to fulfill that plan in our lives if we obey it. If we repent and confess our sins, there is no question as to whether He will forgive us. God will not act arbitrarily or capriciously, for His law has already determined what His response will be. Because Christ has already paid the price, it is a matter of justice with God to forgive us.

- *Love.* "God is love" (I John 4:8, 18). Christianity is the only religion to identify God so totally with love. God loves humans unconditionally. He desires for us to love

Him in return, but even when we do not He still loves us. In fact, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God’s love for us includes respect for our unique personality and freedom of choice. He does not force us to obey Him; He will never violate our individuality. Consequently, at the judgment unrepentant sinners will receive what they have chosen: eternal separation from God.

When people choose to sin, God’s love for them demands that He hate their sin, for sin harms and eventually destroys them. Although He loves sinners, He cannot ignore, condone, or have fellowship with sin, for that would violate His holiness and justice.

- *Mercy and grace.* God is merciful and gracious (Psalm 103:8). His mercy means that He is willing to forgive our sins. His grace means He bestows unmerited favor upon us; He freely provides salvation and blessings. God loves us even though we do not deserve it, and He actively desires to help us in every way.

Mercy and justice exist in eternal harmony in God. His justice demands death as the punishment for all sin, but in His love and mercy God gave His Son to meet the requirements of His justice and yet provide salvation for repentant sinners. Those who reject this gracious provision of God’s mercy will have to face His justice alone (Romans 11:22).

God is absolutely sovereign in His bestowal of blessings. No one can demand anything of God; no one deserves anything from Him. Nevertheless, God has revealed the condition under which He will bestow His grace: we receive His grace by obedient faith (Romans 10:1-21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

- *Faithfulness.* God is constant, reliable, loyal, and unfailing (Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 119:90). He always fulfills His Word. He always keeps His covenants and promises.

- *Truth.* God is the God of truth (Deuteronomy 32:4). His Word is truth (John 17:17). There is no falsehood, deception, ambiguity, or uncertainty with Him.

- *Goodness.* God is the epitome of virtue, excellence, perfection, benevolence, and kindness (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 31:19; 33:5; 52:1). He delights in doing good.

It is possible to list additional qualities or to discuss additional aspects of the attributes already listed. For example, God is longsuffering, gentle, and compassionate (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 18:35; 86:15; 145:8). Perhaps we can view these qualities as flowing from God's love and mercy. The Bible also describes God as light, which may be seen as a reference to His holiness and truth (I John 4:8).

Actually the attributes listed are so interrelated that it is impossible to discuss them in isolation from each other. For example, holiness and justice are closely connected, as are faithfulness and goodness.

III. THE ONENESS OF GOD

One of the clearest themes of Scripture is an uncompromising monotheism—belief in one God. Simply stated, God is absolutely and indivisibly one. There are no essential distinctions or divisions in His eternal nature. All forms of polytheism—belief in more than one God—are excluded.

All the names and titles of the Deity, such as God, Jehovah, Lord, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit refer to one

and the same being. Any plurality associated with God only relates to attributes, titles, roles, manifestations, modes of activity, relationships to humanity, or aspects of God's self-revelation.

This is the historic position of Judaism. Both Oneness and Jewish believers find the classic expression of this belief in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." In subsequent verses, God underscored the importance of this truth by commanding His people to teach it to their children when sitting, walking, lying down, and rising up—in other words, continually.

Jesus emphasized the importance of this teaching, calling it "the first of all the commandments" (Mark 12:29). Jesus also endorsed the Jewish concept of God's oneness when He told the Samaritan woman, "Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

Many biblical passages, including the following, affirm strict monotheism and exclude any plurality in the Deity.

- "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour" (Isaiah 43:10-11).

- "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself" (Isaiah 44:6, 24).

- "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:21).

- "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isaiah 46:9).

- "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the

only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

- “There is none other God but one. . . . But to us there is but one God, the Father” (I Corinthians 8:4, 6).
- “God is one” (Galatians 3:20).
- “For there is one God” (I Timothy 2:5).
- “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

Trinitarians sometimes explain that the Old Testament monotheistic passages merely speak of perfect agreement and unity among the trinity, excluding a plurality of false deities but not a plurality of persons in the true God. This view would allow outright polytheism, however, for many distinct deities could exist in perfect harmony.

Moreover, neither the Old Testament writers nor their original audiences thought of God as a trinity. If threeness is an essential part of God’s nature, He did not reveal it to Israel, His chosen people. If God is a trinity, then Abraham, the father of the faithful of all ages, did not comprehend the fundamental nature of his God.

Turning to the New Testament, it is important to interpret the writings in light of context and culture. The original speakers and writers were strictly monotheistic Jews who had no thought of introducing a revelation of plurality in the Godhead. Neither the writers nor the readers thought in trinitarian categories, for both the doctrine and the terminology of the trinity had yet to be formulated.

Neither testament uses the word *trinity* or associates the word *three* or the word *persons* with God in any significant way. No passage says God is a holy two, holy three, or holy trinity, but over fifty verses call God the “Holy One” (Isaiah 54:5).

The only New Testament passage to use the word person (Greek, *hupostasis*) in relation to God is Hebrews 1:3. It says the Son is the image of God's own person (literally, "substance"), not a distinct person.

The only passage to use the word *three* in relation to God is I John 5:7, which speaks of three ways in which God has revealed Himself—as Father, Word, and Spirit. It does not imply a plurality of persons any more than when we speak of a man, his word, and his spirit. For example, I Corinthians 2:11 compares a man and his spirit to God and His Spirit; the former are not two persons and neither are the latter. And I John 5:7 concludes by saying, "These three are one."

Trinitarians usually do not appeal to this verse today because it occurs in only one very late Greek manuscript. With the exception of the King James Version, the major English translations today exclude it on the ground that there is insufficient evidence to establish it as part of the original text of Scripture.

Trinitarians affirm that God is one but say He is "one God in three persons." This formulation is unscriptural, contradictory, and incomprehensible. The Bible not only says there is "one God" but specifically says, "God is one" (Galatians 3:20). In other words, whatever term we choose to identify God—being, person, substance, nature—He is numerically one of that.

IV. FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

The Bible speaks of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit), but it does not use these titles to indicate three persons "in" the Godhead.

The one God is the Father of all creation, Father of the only begotten Son, and Father of born-again believers. (See Deuteronomy 32:6; Malachi 2:10; Galatians 4:6; Hebrews 1:5; 12:9.)

The title of Son refers to God's incarnation. The man Christ was literally conceived by the Spirit of God and was therefore the Son of God (Matthew 1:18-20; Luke 1:35).

The title of Holy Spirit refers to God in spiritual activity. It describes the fundamental character of God's nature, for holiness forms the basis of His moral attributes while spirituality forms the basis of His nonmoral attributes. The title is particularly used of works that God can do because He is a Spirit, such as anointing, regenerating, indwelling, and sanctifying humanity. (See Genesis 1:1-2; Acts 1:5-8.)

These three roles are necessary to God's plan of redemption for fallen humanity. In order to save us, God provided a sinless Man who died in our place—the Son. In begetting the Son and in relating to humanity, God is the Father. And in working in our lives to empower and transform us, God is the Holy Spirit.

In sum, the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit describe God's multiple roles and works, but they do not reflect an essential threeness in God's nature. *Father* refers to God in family relationship to humanity; *Son* refers to God in flesh; and *Spirit* refers to God in activity. For example, one man can have three significant relationships or functions—such as administrator, teacher, and counselor—and yet be one person in every sense. God is not defined by or limited to an essential threeness.

The Bible identifies the Father and the Holy Spirit as

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one and the same being. The title of Holy Spirit simply describes what the Father is, for God is a Spirit (John 4:24). The Holy Spirit is literally the Father of Jesus, since Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18, 20). When the Bible speaks of the man Christ Jesus in relationship to God it uses the title of Father, but when it speaks of the action of God in causing the baby Jesus to be conceived it uses the title of Holy Ghost so that there will be no mistake about the supernatural, spiritual nature of this work.

The Bible calls the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jehovah, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of the Father. The last title, found in Matthew 10:20, shows that the Spirit is not a separate person from the Father but pertains to, or is the essence of, the Father. The Bible attributes many works of the Father to the Spirit as well, such as resurrecting Christ and indwelling, comforting, sanctifying, and resurrecting believers.

As we have seen, the Son is the manifestation of the one God in flesh. The title of Son sometimes focuses solely on the humanity of Christ, as in “the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). Sometimes it encompasses both His deity and humanity, as in “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). It is never used apart from God’s incarnation, however; it never refers to deity alone.

The terms “God the Son” and “eternal Son” are non-biblical; the Bible instead speaks of the “Son of God” and the “only begotten Son.” The Son is not eternally begotten by some incomprehensible, ongoing process; rather, the Son was begotten by the miraculous work of the Holy

Spirit in the womb of Mary. The following verses show that the Son had a beginning, namely, at the Incarnation.

- “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

- “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

- “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. . . . I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son” (Hebrews 1:5).

One day the redemptive plan for which God manifested Himself in flesh will be complete. God will continue to reveal Himself through the immortal, glorified human body of Christ, but the mediatorial role and reign of the Son will end. Jesus Christ will rule eternally, not as the Son, but as God, Father, Creator, and Lord of all. “Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (I Corinthians 15:28).

How does “the Word” in John 1 correspond to the Son? John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” While both terms refer to Jesus Christ, *Word* is not equivalent to *Son*, for the latter is limited to the Incarnation while the former is not. In the Old Testament, God’s Word (*dabar*) was not a separate person but was God speaking or God disclosing Himself (Psalm 107:20; Isaiah 55:11). To the Greeks, the Word (*logos*) was not a separate divine person either, but reason as the controlling principle of the universe. The noun *logos* could refer to thought (unexpressed word) as

well as speech or action (expressed word).

In John 1, the Word is God's self-revelation, self-expression, or self-disclosure. Before the Incarnation, the Word was the unexpressed thought, plan, reason, or mind of God. In the beginning, the Word was with God, not as a separate person but as God Himself—pertaining to and belonging to God much like a man and his word. "The Word was God Himself" (John 1:1, Amplified). In the fullness of time God put flesh on the Word; He revealed Himself in flesh. In the person of Jesus Christ, "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). "God was manifest in the flesh" (I Timothy 3:16). The Word was revealed in the Son.

V. THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the one God, and this truth is foundational to our faith. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:8-10).

This passage teaches the deity of Jesus Christ in the strongest possible terms. *Godhead* is a synonym of *deity*. It refers to the state of being God, to the sum total of God's nature. The identity of Jesus as God would be established if verse 9 simply said He was the Godhead incarnate, for by definition "Godhead" is the fullness of absolute deity. But to make the point as clear as possible, the verse says, "the fulness" of the Godhead, although the Godhead can never be less than complete and absolute. To underscore the point even further it says "all" the full-

ness, although by definition anything less than all would not be fullness.

Verse 10 says that we will find everything we need in Jesus. If all we know is Jesus, we know enough, for when we have Him we have everything that God is. All the roles, titles, and attributes of God are invested in Jesus. Whatever God is, Jesus is. He is at once Father, Son, Spirit, Word, and Lord.

Verse 8 warns us not to base our doctrine of Christ upon human philosophy. Unfortunately, the terms and concepts that characterize trinitarianism were borrowed from secular philosophy of the ancient world and led to a distortion of the true doctrine of God. Instead of appealing to tradition, creeds, philosophies, and man-made doctrines, we must adhere to the text, teaching, and thought of Scripture itself.

Jesus is God in the Old Testament sense; that is what New Testament writers meant when they called Jesus God. The one and only God of the Old Testament incarnated Himself as Jesus Christ. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (II Corinthians 5:19). The following descriptions of Jesus clearly declare His identity as God.

- "The mighty God, The everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6)
 - "God with us" (Matthew 1:23)
 - "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28)
 - "The eternally blessed God" (Romans 9:5, NKJV)
 - "The image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15)
 - "God . . . manifest in the flesh" (I Timothy 3:16)
 - "Our great God and Savior" (Titus 2:13, NKJV)
- (See also Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 35:4-6 with Matthew

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11:1-6; Micah 5:2; Acts 20:28; II Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:2; II Peter 1:1.)

Trinitarianism actually maintains that only one of three divine persons, called “God the Son,” came in flesh, but the Bible says that God came in flesh. Jesus is not just the incarnation of one person of a trinity but the incarnation of all the identity, character, and personality of the one God.

All names and titles of God apply to Jesus.

Jesus is Jehovah (LORD in KJV). Many Old Testament statements by or about Jehovah are specifically fulfilled in Jesus.

- Isaiah 40:3 predicts that a voice in the wilderness would prepare the way of Jehovah, and all four Gospels apply this prophecy to John the Baptist, who prepared the way of Jesus.

- “The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5).

- In Isaiah 45:23 Jehovah said, “Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” Romans 14:10-11 and Philippians 2:10-11 apply this prophecy to Christ.

- “Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I” (Isaiah 52:6).

- The “righteous Branch” out of David and the “King” who will reign over the earth in the latter day will be called Jehovah Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

- Jehovah predicted, “They weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver” (Zechariah 11:12).

- Jehovah also foretold, “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10).

- Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58), referring to the name “I AM” that Jehovah had used

for Himself in Exodus 3:14.

The Old Testament describes Jehovah as the Almighty, only Savior, Lord of lords, First and Last, only Creator, Holy One, Redeemer, Judge, Shepherd, and Light; yet the New Testament ascribes all these titles to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the Father incarnate.

- “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . and his name shall be called . . . The everlasting Father” (Isaiah 9:6).

- “Thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer” (Isaiah 63:16).

- “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30).

- “The Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38).

- “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. . . . The Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:9-10).

- The Father manifested Himself to take away our sins (I John 3:1-5).

- Jesus is the father of overcomers (Revelation 21:6-7).

The Bible attributes many of the same works both to the Father and to Jesus: resurrecting Christ’s body, sending the Comforter, drawing people to God, answering prayer, sanctifying believers, and resurrecting the dead.

The Holy Spirit is literally the Spirit that was in Jesus Christ.

- “The Spirit of truth . . . dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:17-18).

- “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).

- “The Lord is that Spirit” (II Corinthians 3:17).

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- “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts” (Galatians 4:6).
- “This shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:19).

The spirit of a man is not a different person than he, but pertains to him, or is his very essence. So it is with Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Christians do not encounter or receive three divine spirits, nor do they learn to recognize three distinct personalities; they encounter one personal Spirit being.

The New Testament ascribes the following works both to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit: moving on prophets of old, resurrection of Christ’s body, work as the Comforter/Advocate (same Greek word: *parakletos*), giving of words to believers in time of persecution, intercession, sanctification, and indwelling of believers.

Jesus is the One on the throne in heaven. Revelation 4:2 says there is one throne in heaven and One on the throne. Revelation 4:8 describes the One on the throne as “Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” Revelation 1 describes Jesus in identical terms: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty. . . . I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last. . . . I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:8, 11, 17-18).

Moreover, in Revelation 22:3-4 “God and the Lamb” is one being on the one throne, and He has one face and one name. Only Jesus is both sovereign and sacrifice for sin—

both deity and humanity—at the same time. He is the image of the invisible God, and His name is the highest name by which God is revealed. Trinitarians are often unsure whether they will see one or three divine personages in heaven, but any notion of three separately visible beings is tritheism (belief in three Gods). We will see Jesus only, for to see Him is to see God in the only way that God can be seen (John 14:9).

God's essential oneness is demonstrated by the way the Bible alternately attributes various divine works to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. This practice forces trinitarian theologians to say that the persons of the trinity cannot be distinguished on the basis of function or operation, but each shares equally in the work of the others. In their theory, then, the uniqueness of each person is reduced to the following definition: the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten, and the Spirit is proceeding. Yet they cannot explain what "begotten" means since they divorce it from the conception and birth of Jesus. Nor can they say what "proceeding" means or how it differs from "begotten." In short, the quality that identifies and distinguishes each "divine person" has no meaning that humans can discern. The truth is that there is no distinction of persons in God, but only a distinction between deity and humanity in Jesus Christ.

VI. THE NAME OF GOD

Both testaments place strong emphasis on the doctrine of the name of God. In biblical thought, an individual's name is an extension of his personality. In particular, the name of God represents the revelation of His pres-

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ence, character, power, and authority (Exodus 6:3; 9:16; 23:21; I Kings 8:27-29). In the Old Testament, Jehovah was the sacred, redemptive name of God and the unique name by which He distinguished Himself from false gods (Exodus 6:3-8; Isaiah 42:8).

Actually, Jehovah is an English version of the Hebrew name YHWH, which was probably pronounced Yahweh and which is represented in the King James Version by LORD or sometimes GOD (in large and small capitals).

The Old Testament uses a number of compound names for God that reveal various aspects of His character.

Hebrew	English	Scripture
El-Elyon	Most High God	Genesis 14:18
El-Roiy	The God of sight	Genesis 16:13
El-Shaddai	Almighty God	Genesis 17:1
El-Olam	Everlasting God	Genesis 21:33
YHWH-jireh	Jehovah will see (i.e., provide)	Genesis 22:14
YHWH-rapha	Jehovah who heals	Exodus 15:26
YHWH-nissi	Jehovah our banner (i.e., victory)	Exodus 17:15
YHWH-m'kaddesh	Jehovah who sanctifies	Exodus 31:13
YHWH-shalom	Jehovah our peace	Judges 6:24

Hebrew	English	Scripture
YHWH-saboath	Jehovah of hosts (i.e., almighty)	I Samuel 1:3
YHWH-elyon	Jehovah most high	Psalms 7:17
YHWH-raah	Jehovah our shepherd	Psalms 23:1
YHWH-hoseenu	Jehovah our maker	Psalms 95:6
YHWH-tsidkenu	Jehovah our righteousness	Jeremiah 23:6
YHWH-shammah	Jehovah is present	Ezekiel 48:35

In the New Testament, God accompanied the revelation of Himself in flesh with a new name. That name is Jesus, which includes and supersedes Jehovah and all the compound names, since it literally means “Jehovah-Savior” or “Jehovah is salvation.” This name expresses that God came to dwell with us and become our Savior (Matthew 1:21, 23). Although others have borne the name Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who actually personifies that name.

Jesus is the redemptive name of God in the New Testament. It is the name of supreme power and authority, the only saving name, the name given for remission of sins, and the highest name ever revealed. When there is an occasion to invoke God’s name, Christians should use the spoken name of Jesus as an outward expression of faith in Jesus and in obedience to His Word.

- “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14).

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- “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

- “Through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

- “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Philippians 2:9-10).

- “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17).

The early church prayed, preached, taught, healed the sick, performed miracles, cast out unclean spirits, and baptized in the name of Jesus. They refused to keep quiet about His name, and they rejoiced when they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. Of course, the name of Jesus is not a magical formula; it is effective only through faith in Jesus and a relationship with Him (Acts 3:16; 19:13-17).

VII. SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES EXPLAINED

In order to understand the biblical doctrine of God more fully, let us examine some scriptural passages often cited in support of trinitarianism.

A. Old Testament

- Most occurrences of the word *God* in the Old Testament are translated from the Hebrew word *Elohim*, which is plural in form. This word does not denote a plurality of persons, for it is used with a singular verb. Moreover, it was applied to individual pagan gods, to the

golden calf, and to Christ, none of whom was a trinity. The use of the plural form of a noun is a characteristic way to express greatness or majesty in the Hebrew language.

- In Genesis 1:26, God used plural pronouns for Himself when He said, “Let us make man in our image.” There are several possible explanations for the plural: (1) God conversing with angels (as Jews explain); (2) God counseling with His own will (as in Ephesians 1:11); (3) plural pronouns simply agreeing with the plural noun *Elohim*; (4) a majestic or literary plural; or (5) a prophetic reference to the future manifestation of the Son of God. Significantly, in fulfilling this verse, God created Adam as one person, with one body, mind, personality, spirit, and will. Moreover, Isaiah 44:24 says God created the world alone and by Himself.

- Old Testament references to the Son are prophetic of the man Christ, pointing to God’s future manifestation in flesh.

- Old Testament references to the Spirit of God, the Word of God, and the wisdom of God do not imply a plurality of persons any more than when one speaks of the spirit, word, or wisdom of a man.

- All Old Testament theophanies can easily be seen as manifestations of the one omnipresent, omnipotent God. While the “angel of the LORD” is apparently a manifestation of God in many passages, sometimes the phrase denotes a literal angel distinguished from God.

- Trinitarians point out that the Hebrew word used to describe God’s oneness is *echad*, which can mean one in agreement. It can also mean absolute numerical oneness, however, and is so used many times in Scripture. (See Joshua 12:9-24.) It must be interpreted as such when it

refers to God, or else it would not exclude polytheism as the passages in question clearly intend. To the extent that *echad* connotes a unity of plural things, it signifies the unity of God's multiple attributes.

B. New Testament

- Jesus preexisted the Incarnation, not as the eternal Son but as the eternal Spirit of God. The Son was sent from the Father, but this terminology simply indicates that the Father enacted His preexisting plan at a certain point in time and that the Son was divinely appointed to accomplish a certain task. In the same way, John the Baptist was a man sent from God (John 1:6), but he did not preexist his arrival into this world.

- The baptism of Christ did not introduce to the devout Jewish onlookers a doctrine of plurality in the Godhead, but it signified the authoritative anointing of Jesus as the Messiah. The dove was a sign for John, and the voice was a sign for the people. A correct understanding of God's omnipresence and omnipotence dispels any notion that the heavenly voice and dove require separate persons.

- Plural titles for God distinguish between His attributes, roles, or relationships. For example, II Corinthians 13:14 describes three aspects or works of God—grace, love, and communion—and links them with names or titles that correspond most directly to them—Lord Jesus Christ, God, and Holy Ghost. Likewise, I Peter 1:2 mentions the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the blood of Jesus. Matthew 28:19 speaks of the roles of God in our redemption—Father, Son, and Spirit—but identifies them with a singular name. That name is Jesus, as we see from Luke 24:47 and the

baptismal accounts in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16.)

- Plural references to God and Jesus Christ in the New Testament emphasize that we must not only acknowledge the one true God of the Old Testament—the Father and Creator—but we must also acknowledge His revelation in flesh, as Jesus Christ. Salvation does not come to us simply because God is Spirit, but specifically through the atoning death of the man Christ Jesus. Thus John 17:3 says that to be saved we must not only know the one true God but also Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

This concept also explains the typical greeting in Paul’s epistles: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7). If the trinity were in view, we would expect mention of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the Greek conjunction *kai* here could mean “even,” which would identify the Father and Jesus as the same being. In similar passages, *kai* definitely identifies God and Jesus as one and the same being. (See II Thessalonians 1:12; I Timothy 5:21; II Timothy 4:1; Titus 2:13.)

Likewise, I Timothy 2:5 says there is “one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” If there were a second divine person coequal to the first he could not be our mediator, for he would need someone to mediate between him and sinful humanity just as much as the first person would. The sinless *man* Christ Jesus who became a sacrifice for our sins is the mediator.

- Plural references to Father and Son in the Gospels show the true humanity of Jesus, for the Son is the man in whom God dwelt. Although Jesus is both Father and

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Son, the two terms are not equivalent. We do not say the Father *is* the Son, but the Father is *in* the Son. For example, the Father (the Spirit) did not die, but the Son (the humanity) died.

- The prayers of Christ demonstrate the struggle and submission of the human will. Jesus prayed as a true human (from His human self-consciousness), not as a second divine person, for by definition God does not need to pray.

- Jesus frequently stated that the Son was inferior to the Father in power, authority, and knowledge. In these instances, He spoke of His humanity. If these examples are used to demonstrate a plurality of persons, they would establish the subordination of one person to the other, contrary to the trinitarian doctrine of coequality.

- Other descriptions of communion and love between Father and Son show the union of deity and humanity in Christ. If used to demonstrate a distinction of persons, they would establish separate centers of consciousness in the Godhead, which is in effect polytheism.

- Christ's description of the Holy Ghost as "another Comforter" in John 14:16-18 indicates a difference of form or relationship, that is, Christ in Spirit rather than in flesh.

- John 17 speaks of Christ's glory with the Father before the world began. This glory referred to Christ's upcoming crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, which was in the plan of God before creation. Christ prayed as a man for the Father to fulfill the plan. He was not speaking of His glory as God, for He always had it and did not need for anyone to give it to Him. Moreover, later in the chapter He spoke of giving this glory to His

disciples, but God never shares divine glory.

- John 17 also speaks of the unity of the man Christ with the Father. As a man Christ was one with God in mind, purpose, and will, and we can be one with God in this sense. Other passages, however, teach that Christ is one with God in a sense that we cannot be, in that He is God Himself.

- “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” denotes a covenant relationship much as “the God of Abraham.” It serves to remind us of the promises Christ won as a sinless man, which are available from “the God of Jesus Christ” to those who have faith in Christ.

- The humiliation of Christ described in Philippians 2:6-8 does not mean Christ emptied Himself of attributes of deity such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, for then Christ would be merely a demigod. The Spirit of Christ retained all attributes of deity while He manifested all of His character in flesh. This passage only refers to the limitations Christ imposed on Himself relative to His human life. In His life and ministry Christ voluntarily surrendered glory, dignity, and godly prerogatives. He was in very nature God, but He was also a man and He lived as a servant. The union of deity and humanity that was Jesus Christ was equal with God and proceeded from God, but became humble and obedient unto death.

- God made the worlds (literally, “ages”) by the Son (Hebrews 1:2). Certainly, the Spirit of God who later dwelt in the Son was the Creator. Moreover, God based the entire work of creation upon the future manifestation of the Son; He created with the Son in view. God foreknew that humans would sin, but He also foreknew that

through the Son they could be saved and could fulfill His original purpose in creation. Though God did not pick up the humanity until the fullness of time, He acted upon it from all eternity. The Lamb was “foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times” (I Peter 1:19-20).

- Hebrews 1:6 calls the Son the first begotten or the firstborn. He is the firstborn with reference to His humanity: (1) He is the first and only begotten Son in that He was conceived by the Spirit. (2) The Incarnation existed in God’s mind from the beginning and formed the basis for all subsequent actions. (3) As a man, Jesus is the first to conquer sin and so is the firstborn of the spiritual family of God. (4) As a man, Jesus is the first to conquer death and so is the firstborn of the resurrection. (5) Just as the firstborn son has the position of preeminence, so Jesus is the head of all creation and of the church.

- The New Testament speaks of Jesus as being at the right hand of God. This phrase does not denote a physical positioning of two beings with two bodies, for God is a Spirit and does not have a physical body outside of Jesus Christ. This view would be indistinguishable from belief in two gods. Rather, the phrase is an idiomatic expression from the Old Testament denoting that Christ possesses all the power, authority, glory, and preeminence of God (Exodus 15:6; Matthew 26:64-65; Acts 2:34). It also describes His present mediatorial role (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 8:1). Stephen did not see two divine persons; He saw the exalted Christ radiating all the glory of God, and he called upon God by saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:55-60).

- The vision of the One on the throne and the Lamb

in Revelation 5 is symbolic of the Incarnation and Atonement. The One on the throne represents all the Deity, while the Lamb represents the Son in His human, atoning role. The Lamb actually came out of the throne and sits on the center of the throne (Revelation 5:6; 7:17).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The correct concept of God is vital to all parts of our lives. His oneness is the foundation of true religion (Mark 12:28-30). Eternal life depends upon our knowing the one true God and His incarnation as Jesus Christ (John 17:3).

Moses realized the vital importance of knowing who God is. When God called him to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, he asked, "When . . . they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?" In response, God gave Moses a beautiful revelation of His eternity, self-existence, and omnipotence: "I AM THAT I AM" (Exodus 3:13-14).

Saul of Tarsus (Paul) likewise recognized the essentiality of knowing who God is. He thought he knew God and was doing His will, but when God struck him down on the road to Damascus Saul became aware that his concepts were wrong. He asked, "Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). As a Jew, he knew there was only one Lord, namely Jehovah, but he realized that he did not know Jehovah as he had thought. The Lord gave him a wonderful revelation also. He accepted Saul's use of this monotheistic title without any qualification or modification and replied, "I am Jesus."

While trinitarians concede that their doctrine of the Godhead is a mystery to human minds, the essential truth about God is no mystery but is clearly revealed in Scripture

to those who will believe (Romans 16:25-26; I Corinthians 2:7-10; II Corinthians 4:3-6; Colossians 1:25-27). In particular, God's oneness is clearly stated in Scripture. The true mystery of the Godhead is the Incarnation (I Timothy 3:16), and that has been revealed.

The biblical doctrine of God commonly known as Oneness can be stated in two affirmations: (1) There is one God with no distinction of persons. (2) Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead incarnate. In other words, all titles of the Deity apply to Jesus, and all aspects of the divine personality are manifested in Him.

In contrast to trinitarianism, Oneness asserts the following: (1) God is indivisibly one in number with no distinction of persons. (2) God's oneness is no mystery. (3) Jesus is the absolute fullness of the Godhead in flesh; He is God, Jehovah, Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. (4) The Son of God was begotten after the flesh and did not exist from eternity past—the term refers to God's incarnation as Christ. (5) The Word is not a separate person, but the mind, thought, plan, and revelation of the Father. (6) Jesus is the revealed name of God in the New Testament, and it represents salvation, power, and authority from God. (7) We should administer water baptism by orally invoking the name of Jesus. (8) We receive the abiding presence of Christ into our lives when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. (9) We will see one divine person in heaven: Jesus Christ.

The Oneness message affects our experience of salvation, for it shows us that baptism in Jesus' name is correct and that receiving the Holy Spirit is not an optional blessing but the means by which Christ indwells our hearts. The Oneness message also affects our worship

and our holiness, for when we believe in the one God as we should we will love Him with all our heart, soul, and might and dedicate our lives to Him and Him alone (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

The Oneness doctrine upholds biblical Christianity in at least three specific ways: (1) It restores biblical terms and patterns of thought on the subject of the Godhead, clearly establishing New Testament Christianity as the spiritual heir of Old Testament Judaism. (2) It affirms the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, revealing His true identity. (3) It places biblical emphasis on the name of Jesus, making the power of His name available to the believer.

When we understand the biblical doctrine of God, we will realize that our Creator is also our Savior. The God against whom we sinned is the One who forgives us. (Indeed, no one else has the authority to forgive us except the One whose law we violated.) God loved us so much that He came in flesh to be our Savior. He gave of Himself; He did not send someone else (II Corinthians 5:19).

Moreover, our Creator-Savior is also the indwelling Spirit who is ever present to help us. God first *told* us how to live and then came to live among us. As a man, He *showed* us how to live and purchased eternal life for us by laying down His human life. Now He abides within us and *enables* us to live according to His will.

In sum, Jesus Christ is the one God incarnate, and in Him we have everything we need—healing, deliverance, victory, and salvation (Colossians 2:9-10). And this message of the almighty God in Jesus Christ is vital to restoring biblical belief and apostolic power.

THE BIBLE

by Marvin D. Treece

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I. INSPIRATION AND AUTHORITY

The central core of teaching about the one true God and the eternal salvation God has provided is contained in the Bible. We must believe that He has spoken to us through this manner of communication, or else there is no hope of ever knowing what He is like or what His will is for us. It is interesting to note that all major religions claim revelation of their deities through some basic books. The Mormons have the Book of Mormon, the Muslims have the Koran, and so on. To Christians the Bible is the inspired Word of God, and as such it claims to be the sole authority for salvation and Christian living.

A. A literal Bible

Even though the Bible has reached new heights as a best seller, it is probably less believed today than in past centuries. Many people read it for nothing more than its literary value. To many, the Bible contradicts what they see practiced by professing Christians. One critic said that Christianity is a good idea that has never been tried.

In a book review of the *Literary Guide* published in *Newsweek* magazine, David Lehman presents what is probably the predominant view of the Bible today: "If you can't subscribe to the Bible as scripture, you can nevertheless revere it as a magnificent literary master work."¹

But the British poet Donald Davie commented in a review of the same book, "Treating the Bible as literature is tantamount to calling it a fabrication." To Christians such faint praise of the Bible is blasphemy!

The Bible does not allow a neutral spectator view. It is either a person's food and drink, his native breath, or else

it is his opponent. Those who do not “walk by the same rule” are “enemies of the cross” (Philippians 3:16-18). There is no middle ground! A person either loves it or loathes it. He is either reaching for “the mark for the prize” (Philippians 3:14), or else he is not walking by the same rule and is an enemy of the cross.

Such a book cannot allow people to be unaffected. It will not allow them to be neutral because it is God’s Word to humanity. Those who are noncommittal and who want to watch as spectators are considered opponents of the Word. Jesus said that a person is either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). There are no neutral positions.

How can a person look at such a book as the Bible and enjoy it only as poetry or literature when it tells him that his life is in opposition to God because of his lust, greed, pride, and sin in general? It points out God’s attitude toward his actions and deals with his basic degenerate nature. This Book means business! It judges the soul.

The Bible is the means by which God has preserved and propagated His Word for all time. It stands between the eternities and ties the two together. It tells of one God, who is independent of any other entity and who is the same to every generation.

The Bible describes the one God as He relates to people in different cultures and economies. Whether His people lived in the desert or in Babylon, in Egypt or in Jerusalem, in Antioch or in Rome, they were able to approach Him and find His wisdom.

B. Prophecy

Fulfilled prophecy demonstrates that the Bible is God’s Word. The ability to shape the future according to

one's will and desire lies in the realm of deity. The Bible not only foretells events but also shows how God carries to conclusion His will and creative concepts. Time is no obstacle, nor do the objections of any other entity deter Him. For Him to say, "I will that there be a church," and to bring that church into existence involves power that no mortal knows.

No one other than the true God of the Bible can predict future events accurately and then bring them to pass unfaithfully. Isaiah 41:21-23 delivers the challenge of God to all other supposed deities: "Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods."

The odds against a prophecy coming to pass are astronomical. Josh McDowell's book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* gives examples of the difficulties of a prophecy being brought to fulfillment. McDowell listed eleven different prophecies that would be considered obscure and showed that the mathematical chances for them coming to pass are virtually nil. Yet the God of the Bible not only predicted these astounding events but also brought them to pass.

The fulfillment of prophecy causes the pages of the Bible to come alive and reveals it as the veritable Word of God. It is the glory of God to give signs through His foreknowledge.

C. Inspiration

The word *inspiration* means "a breathing," and II Timothy 3:16 tells us that the Bible is the inspired Word of God: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The word

translated as “scripture” is *graphe*, which literally means “writing.” Paul certainly did not mean that all writings (secular letters, textbooks, novels) are inspired of God; he made himself clear in verse 15 by the description “holy writings.”

The word for “inspired” is *theopneustos*, literally “God-breathed,” and it reveals that Scripture uniquely issued from God as His breath. It is impossible for God’s Word to be extinguished because God still lives. The Bible that we use and depend upon has the same origin as we do—from the breath of God. (See also II Peter 1:20-21.)

D. Internal declarations

The Bible itself declares that it is God’s Word. Many times the Bible says, “This is the word of the Lord.” The last book of the Bible to be written warns against making alterations or additions to the Scripture (Revelation 22:18-19). This warning is true not only for Revelation but for all Scripture: its divine origin precludes an addition being made.

II Peter 1:20 states, “No prophecy of scripture comes of its own interpretation” (translation by author). How then did scriptural prophecy come? “Men of God spoke while being borne along by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21, translation by author). The writers were “carried along” by the Holy Ghost. This declaration permits no carnal influence into the Holy Writ, and such attempts have always resulted in embarrassing detection. If it had been possible to change or alter such a sin-hating, world-condemning, flesh-mortifying Bible without being obvious, it would have been done.

Jesus declared that Moses’ writings were Scripture

(John 5:39, 46, 47). He included the Prophets and Psalms in Luke 24:44 as Scripture. So according to Jesus, the Scriptures include these writings: Law, Prophets, Psalms. He used the traditional threefold classification of the Jews, which encompasses all the books of the Old Testament by including the historical books under the heading of Prophets and including poetic and miscellaneous books under the heading of Writings.

E. External evidence

Some critics disallow the Scripture's testimony of itself as the Word of God, but there are also extrabiblical sources, such as archaeological findings, which testify to the accuracy of the biblical accounts and give validity to the Bible's claim to be the Word of God.

Archaeologists prove time and time again the reliability of the Bible. William F. Fullbright, known for his reputation as one of the greatest archaeologists, stated, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of our Old Testament tradition." A Yale archaeologist similarly wrote: "On the whole . . . archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."²

The works of ancient historians also corroborate the biblical accounts. For example, passages in Josephus and Tacitus testify to the life of Jesus Christ.

Although the writers of history lend great assurance to the absoluteness of the scriptural record, history does not come close to the certain assurances of a born-again

Christian. He has not only the works of the scholars; he has the witness of the Spirit.

F. Verbal plenary inspiration

Since the Bible is God's Word, all parts of it are inspired. This doctrine is often called *plenary* ("full, complete") inspiration. Moreover, every word of the Bible is inspired. This doctrine is often called *verbal* ("dealing with words") inspiration. This view does not mean that no mistakes were ever made in any copies of the originals, but rather that every word of the original was written as God gave it. God moved upon those who wrote the Bible so that every word they wrote accurately reflected God's message.

Thus we can have confidence in every word, even in the form of every word. For example, Paul used the grammatical distinction between singular and plural to prove the inclusion of Gentiles into the program of promise, which until then was considered as belonging to the Jew only (Galatians 3:16). Since "seed" in that verse is singular, the promises made to Abraham were not made to "seeds," plural, but as concerning one, and this one seed is Christ. Therefore, the blessing of Abraham comes on the Gentiles through Christ, that is, by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:14). How would Paul have been able to positively declare such a teaching based on the singularity of one word if he himself did not believe every word was inspired?

Jesus claimed the complete law to be equally inspired and eternal. He said every word is to be accepted and should be the source of sustenance for the spiritual person (Matthew 4:4). "Not on bread only shall a man live,

but on every word proceeding through the mouth of God” (translation by author). And this word was given in the law.

Matthew 5:18 places emphasis on the correctness of every word and even on every letter of the alphabet. “Not one iota or point shall by any means pass away from the law . . .” (translation by author). The “iota” is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *yod*, which is the smallest letter of the alphabet. The “tittle” is from the Greek word meaning a hook, horn, point. It is used by Greek grammarians for accent and diacritical points. It is the projection of a stroke of the pen that distinguishes one letter from another. Some letters of Hebrew resemble one another so closely that the twist of the pen changes the meaning. The rabbis cautioned scholars and scribes to be careful in their writing so as to avoid such mistakes.

Christ said that everything else would pass away, but the smallest written letter or designation would remain until all was fulfilled. The Scriptures are exact; the Jews possessed the written Word of God. Jesus also gave the same enduring quality to His own words in Matthew 24:35. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words by no means will pass away” (translation by author). Clearly, His words still exist. If they would outlast this planet, then they are still here!

G. Inerrancy and infallibility

Inerrancy means that the original autographs (manuscripts) of the Bible were without error. Infallibility means without error in a larger sense; the concepts and accounts are correct. Neither word denies that there are variations and mistakes in various copies made since the originals.

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The Scripture is both inerrant and infallible in its original writings. (See Psalm 119:142, 151; John 17:17.) God gave people His holy Word, and they wrote it down as God inspired them. Although no originals now exist, through the many manuscripts—actually thousands—the originals are as visible as if they were before our very eyes. God’s truth endures to all generations, so we can have confidence that He has placed His hand of preservation upon His Word. (See Psalm 100:5; 117:2.) Sir Fredrick Kenyon, a leading authority of textual authenticity said:

It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the New Testament. The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translation from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writings of the church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world.³

Inerrancy and infallibility imply one another. Although the words seem to be synonymous, there are those who make a difference. Gleason L. Archer explains this view in order to refute it:

In recent years there has been a strenuous effort made by the revisionist movement within American Evangelicalism to defend the legitimacy of maintaining a kind of infallible authority or trustworthiness of

Scripture that allows for the appearance of factual errors in matters of history and science—even in the original manuscripts of Scripture. It is urged that the Bible was never intended to be a textbook of science or history, only of theology and doctrine. There may have been occasional mistakes in the area of astronomy or biology, and misunderstanding reflecting the backward views of a prescientific age may be reflected in the Hebrew text; but surely these mistakes cannot be regarded as endangering or compromising the validity of the theological teachings that constitute the main thrust of those ancient books. And if perchance now and then there may be contradictions between one statement of historical fact and another in some other passage, these errors may be freely and frankly admitted without damage to the status of the Bible as an infallible textbook in matters of metaphysics and theology. A flexible defense such as this makes it much easier to maintain an evangelical commitment to biblical authority without appearing ridiculous to professional historians and scientists who question the truth status of the Scriptures on the ground of its many factual errors.⁴

The Bible does not contain errors, however. God knows science better than anybody else, but He had to use terms that people could understand, and those terms differ from one age to the next age. The Bible describes reality in a way that people throughout history could understand.

In his book, Archer explained quite capably many difficulties and seeming contradictions in Scripture, demonstrating that God intended for His followers to trust in a

book without an error. Christ and His apostles believed and referred to scriptural records without the slightest hint of partial inerrancy or relative infallibility.

Archer says that Christ obviously accepted the Old Testament's infallibility, noting "the clear endorsement by our Lord Jesus Himself of even those passages in the Old Testament that speak of supernatural events most commonly rejected by rationalistic critics in our day."⁵ Here are some examples: (1) Adam and the Garden of Eden (Matthew 19:5), (2) Noah and the ark (Matthew 24:38-39), (3) the conversation of Moses with God at the burning bush (Matthew 22:32), (4) the feeding of the Israelites by manna from heaven (John 6:49), (5) the story of Jonah in the belly of the whale (Matthew 12:40), and (6) the repentance of Nineveh in response to Jonah's preaching (Matthew 12:41).

Jesus believed in the literal trustworthiness of the Old Testament record, whether those records dealt with doctrinal matters, matters of science, or anything else. Actually, humans do not know everything about science, and knowing it only partially brings confusion. Had God used advanced scientific terminology in the Bible, which He could have, people would have understood nothing.

Seeming inaccuracies in Scripture can be understood by a deeper study, by the discovery of additional information, or by the detection of some mistake by a copyist.

There are a number of discrepancies among manuscripts where scribes misspelled unfamiliar proper names when copying them or in dealing with numbers made a slight mark that resulted in an error. For example, II Kings 8:26 says that Ahaziah began reigning at the age of

twenty-two, whereas II Chronicles 22:2 says that he was forty-two years old when he began to reign. The difference is a horizontal hook above Roman-style numerals. A similar scribal discrepancy occurs in II Chronicles 36:9, which says Jehoiachin began reigning at age eight. But II Kings 24:8 gives his age as eighteen. The context shows that eighteen is correct, because Jehoiachin “did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD” (II Kings 24:9), and the age of eight would have been too early for him to be considered responsible for such moral decisions.

In these and other cases of discrepancies in copying, the Lord nevertheless ensured that His message and record could be determined. He said His message enough times and enough ways so that His Word is clear and so that any error of a copyist could be detected. This is evident in the later scriptoriums (official scribal institutions), where many copies were made. Where one scribe would make a mistake, whether it was a mistake of the eye, of the hand, or of the ear, another would have written the passage correctly. Since simultaneous copies existed, corrections could be made from them.

II. THE CANON

A. Definition

The English word *canon* comes from the Greek *kanon*, which means “a reed” and which implies a straight rod. The following two definitions explain its meaning in our context:

Because a reed was employed in measuring, the word came to be used in the sense of “measuring-rod”

or “ruler.” This was gradually extended to cover all kinds of “rules” or “standards” such as a “model” of proportion in plastic art; a “general rule” or paradigm in grammar; and table of dates or “system” or chronology in astronomy. As a technical term applied to a “list” or “catalogue” of scriptural books, the word seems to have been first used by Origen A.D. 250 but this use did not become general till more than a century after his death.⁶

Ecclesiastical writers during the first three centuries used the word *kanon* to refer to what was for Christianity an inner law and binding norm of belief (“rule of faith” and/or “rule of truth”). From the middle of the fourth century onward the word also came to be used in connection with the sacred writings of the Old and New Testaments.⁷

B. Inspiration and the canon

How do we know what books belong in the canon of Scripture? Was “inspiration” the criterion for canonicity? Historically, it appears that books were deemed as canonical because they had the authority of a recognized prophet or apostle and were recognized by the people of God as inspired. For example, they are authoritative, and hence canonical, because they are “the extant literary deposit of the direct and indirect apostolic witness on which the later witness of the church depends.”⁸

As a practical matter, inspiration and canonicity both relate to the same books, as the following quotation explains:

The two terms merely represent two different ways of approaching the books of the Bible. The word “canonical” lays emphasis on the normative aspect, while “inspired” has become the technical term to indicate that the writings in question were produced by God’s special operation through the Holy Spirit. The two concepts coincide because they both refer to precisely the same books and distinguish these books from other writings.⁹

The test of inspiration does not rest solely on the writer’s own declaration of spiritual anointing but to the testimony of the Holy Spirit and recognition by the people of God. Inspiration is further demonstrated by fulfilled prophecies and agreement with other proven writings.

C. The Old Testament canon

There is internal evidence of the canon of the Old Testament. In its earliest stages, such as the giving of the law, there is indication of the intent to preserve the records of God’s dealings with people. “Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments. . . . And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. . . . And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:3-7).

The revival under Josiah and the finding of “the book of the law” by Hilkiah in the Temple indicate the importance of those earlier books being preserved. “And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. . . . And it

came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes” (II Kings 22:8, 11). As a result, Judah began to seek after God again. Here, then, is an early account of the effort to hold certain writings in reverence and recognize them as inspired books of God.

Further preservation and choice of books is found in the reign of Hezekiah, who gathered a guild of writers and copied Scripture. “These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out” (Proverbs 25:1). As Sidlow Baxter has explained, there is some evidence that Hezekiah had his scribes to copy large portions of Scripture:

There seems to be a curious yet unmistakable confirmation of Hezekiah’s work on the Scriptures in the form of a certain peculiarity which few people know about. At the end of many of the books of the Old Testament, in the Hebrew originals, three capital letters are found. . . . No Hebrew transcriber and no compositor has dared to omit these three capital letter, Heth, Zayin, Qoph—in English, H. Z. K. These three letters are the first three in the Hebrew name of Hezekiah, and would stand for an abbreviation of his name, in the same way that men put their initials on documents today.¹⁰

There is also evidence of the canon outside of the Bible’s record of itself. For example, the ancient disagreement between the Samaritans and the more orthodox Jews of Jerusalem (recorded in Nehemiah) reveals that both groups regarded the five books of Moses as Scrip-

ture before that time. The *Dictionary of the Bible* explains:

At all events, the Samaritans were at one with the Jerusalem Jews in knowing and accepting the Pentateuch, which they still preserve and reverence as "Scripture." They would hardly have accepted it from their hated opponents *after* the final schism. We may infer, therefore, that by 300 B.C. at the very latest the Pentateuch was in circulation in Palestine Judaism, that it was generally accepted as the permanent embodiment of "the Law," and for this reason it was accorded something very like the same authority that was certainly attributed to it after it was subsequently canonized.¹¹

Other writers say that by this time not only was the Pentateuch respected as Scripture, but also the historical prophetic books and the poetical books. Ben-Sira's writing of about 200 B.C., called *Famous Men*, mentions "the Law, Prophets, and the Rest" and reveals the effort to collect the sacred writings.

Many modern-day critics who do not accept the Bible's reference of itself quote readily from the works of Josephus. He wrote about A.D. 100 concerning the collection of the Scriptures. Josephus offered further evidence of the claim of their inspiration. He also described the exactness of the copyists and the great care they took not to add anything to or subtract anything from the text. He wrote:

We do not possess innumerable multitude of books among us disagreeing from and contradicting

one another [as the Greeks have] but only two and twenty books which contain the record of all the past time; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his Laws, and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three hundred years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. . . . How firmly we have given credit to those books of our nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them or take anything from them, or to make any changes in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.¹²

There is no doubt of the confidence of the Jews in plenary inspiration at this juncture. It is also clear that the ancient Hebrew Scriptures had three divisions—Law, Prophets, and Writings—which included all the books of the Christian Old Testament. These divisions were retained through succeeding years, and Jesus and His disciples made reference to the same divisions (Luke 24:44).

The official fixing of the canon of the Hebrew Bible is generally attributed to the council of rabbis at Jamnia, which Bruce Metzger describes as follows:

Several significant collections of books and lists of “canonical” authors were drawn up by Jews and by Pagans during the early centuries of the Christian era. After the fall of Jerusalem, A.D. 70, both a rabbinical school (Beth ha—Midrash) and court (Beth Din, or Sanhedrin) were established at Jamnia (also called Jabneh), a city a dozen miles south of Joppa.¹³

The greatest authority and attestation of the Old Testament’s canon came from Jesus Himself, for He made reference to these writings (Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 22:40). The rich man in hades was reminded of the familiar Scriptures (Law and Prophets) (Luke 16:29). Christ also referred to the division of the Writings by speaking of the Hymns, or Psalms (Luke 20:42). He spoke of Solomon and his wisdom and depended on familiarity with Solomon’s writings in saying of Himself that “a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31). Christ mentioned the three divisions together in Luke 24:44: “It is necessary that all things be fulfilled which have been written concerning me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms” (translation by author).

When Jesus spoke in Matthew 23:35, He probably had in mind the order and arrangement of the Old Testament canon. “So all (the) righteous blood which is shed upon the earth comes upon you, from the blood of Abel, the righteous one, until the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom you murdered between the shrine and the altar” (translation by author). The Book of Chronicles stands last in the traditional arrangement of the Hebrew canon, and the murder of Zechariah is the last such incident recorded in this arrangement (II Chronicles

24:20-21). This murder took place when Joash was king of Judah in the ninth century B.C. The murder of Urijah, son of Shemaiah, happened in Jehoiakim's reign in the seventh century B.C. (Jeremiah 26:23). Since Urijah's murder occurred later, why did not Christ say "from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Urijah"? It seems that He used an idiomatic quote, like our saying "from Genesis to Malachi" today, to include the entire spectrum of the Hebrew of Scriptures. If Jesus had meant last in chronological sequence He would have cited Urijah, but by citing Zechariah as last, He covered all the martyrs in the Old Testament from beginning to end, thereby endorsing all the Old Testament.

It is questioned whether there was a difference in the Palestinian Jewish canon and the canon of the Jewish Dispersion. But the books accepted by the council of Jamnia were known to the Dispersion and were translated into Greek. Probably there were more books used in the Dispersion than in Palestine, but obviously they did not attain the stature accorded to the already accepted canon. "It is probable that the majority of the Jews in the Dispersion accepted the decision of Jamnia."¹⁴

The Roman Catholic Church includes fourteen additional books in the Old Testament that Protestants and Jews do not accept. These books are called the Apocrypha, which means "hidden" in Greek. They were written in the intertestamental period. Some of them bear names of great personages from Hebrew history, but this did not prove enough to carry them beyond the Jamnia conference into acceptability.

The Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament said to have been written between 250-150 B.C.,

includes the Apocrypha. It is probable that these books crept in at a later date, for the oldest existing manuscripts are from around A.D. 350.¹⁵

The books of the Apocrypha make no claim of inspiration, and they contain false doctrine, fanciful stories, and poor moral teaching. Significantly, neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers quoted from them. Protestants reject them as Scripture “because there is not sufficient evidence that they were ever reckoned as canonical by the Jews anywhere.”¹⁶

As we have seen, the Jews count twenty-two books in the Hebrew canon. These books are the same as the thirty-nine books of the Christian Old Testament. The Law includes the five books of Moses. The Prophets includes the “former prophets”—Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel as one book, I and II Kings as one book—and the “latter prophets”—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve “minor prophets” counted as one book—for a total of eight books. The third division is called Writings. It includes Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, and I and II Chronicles counted as one book, bringing the total to twenty-four books. Later Ruth was joined to Judges, and Lamentations was put with Jeremiah, bringing the number to twenty-two, which is the way Josephus counted them.

D. The New Testament canon

Initially, the early Christians did not have the written New Testament. They had the Old Testament, however, and used it in support of the gospel. We have many examples of the apostles substantiating their doctrine by

the existing Scriptures. In the earliest times, the church depended on letters written by the apostles, the Holy Ghost speaking through the leaders, and Old Testament writings. Apostolic letters were circulated, were copied, and were prized possessions of those fortunate enough to see them.

The apostles wrote their letters to meet the needs of their fellow Christians. They probably did not imagine how important their communications would be centuries later. One can detect, however, a sense of infinity and even infallibility resting upon the writers. For example, Paul must have had more than a local audience in mind when he wrote to the Galatians, "If we, or an angel out of heaven, preach (anything) alongside that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema" (Galatians 1:8, translation by author). John must have felt that he represented a final word to the church when he charged that no one was to add or to subtract from "this book" (Revelation 22:19).

Scholars such as Bruce Metzger of Princeton have attempted to trace the collection and circulation of sacred writings in the early church. The Holy Spirit directed the inspired books through treacherous shoals of false and spurious writings. In the words of Metzger, "The church did not create the Canon, but came to recognize, accept, affirm, and confirm, the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the church."¹⁷

In recognizing the canon, it seems that the foremost test was apostolicity (apostolic authorship or endorsement). This requirement excluded several popular writings of the second century. For example, the *Shepherd of*

Hermas was rejected by the writer of the *Muratorian Fragment* (the most ancient list of New Testament books) because “it cannot find a place ‘among the prophets whose number is complete or among the apostles.’”¹⁸ Regarding Mark and Luke, who were not apostles, their close association with Peter and Paul respectively allowed their Gospels to stand among the others.

Another test of canonicity for a book was its acceptance by the churches as inspired. Some books were allowed to be read but on the understanding that they were not to be classed as Scripture. Even New Testament preachers referred to extrabiblical sources without giving them scriptural authority. (See Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12; Jude 14). Similarly, we today quote everything from the almanac to the daily news in our preaching but do not present these sources as Scripture. There is a difference between homiletical use and theological authority.

A third prerequisite was conformity to the “Rule of Faith.” In other words, the writing under consideration had to agree with the doctrine preached by the apostles.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) acknowledged the four Gospels, Acts, the epistles of Paul, and I John, I Peter, Jude, and Revelation. He said further that Hebrews was the work of Paul. He, however, quoted from Barnabas, Clement of Rome, *Hermas*, and several other apocryphal books.

Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) categorized the books he had access to in the famous library of Caesarea, where he was bishop in A.D. 315. He listed “the holy quarterion of the gospels,” the “Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of Paul; next in order the extant former Epistle of John, and likewise the Epistle of Peter.” He also accepted the

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Apocalypse of John, which he said he did not understand but placed in the canon. Finally he noted “the accepted writings,” which were James, Jude, II Peter, “and those that are called the second and third John.” He named some “rejected writings:” the Acts of Paul, and the Shepherd, and the Apocalypse of Peter, the Epistle of Barnabas, the so-called teaching of the Apostles, and the Gospel of Hebrews.¹⁹

The Muratorian Canon is a major document in the history of the canon of the New Testament. This list of the New Testament books was written about A.D. 170, predating Eusebius by more than a century, and was published by the man who discovered it (whence also comes its name) in 1740. It substantiates the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen epistles of Paul, the Epistle of Jude, and two epistles of John. There has been much discussion as to whether the mention of “two epistles of John” means the first and second or the second and third epistles. “It is possible that, since the author has already alluded to the first epistle in connection with the Fourth Gospel, he felt able here to confine himself to the two smaller epistles. Or, according to an ingenious conjecture, the original Greek read ‘two in addition to the catholic [epistle].’”²⁰

Athanasius wrote about A.D. 329 that there are twenty-seven canonical New Testament books, presenting the same books that are in our present Bible. Although there was disagreement concerning the Book of Revelation, he contended for its acceptance. He further said that no books were to be added or taken away from these.

As Metzger noted, the total number of surviving Greek Bibles speaks “eloquently and more positively than the councils on questions relative to the canon.”²¹

The Institute for New Testament Text Research at Munster collected the following statistics in 1980: relative number of surviving New Testament manuscripts: the entire Greek New Testament—59; manuscripts containing the Gospels, Acts, catholic epistles, and Pauline epistles—149; manuscripts and fragments of Gospels—2120; manuscripts and fragments of the Acts and catholic epistles—447; manuscripts and fragments of the Pauline epistles—571; manuscripts and fragments of the Book of Revelation—228.²²

III. Transmission

A. The process

The transmission of the Bible text involves accommodation to other cultures and languages. In this process an error at or near the beginning would be multiplied by difficulties of translation and representation of idiomatic expression.

The doctrine of inspiration assures us that there were no errors in the original. “Holy men from God spoke while being borne along by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21, translated by author). This verse permits no margin of error, for God actually moved upon people to write. The possibility of error in the originals due to the time lapse from the moment God spoke to holy men and to the moment they were able to transmit the word is excluded by the present participle *pheromenoi*, “continued being moved by the Holy Spirit.” The Word was fresh from God!

The languages of the Bible are Hebrew, Aramaic (a related Semitic language), and Greek. Aramaic, being more syntactically flexible, generally replaced Hebrew in

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the common speech of the Jews after the exile of Israel. However, New Testament Jews could read and speak Hebrew. In New Testament times, Greek was the international language of communication and commerce in Bible lands.

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew with a few passages in Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek, although it is possible that some of the Gospels were originally written in Aramaic.

The Greek of the New Testament was thought for years to be a special “Holy Ghost” language because of certain unfamiliar words, but further findings revealed that the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, or the common language of the people, rather than classical Greek.

The first books were scrolls. The kind of book we use today is called a codex, which was not used until the close of the first century. A codex was made by folding one or more sheets of papyrus or vellum in the middle and sewing them together for easier handling and quicker reference.

Papyrus (from which our word *paper* is derived) was made from reeds that grew along the Nile and other marshy places. The stems of the reeds were split and laid upon a hard surface, then others were laid crosswise upon them and were pressed or crushed to form a paper that looked much like brown shopping-bag paper today. A long roll of this material would be forty feet in length or longer. The Book of Matthew would take about twenty-five to thirty feet, depending on the size of characters the scribe used. This material lasted very well, especially in regions of low humidity such as Egypt. We have some papyrus

manuscripts dating back to the early part of the second century. The greatest amount of papyri came from rubbish heaps that rose to a height of twenty to thirty feet on the outskirts of Egyptian towns and villages. The oldest manuscript fragments we have of the New Testament are papyri from the second and third centuries.

Other materials used in the preservation of Scripture were clay tablets, leather, and ostraca (pottery). These pieces of pottery rank high in value along with the papyri. They were called the poor man's writing tablet.

Parchment and vellum (a fine kind of parchment) were made of different kinds of animal skins. They were very durable and strong and could be erased and reused. Using modern technology, it has been possible to recover the original writing on erased manuscripts, called palimpsests, because of the indentation left by the acid in the ink of early scribes.

Uncials are a classification of New Testament manuscripts, named so because they were written with all majuscule (capital) letters. They span a time period from the fourth to the eighth century A.D., with a few being later. They are respected because of their antiquity, and they reveal the earlier style of writing.

The oldest and most complete uncials (with the exception of the Papyri) are Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph), Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Vaticanus (B), Codex Ephraemi (C), and Codex Bezae (D). Aleph is a fourth-century codex discovered by Constantine Tischendorf at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai. It mainly belongs to the Alexandrian type of text, agreeing most frequently with B.

A is a handsome codex dating from about the fifth

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century. Some portions are lost, as is true with most of its contemporary documents. It exemplifies the Byzantine type of text and ranks as the oldest in this category.

B is revered by some as most valuable and, as its name indicates, is in the Vatican Library at Rome. It is a fourth-century manuscript and has not been made available to scholars for study for years. It contains the Apocrypha with the exception of Maccabees.

Codex C is a fifth-century palimpsest that now contains only sixty-four leaves of the Old Testament.

Minuscules, as their name describes, are manuscripts of later date written in small letters. They outnumber the uncials. Some refer to them as the majority text and consider them to be the truer text. Simply counting texts does not necessarily settle the matter of textual criticism, however.

The early versions (translations in other languages) of the New Testament are also very important, because some of them originated in the second and third centuries.

The most important versions from the earlier centuries are as follows:

1. The Syriac versions. These include the Old Syriac, the Syriac Peshitta, which means "common" and exists in manuscripts dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, and several others.

2. The Latin versions are represented first by the Old Latin Version of which there remains no complete copy. Texts of it range in time from the fourth to the thirteenth century.

The Latin Vulgate was produced by Sophronius Eusebius Hieronymus, or Jerome, at the direction of Bishop Damascus of Rome about A.D. 382. What happened to the

manuscripts Jerome used is not known, but there have been many revisions, recensions, or editions of his work. "As a result, the more than 8,000 Vulgate manuscripts which are extant today exhibit the greatest amount of cross-contamination of textual types."²³

3. The Coptic versions are the work of Egyptian translators, with the Sahidic and the Bohairic being the prominent.

4. The Gothic version was translated by Ulfilas, a missionary to the Goths. He translated manuscripts from Greek into Gothic after creating an alphabet for Gothic. His work was done in the fourth or fifth century, and manuscripts extant are fifth or sixth century. He translated in a very literal manner, and the text he used was Byzantine, similar to the Textus Receptus, which is the text behind the King James Version. Ulfilas obviously had access to manuscripts predating Vaticanus or Sinaitic because he quoted the King James ending of Matthew 6:13, which neither of them have.²⁴ This version lends significant credibility to the King James Version.

Other versions include the Armenian (fourth century), Georgian (fifth century), Ethiopic (sixth century), Arabic, Nubian, and Sogdian.

Scholars also use lectionaries to study the Bible text. They were copies made for use in churches. They divided portions of Scripture into lessons to be used on Sundays or special days throughout the year, with notes indicating certain passages to be read on certain days.

B. The scribes

The first church with its missionary zeal was interested in passing along copies of Scripture to Christians in other

places. Individuals copied Scripture by hand, work that scribes were later paid to do. As the number of Christians grew, the task demanded more effort. Such demands often required haste, which caused errors in spelling.

Later, in the fourth century, the state gave official sanction to Christianity, and the process of bookmaking was done by commercial manufacturers. The writing was done in scriptoriums, or scribal institutions. Even though this method allowed less error, the work was nevertheless tedious. If a certain number of copies were needed, the task required as many writers as copies that were ordered. There was one central reader, or lector, who slowly read aloud. It was a laborious task to sit hour after hour listening to the drone of a reader and still remain alert enough to avoid making mistakes.

The scribes were not allowed to converse with one another, and if caught doing so, they were penalized in wages. Of course, any distraction could result in an error. Similar copies made from the same scriptorium were compared in order to correct errors. In one such blunder of John 5:39, where Jesus said of the Scriptures, "They bear witness (ai marturousai) concerning me," a scribe working on Codex Bezae wrote, "They are sinning (a martanousai) concerning me," which naturally is an absurd rendering.

The mistakes that were made include the following: (1) Errors of hearing. These were mistakes of understanding words that sound alike, such as "reel" and "real" or "there" and "their." The similarities of certain Greek characters, such as the short o and long o sounds, resulted in some mistakes. (2) Errors of vision. Some of the Greek letters that resemble one another were fre-

quently interchanged. (3) Errors of judgment, such as copying from the wrong column or inserting marginal notations in the text itself. (4) Intentional changes, often to clarify, correct, or harmonize a presumed discrepancy.

The monotony of scribal duties and the prohibition of conversation during work periods of a scriptorium often resulted in a writer inserting a note or a colophon on the margin of the page. These additions give an interesting insight into the world and duties of these scribes. Bits of human interest appear and lend not only color but amusement. One may comment on the foulness of the weather, while another will say how cold the room was. The seemingly endless process of writing would so wear on one of them that at the close of the last chapter a note would read, "The end of the book, thank God."

Certain notes were written for praise and worship; some were exegetical comments and were sometimes included in the text. Many textual scholars explain the inclusion of I John 5:7 in later manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate in this manner. (It does not appear in any early Greek manuscript or in any Latin manuscript before about A.D. 800.)

There were no chapters and verses in the earliest manuscripts and no division of words. It was not until the fourth century that divisions were used to aid in finding a place in Scripture. The practice of linear writing (no space between words) certainly made the transmission of the text more difficult. For example, the words *God-isnowhere*, could be divided to mean *God is now here*, or *God is no where*. The difference is quite evident. Such ambiguities were not frequent in Greek, however, for the words were identified by their endings, which were limited to vowels or one of three consonants.

Eusebius of Caesarea devised a system to aid one in locating parallel passages in the Gospels. His method must have been very popular because it was widely used in many manuscripts and versions.

C. Accuracy of our Old Testament

The reverence for the “holy writings” by the ancients is well known, and the dedication of the copyists resulted in a Hebrew text today that compares well with the earliest manuscripts of the Old Testament.

Until recently we possessed no copies of the Hebrew text earlier than the ninth century A.D., and thus we were limited in our ability to compare texts and prove conclusively the accuracy of our Old Testament.

Then, beginning in 1947, discoveries near Qumran in certain caves in the Judean wilderness provided the greatest find of Bible manuscripts in recent times. These caves yielded hundreds of manuscripts of which about 170 are biblical. The manuscripts vary in dates. Some are said to be as old as the third century B.C. and compare quite well with our Old Testament today. They span a time period of about three hundred years.

There are two “main strands of Biblical recension in the Qumran scrolls.”²⁵ One recension, or edition, is known as the Massoretic Text, which is the text of the King James Version. The other type of text was in circulation in Egypt during the second and third centuries B.C. and correlates with the Septuagint.

The important thing about these scrolls is that they substantiate our Bible text, which, until their discovery, had no early witness. They demonstrate the accuracy of our Old Testament.

D. Accuracy of our New Testament

The advantage of the New Testament textual study in comparison with that of the Old Testament is the number of existing manuscripts and older versions found in different parts of the world. The similarities of some and the differences between others allow textual scholars to trace origins and categorize them into families. By comparisons of both internal and external evidences, it is possible to ascertain the original text.

History is not without its culprits, however. Some of them made alterations under the cloak of “higher criticism,” and some miscopied and added exegetical notes because of their own views. Amazingly, God has guided and preserved His Word in such a way that with every passing year new evidence is found to authenticate the existing New Testament.

Another miraculous factor is the dating of our earliest manuscripts so near to the time of the originals. This is not true of any other ancient extrabiblical literature. The closest one can come to the originals of most classical Greek works is many hundreds of years.

Concerning the relatively short period of time from the writers of the New Testament to the earliest manuscripts we have in our possession today, scholars say that the time is so short as to be negligible. Because of such a minimal time lapse we can be confident of the authenticity and general integrity of the Bible.

It is with confidence that the most critical commentators recognize that the reproduction of the true Scripture is possible. There is an awe among them because of the great collection of New Testament texts so near to the dates of the originals.

E. English translations

The production of the English translation (as to major versions) began with John Wycliffe. He based his translation upon the Latin Vulgate. His work was done from 1320-84 and was not finished at his death. His friends completed his work after his death.

William Tyndale was the next in order of the great English translators. He was an early reformer and was determined that the English-speaking people should have the Bible in their own language. Instead of basing his work upon the Latin Vulgate, as did Wycliffe, he had access to the Greek text of Erasmus. He was martyred before he completed the Old Testament, but his New Testament was issued in 1525. It is thought that the Matthews Bible of 1537 used Old Testament material that he left.

Following Tyndale's translation came the Coverdale New Testament about 1535. Then followed the Matthews Bible, which is generally credited to John Rogers, a friend of Tyndale.

The Great Bible of 1539 was based on the others already mentioned: Matthews, Coverdale, and Tyndale. It was the work of a commission authorized by Henry VIII. Afterward it took the name of Cranmer's Bible (1540).

Another version called the Geneva Bible fits into the chronological graph here. It was Calvinistic in its overall aspect.

Next came the Bishop's Bible in 1568, prepared under the direction of the archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Elizabeth. It was chiefly a revision of the Great Bible and was used mainly by the clergy. It was not popular with the ordinary churchman.

In 1582 the Roman Catholic version was published. It was translated from the Latin Vulgate and published at Rheims. It is known as the Douay Bible and contains controversial notes. It is viewed as unacceptable outside of the Roman church.

The King James Version of 1611 is the most popular Bible for English-speaking people. It is also called the Authorized Version because James I authorized a committee to produce it. This version is cherished the world over, as described by its publishers:

For nearly four hundred years, and throughout several revisions of its English form, the King James Bible has been deeply revered among the English-speaking peoples of the world. The precision of translation for which it is historically renowned and its majesty of style have enabled that monumental version of the Word of God to become the mainspring of the religion, language, and legal foundations of our civilization.²⁶

An examination of the translations produced since the KJV shows the great effort of the KJV translators to maintain the literal rendering in it. Space will not permit a comparison of passages but it is well worth the effort to any serious student of the Word.

Following the 1611 KJV came the Revised Version (1881-85), followed by the American Standard Version (1901). Their close proximity to the critical text of Westcott and Hort, which is dominated by the Roman Catholic Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus and the theologically liberal leanings of their translators, render

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them somewhat suspect. Fredrick Kenyon in his introduction of the Chester Beatty papyri manuscripts has explained the textual controversy:

The main controversy lay between the supporters of the traditional "Received Text" embodied in the vast majority of extant manuscripts and reproduced in our Authorized Version and those who followed Hort and other scholars in preferring the evidence of the older authorities, notably the Vatican and Sinaitic Mss. and the early versions, which had become known in the course of the nineteenth century.²⁷

When Kenyon refers to the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus as "the older text," it is with the exception of the Beatty papyri and other papyri. Moreover, the few "older" manuscripts may not always be as reliable as the preponderance of later manuscripts, which could reflect even older readings. In any case, the vast majority of variant readings do not significantly affect content or doctrine, and the fundamental doctrines can be readily established from any major text or version.

There are many newer translations such as Williams, Lamsa, Phillips, Goodspeed, Moffatt, and the New English Bible. Some of them are helpful for comparison and word appreciation, but the King James Version is preferable for doctrinal study. An excellent modern-language update of the KJV is the New King James Version.

The New International Version is a conservative modern translation, but most of the newer versions tend to be more of a paraphrase than a literal rendering of the Greek

words. Some do not even claim to be a translation of Greek words—the Living Bible and Good News for Modern Man are examples—but try to convey ideas, and they often end up being more of an interpretation than a translation. It is said that the interpreter takes up where the translator stops, but sometimes he picks up before the translator is through.

The best method of Bible study is to read the Bible in the original languages. For example, the United Bible Societies publish a Greek New Testament that furnishes a textual apparatus. With it, the student is able to see which manuscripts are behind the passages, and he can go to a lexicon (Greek-English dictionary) for the meaning of a word. A volume that accompanies the United Bible Societies text goes into even more detail about the variants and the manuscripts. It is called *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger and is exhaustive.

If a person cannot read Greek, he can still obtain an interlinear New Testament such as Marshall's translation of Nestle's text, which gives the Greek word with the English beneath each word and the King James Version at the side. He must be sure to check the text, however, because Nestle usually followed the Westcott and Hort text and there are many variants. At any rate, there needs to be a tremendous amount of study to appreciate and understand even the King James Version. Sometimes the blind advocacy of a particular translation is an excuse for failure to study and apply the Word. As someone has said, "It's not the translation that bothers folks, but living the translation that is hard."

IV. PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

A. Biblical criticism

The word *criticism* is usually seen as a negative word, although in textual studies the word is neutral. Perhaps the term “textual appreciation” is more appropriate for general discussion.

There are two basic types of biblical criticism.

Historical criticism refers to the study of the origin, authenticity, and context of various books. This type of study is important but it has often been abused in a way that attacks the integrity of the biblical message.

Textual criticism seeks to discover the original words of the biblical writers and to establish certain rules in order to come to the correct conclusions. Here are some rules that most textual critics today use.

External evidence.

Important factors are: (1) The date of the manuscript and the date of the type of text. (Some minuscules are of greater importance than uncials.) (2) The geographical location and its agreement with texts from different localities. (3) The relationship to other texts. The texts should be weighed against each other, not simply counted.

Internal evidence.

(1) The shorter reading is generally preferred, for often the longer reading is an effort of a copyist to interpret a bit. (2) The more difficult reading is generally preferred, for the same reason. (3) The harmony of the text with others is an important factor. (4) The style and vocabulary of a particular writer must be considered.

B. The literal method of interpretation

Bible students should translate and interpret literally when possible and as literal as possible.

The literal (or grammatico-historical) method of interpretation is the only consistent approach, in contrast to the allegorical method. By the literal method of interpretation, we mean understanding the words of Scripture according to their ordinary, customary, apparent meaning as determined by grammar, context, and historic usage. This method does not exclude symbolism, but it means that we should only attribute a figurative or symbolic meaning when the context or wording itself indicates such. Examples are recognizable figures of speech, parables, types, or symbols indicated as such in Scripture, and some prophetic references. When someone hears an allegorical interpretation and there seems to be no scriptural license for the symbolism or typology, he should ascertain what authority the interpreter is using. The fundamental problem with allegorical interpretation is that it ignores the objective meaning of Scripture and is largely subjective. Under the allegorical method, one person's interpretation is as good as another's, for there is no basis for proving or disproving it and no final authority.

V. CONCLUSION

We cannot improve the Bible by our opinions. It stands as the Word of God because of its supernatural origin and miraculous preservation. It stands on its own merits.

It has been well stated, "If all the academics of music in the world were to unite in declaring Bach and Beethoven to be great musicians we should reply, 'Thank

you for nothing; we know that already.’”²⁸ The person who thinks that his endorsement elevates the Bible in stature from obscurity to worldwide renown has not really seen its glory. It feeds for itself as the inspired, living, life-giving Word of God.

NOTES

- ¹Lehman, “A Literal or Literary Bible?” *Newsweek* (January 10, 1988), 72.
- ²Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, (San Bernardino: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), 64, 176.
- ³*Ibid.*, 45.
- ⁴Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 22.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, 16.
- ⁶James Hastings, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 121.
- ⁷Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1987), 293.
- ⁸*Ibid.*
- ⁹A. B. du Toit, *The Guide to the New Testament*.
- ¹⁰J. Sidlow Baxter, *Mark These Men* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 121.
- ¹¹*Dictionary of the Bible*.
- ¹²Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, ed. William Whitson (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), 18:607.
- ¹³Metzger, *Canon*, 109.
- ¹⁴*Dictionary of the Bible*.
- ¹⁵James Orr, gen. ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁷Metzger, *Canon*, 287.

¹⁸Ibid., 253.

¹⁹*Dictionary of the Bible*.

²⁰Metzger, *Canon*, 197.

²¹Ibid.

²²Kurt and Barbara Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testament*, as quoted by Metzger, *Canon*, 127.

²³Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1968), 77.

²⁴F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell), 216.

²⁵Seigfried H. Horn, "The Old Testament Text in Antiquity," *Ministry* (November 1987), 4, quoting W. F. Albright, *New Light on Early Recension of the Hebrew Bible*.

²⁶*The New King James Version of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), iii.

²⁷Fredrick G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri: General Introduction* (Great Britain: Letterpress at the University Press, 1933), 15.

²⁸Metzger, 287.

ANGELS

by **Ralph V. Reynolds**

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ANGELS

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I. ORIGIN AND NATURE OF ANGELS

A. Angels are heavenly beings

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible gives great prominence to teaching regarding angels. They are spiritual beings who are worshipers of God and ministers for the needs of humanity. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

Angels are spirits; thus they are immaterial and incorporeal (Hebrews 1:7). They are invisible but have the power to manifest themselves in human form in order to be seen by people. They are not the spirits of the departed, nor are they glorified human beings. They are nonhuman spirit beings with individual personalities.

The Greek word *angelos*, which is translated as “angel,” literally means “messenger.” This definition suggests that emphasis should be placed upon their ministry rather than upon their nature and appearance.

Although angels were created as superior to humanity, in the Bible they never permitted people to worship them. (See Hebrews 1:7-8; Revelation 22:8-9.) They direct all worship towards God and take the lead in eternal worship.

B. Angels are created beings

Although angels are immortal they are not eternal. They had a definite beginning. They were created by a command of God. Each angel is a direct creation of God, and it is assumed that all angels were created simultaneously. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities,

or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (Colossians 1:16).

Angels do not marry, nor do they procreate. Evidently there is no gender among the angels although Scripture refers to them in the masculine gender. Jesus said that people in the resurrection “neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36).

Angels do not die and are therefore immortal. It should be noted that this is true of the fallen angels as well as the holy, unfallen angels. The fallen angels are reserved for an eternal state of damnation.

C. Angels are intelligent beings

Angels are revealed in the Bible as spiritual beings of outstanding intelligence. The wisdom given to them far surpasses that of humans. They possess a much superior intelligence to any other form of life in this world.

However they are not omniscient. There are many things they do not understand. For example, the hour of the coming of Jesus is unknown to them. “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). Moreover, they do not understand the mystery of the church and the grace of God, although they desire to know: “Which things the angels desire to look into” (I Peter 1:12).

D. Angels have free will

God created angels for the purpose of worship, and worship would be meaningless without free will. God would receive no glory from a robot. Therefore all of the

beings God created to commune with Him were created with a free will. God desires the worship of all His intelligent creation but it must be prompted by free will. Anything less is not acceptable.

For this reason Adam was given a choice and possessed the ability to fall. Satan was not a robot but a beautiful cherub possessing free will and the ability to transgress.

E. Angels are holy

The expression “holy angels” describes God’s angels as spotless in purity (Luke 9:26). They are morally perfect and abhor evil. Their beauty and glorious appearance are directly associated with their absolute holiness.

The angels are humble and obedient. In Isaiah’s vision the seraphim, a high order of angels, covered their faces in the presence of the Lord (Isaiah 6:2). In heaven there is perfect obedience to the will of God. Jesus taught His disciples to pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Luke 11:2). Thus the angels demonstrate absolute, perfect obedience.

F. Angels are powerful

Angels are powerful, more powerful than humans. “Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord” (II Peter 2:11). “Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Psalm 103:20).

In both the Old and New Testaments angels demonstrated their great power. For example, one angel killed 185,000 Assyrians (Isaiah 37:36). One angel rolled back

the stone from the tomb of Jesus (Matthew 28:2). One angel will bind Satan and cast him into the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:1-3).

Although angels are mighty, they are not almighty. They do not possess the attribute of omnipotence. They are described only as “mighty” (II Thessalonians 1:7). Their power is delegated, and it is definitely limited. The angel sent with a message to Daniel was hindered for twenty-one days by the prince of Persia and could not get through until Michael came to his aid. Satan, himself a fallen angel, will be bound by another angel.

G. Angels are numerous

The number of angels is beyond our calculation. The Bible contains many expressions that convey the immensity of their number:

“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Revelation 5:11)

“an innumerable company” (Hebrews 12:22)

“thousand thousands . . . and ten thousand times ten thousands” (Daniel 7:10)

“a multitude” (Luke 2:13)

“legions” (Matthew 26:53).

It should be remembered that only God could change the number of angels, since they do not procreate or reproduce. Their number remains constant, for they do not die. Undoubtedly there is the same number of angels today as there was in the beginning.

H. Angels are swift

Angels do not possess the attribute of omnipresence. Even Satan is not omnipresent. An angel can only be in

one place at any one moment. However, they do have the ability to travel at great speed.

Angels can evidently travel more swiftly than light (186,000 miles per second). One writer suggested that angels can travel as rapidly as thought. It certainly is true that distance means little to them as they minister in obedience to the command of God.

I. Angels have various ranks and positions

God did not create all angels equal in power and authority. In the angelic hierarchy there are various ranks and positions. The Bible does not give much information concerning this matter, but it reveals enough so that we are not left entirely in the dark. We can draw certain conclusions that are verified by the Scriptures. For example, Colossians 1:16 describes various ranks of authority that seem to apply to the angelic hosts, namely, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

Let us briefly study the following angelic orders mentioned in Scripture.

1. *Cherubim*. It seems that the highest rank in the angelic world is that of cherub. In Hebrew, the plural of *cherub* is *cherubim*, although the King James Version uses the word *cherubims* (Psalm 80:1). The root meaning of the word *cherub* is “to cover, guard, protect.” Lucifer was originally appointed to be the “anointed cherub that covereth” (Ezekial 28:14). The office of the cherub seems to relate to guarding and defending God’s holiness.

Cherubim along with a flaming sword were placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to guard the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24). Replicas of cherubim were placed

upon the ark in the Holy of Holies. The curtains of the Tabernacle and the veil of the Temple were embroidered with patterns of cherubim.

2. *Seraphim*. Seraphim (plural for *seraph*) are mentioned only once in the Bible. They are seen in Isaiah 6:1-7 as attending to the Lord as He is seated on a high throne. They seem to be guarding God's holiness.

One of the seraphim purified the lips of the prophet Isaiah. Their ministry seem to be that of purification and unceasing worship.

The four living creatures in Revelation 4:8 may be seraphim. These creatures have the same message as that of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8).

3. *Archangels*. *Arch* used as a prefix means "chief." The word *archangel* means "chief angel." Although there is apparently more than one archangel, the Bible only mentions the term two times. Jude 9 calls Michael "the archangel," and I Thessalonians 4:16 refers to "the voice of the archangel" that will be heard when Jesus descends to catch away the church. This archangel could also be Michael. On both occasions the word is used in the singular; the plural form, *archangels*, is not found in the Bible.

4. *Angels*. The word *angels* embraces all the angelic hosts regardless of their rank or order. They may minister at the direct command of God or they may minister under a heavenly dignitary or prince and be answerable to the authority placed over them under God.

It is likely that at least one-third of the angels were directly under the authority of Lucifer before his fall, for when he fell, one-third of the angels followed his leader-

ship and rebelled against God. (See Revelation 12:4, 9.)

In some Old Testament passages, the “angel of the LORD” is perhaps a direct, visible manifestation of God Himself in angelic form. (See Genesis 16:7-13; Exodus 23:20-23; Judges 2:1-5; 6:11-24.) In other passages, the angel of the LORD is clearly an angelic messenger sent by God to represent Him. (See II Samuel 24:16; I Chronicles 21:15-30; Zechariah 1:8-19.) It is erroneous to interpret this title as referring to a second divine person, for God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4). It is also erroneous to teach that Jesus was a preexistent angel, or to identify Him with Michael. The Spirit of Jesus preexisted the Incarnation as the one true God, and any divine manifestations were the work of this one, indivisible God.

J. Names of some angels

Several individual angels are named or otherwise identified in the Bible.

1. *Michael*. The name *Michael* means “who is like unto God?” Lucifer said, “I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:14), but there in his presence was Michael, whose name asked, “Who is like God?” Lucifer certainly was under greater condemnation because he lifted himself up in pride in the presence of Michael.

Michael is called “the archangel” in the Epistle of Jude. In Daniel 10:13 he is called “one of the chief princes.” Michael opposed Satan in a dispute concerning the body of Moses (Jude 9), and Revelation 12:7 describes him leading an angelic army in heaven against the devil. Michael is mentioned by name five times in the Scriptures.

2. *Gabriel*. The meaning of the name *Gabriel* is “God

is mighty.” He is mentioned four times in the Bible. He is the messenger of mercy and promise.

Gabriel brought the message of the birth of John to Zacharias and the annunciation of the Savior’s birth to the virgin Mary (Luke 1). He was sent with a prophetic revelation to Daniel (Daniel 9:21).

3. *Lucifer*. His name meant “Day Star.” He was created as one of the fairest and most powerful of all the angelic hosts. He rebelled against God, and consequently the Bible gives him various other names, which we shall review later.

Lucifer is the captain of the underworld and the personal leader of all the forces arrayed against Jesus Christ and the church.

4. *Prince of Persia and prince of Grecia*. Daniel 11 mentions these two powerful leaders among the fallen angels. It does not give their names but identifies them by stating their realm of authority among the devil’s angels. These two fallen angels take their orders directly from Satan.

II. THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

A. Angels have a heavenly ministry

In heaven there is perfect obedience to the will of God. There is perfect harmony and unity among the angels as they worship.

Undoubtedly there are many activities in which angels are involved, the greatest of which is worship. The picture the Bible gives is one of continuous, perpetual worship. Revelation 4 and 5 describe a heavenly scene around God’s throne in which there is continuous worship. John

saw thousands of angels, “saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).

B. Angels have an earthly ministry

1. *Angels are messengers sent from God.* Upon many occasions God has used angels as agents to carry messages of comfort and encouragement and to make prophetic announcements. By way of examples here are a few instances recorded in the Bible.

a. *Jacob’s ladder* (Genesis 28:12). Jacob was weary and troubled. After journeying all day he lay down to sleep with stones for his pillow. The Lord appeared to him standing above a ladder that reached to heaven, and Jacob saw angels ascending and descending upon this ladder. Angels still ascend and descend to minister to weary, needy souls.

b. *The annunciation* (Luke 1:26-38). Gabriel carried the announcement of the birth of Jesus to the virgin. Mary not only heard his voice, but she also saw him.

c. *The resurrection* (Matthew 28:2-7; Luke 24:4-7). At Christ’s tomb angels announced the important message of His resurrection.

d. *The ascension of our Lord* (Acts 1:10-11). After Jesus ascended, angels comforted the disciples with the promise of our Lord’s return.

e. *An angel gave Cornelius instructions* (Acts 10:3-6). The angel did not preach the gospel to Cornelius but rather told him where he could find a gospel preacher. Angels do not preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in this age. God has commissioned born-again people to do this

all-important work.

f. *An angel will preach the everlasting gospel* (Revelation 14:6-7). During the Tribulation an angel will proclaim to the whole world the everlasting gospel. This message is proclaimed throughout all ages and remains the same, for it deals with the worship of God and the coming judgment, and it does not need a redeemed person to proclaim it.

2. *Angels are agents who perform God's work.* Angels have sufficient power to perform supernatural acts. A few miraculous acts are stated here.

a. *Two angels delivered Lot from Sodom* (Genesis 19:15-16). These angels took Lot by the hand along with his wife and daughters and thrust them out of the city.

b. *Angels closed the mouths of lions* (Daniel 6:22). Daniel was unharmed by the lions, although he was in their den all night. When Daniel's enemies were thrown in, they were immediately devoured by the lions, which proved that Daniel's deliverance was miraculous. Daniel testified to the king, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths."

c. *An angel destroyed 70,000 through pestilence* (II Samuel 24:15-16). This was an act of judgment following David's sin for numbering Israel.

d. *An angel killed 185,000 Assyrians* (II Kings 19:35). During the night the angel passed through the camp of the Assyrians and they died while sleeping in their tents.

e. *An angel set Peter free from prison chains* (Acts 12:7). In spite of sixteen soldiers guarding Peter, an angel set him free. He was chained to two soldiers but the chains fell off. The iron gate of the prison opened of its

own accord. All of this shows the supernatural power that an angel possesses.

f. *An angel will bind Satan* (Revelation 20:1-2). Satan will be bound and cast into the bottomless pit by an angel.

3. *Angels minister to the saints*. Angels are “ministering spirits” sent forth to assist the “heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

Angels ministered to Jesus following His temptation in the wilderness. “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (Matthew 4:11). If angels ministered to our Lord in a moment of testing, we can be sure that they will also minister to God’s children.

In a moment of dark despair Elijah prayed that the Lord would take his life (I Kings 19:4). In this moment of great weakness an angel ministered to him twice. He received strength from the food that the angel prepared for him and was sustained by it for forty days.

In the midst of a violent storm when all hope was gone, an angel came to Paul assuring him of the safety of himself and 275 fellow passengers (Acts 27:23).

Because of the angel’s message Paul was able to inspire everyone with hope and confidence.

4. *Angels are important in the life of each Christian*. Upon many occasions Christians are made aware of the ministry of angels in their lives, but angels minister when Christians may not be aware of their presence. They are around the Christian when he is asleep and when he is awake.

The following verses of Scripture reveal just how important angels are in the life of a Christian.

Doctrines of the Bible

- “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psalm 34:7).

- “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psalm 91:11-12).

- “Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:10).

- “And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22).

Christians do not have the authority to command or control angels; only God does. Christians must not pray to or worship angels in any way. Instead they are to pray to God and have faith in Him alone, and He will dispatch angels to minister to Christians as He wills.

Many Christians can testify of times they have been saved miraculously from serious accidents and possible death. When the enemy attacks with the purpose of destroying, an angel can intervene and rescue the child of God from serious harm. The knowledge of the presence of angels strengthens and encourages the Christian in the face of great peril.

5. *Angels rejoice over the planned victory of God.* Angels rejoiced and sang when the Lord spoke the earth out of chaos and made it a beautiful planet. It was a time of great victory for them. “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

Angels were spectators when God created humans in His own image out of the dust of the earth. Although they were only spectators and not assistants in the work of creation, the Lord took them into His confidence when

humanity was created to have dominion over the earth. Perhaps God addressed the angelic host who witnessed this important event when He said, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26).

Through the centuries the angels have watched with keen interest the struggle between the good and evil in the human race. There is suspense, and, when there is victory, the angels rejoice. Every time a sinner turns to God in repentance, a victory is won over Satan and all heaven rejoices (Luke 15:10).

III. THE FALLEN ANGELS

A. Satan (Lucifer)

1. *Origin and fall.* “Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so. . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Ezekiel 28:14-15).

Satan was created by God and known as Lucifer. The name *Lucifer* means “day star” or “light-bearer.” He was created as one of the most beautiful and powerful of all the angels. He occupied a position of great authority and responsibility and was in attendance before God’s throne. Lucifer was the “covering” cherub. It appears that a large percentage of the angels were directly under his command.

Some people have concluded that the earth was originally under his authority and that his sin and fall caused great catastrophe. They point to Genesis 1:2 as evidence of a great desolation after the original creation.

The sin that caused Satan’s downfall was pride. The glory of his position was great and his heart was exalted and corrupted. He became ambitious to be like God, and

as soon as he did, rebellion ruled in his heart. Self-will took over in his life; chaos and havoc were the result. The pride and self-will that took over in his heart are evident in Isaiah 14:12-14, which records five instances of his declaration, "I will": "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."

2. *Nature and character.* The Bible describes Lucifer as wicked and perverted. At the same time he is extremely clever and subtle. The Scriptures describe his character as follows:

- a. Satan is a murderer (John 8:44).
- b. Satan is a liar (John 8:44).
- c. Satan is a thief (Matthew 13:19).
- d. Satan is subtle (II Corinthians 11:3).
- e. Satan is a deceiver (Revelation 12:9).

The Bible calls Satan a roaring lion and a serpent (I Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9). Actually, he is far more dangerous as a serpent than as a roaring lion for he disguises his evil nature and intent. He presents himself as an angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14). It is not difficult for him to do so for he originally was an angelic being of light.

3. *Names and titles of Satan in Scripture.* The two principal names given to him are Satan, which is a Hebrew word meaning adversary, and devil, which is derived from the Greek *diabolos*, meaning accuser or slanderer.

The Bible uses at least forty names or titles to refer to

Satan. Here are a few of them.

- prince of the power of the air—Ephesians 2:2
- power of darkness (perhaps an impersonal reference)—Colossians 1:13
- prince of this world—John 14:30
- great dragon—Revelation 12:9
- serpent—Revelation 12:9
- god of this world—II Corinthians 4:4
- Abaddon (Hebrew) perhaps another fallen angel—Revelation 9:11
- Apollyon (Greek) perhaps another fallen angel—Revelation 9:11
- accuser of our brethren—Revelation 12:10
- Beelzebub—Matthew 12:27
- Belial—II Corinthians 6:15

4. *Position and power.* A person should never underestimate the power of the devil. He is not omnipotent, however. Neither is he omnipresent or omniscient. Jesus is far more powerful than the devil and will cast him into the lake of fire. We should always remember that the devil is a defeated foe and that Jesus is the conquering King.

The devil has many subordinates to do his will. A host of fallen angels are subject to his will. Under his authority are beings so mighty that Paul named them as principalities, powers, world rulers, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12). Satan carries on his wicked work with multitudes of evil demons who are his obedient subjects.

5. *Present work.* As the world draws closer to the end of the age the devil is increasingly active. He knows that he has only a short time (Revelation 12:12), and he is busily engaged in obstructing God's work in every way possible.

Doctrines of the Bible

The only way that he can strike at God is to strike at the church. This he furiously continues to do.

The Bible clearly describes many of his activities.

a. *Accusing the saints.* “For the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

Jesus is the mediator for the saints, but Satan is the accuser. The Christian must be careful that he does not assist Satan in this diabolical work. The story of Job, which is not an allegory but a historical account, illustrates Satan’s accusations. Satan is still busy accusing people today.

b. *Devouring those whom he is able to seize.* “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

The lion stalks its prey and roars when it catches its victim. The Christian need not expect the devil to give warning of his presence. By alertness and vigilance, however, the Christian can escape the claws and fangs of the enemy that would devour him.

c. *Deceiving people.* “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (II Corinthians 4:4).

One of the greatest activities of Satan is deceiving the minds of men and women. He is the great deceiver. The majority of lost souls are destroyed through deception and delusion.

d. *Sowing tares.* “But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. . . . The enemy that sowed them is the devil” (Matthew 13:25, 39).

The tares that Satan sows are the seeds of wrong doctrine and delusion. He inserts leaven of error to lead Christians astray and into apostasy.

Paul wrote to Timothy that in the closing days of this church age people would leave the faith and give attention to demons that seduce and teach hypocritical lies (I Timothy 4:1-2).

The weapons that the devil uses against the church are pride, self-will, rebellion, deception, and delusion. Once a person succumbs to these things the door of his heart is open to all kinds of wickedness propagated by a horde of demons sent by Satan.

6. *The Christian's power over Satan.* The Spirit-filled saint actually has nothing to fear from the onslaught of Satan. He has been endued with power over the enemy defensively and offensively.

a. *Defensively.*

"The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4).

By repenting, being baptized in the name of Jesus, and receiving the Holy Ghost the believer runs into a strong tower where he is completely safe. His life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Not only does he have the privilege of being in Christ but he has Christ in him, and the devil cannot control or inhabit his being.

b. *Offensively.*

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my

name shall they cast out devils” (Mark 16:17).

“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).

These verses of Scripture teach definite truths concerning the Christian’s power over Satan. The Christian can resist the devil, and when he does the devil must flee.

Jesus gave His disciples authority to deliver those who were demon possessed. Believers have the ability to command demons to flee in the name of Jesus and they must obey. The saint who is Spirit-filled and living above sin need have no fear of Satan or any of his demons.

B. Fallen angels that are bound

1. *One-third of the angels fell with Satan.* “And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth” (Revelation 12:4).

A host of angels fell with Satan, and most Bible students conclude from Revelation 12 that one-third of the angels did so. It is apparent that the majority of the angels were not influenced by Lucifer but remained true to the Lord.

The angels who were led astray were probably already under Satan’s authority. Apparently, he was their prince and captain before his fall, and when he sinned, many of those under his dominion went with him.

The fall of Satan initiated the battle of the ages. The holy angels witnessed the creation of Adam and his fall after being seduced by Satan. We can readily understand why the angels praised God on Bethlehem’s hills when the Savior was born and why they are jubilant when a sinner repents.

2. *Some of the fallen angels are already bound; some are still free.* When the angelic transgression took place, the judgment of God was decisive and immediate. Apparently many of the leaders among the fallen angels were cast into a prison called Tartarus, where they are bound in chains of darkness. Judgment has been pronounced and held in reserve for all the others. “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [Greek, tartarus], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (II Peter 2:4). “And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

Some of the fallen angels were left free for the time being, such as the prince of Persia and prince of Grecia (Daniel 10:20). Very likely many of the ordinary fallen angels were promoted to places of authority in Satan’s host. They are still very active and will be banished to the lake of fire with the devil. In fact the saints will sit in judgment while the angels are judged (I Corinthians 6:3).

It seems that there is a hierarchy among the angels. This is true of the fallen angels as well as the angels who remained holy and untouched by sin. Under Satan are princes and captains who lead his fallen followers.

C. Demons

1. *Nature and origin.* Demons are evil spirits who are messengers and ministers of the devil. They play an important role in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

The King James Version speaks of them as “devils”

(Matthew 10:8; Mark 16:17). The underlying Greek word is not *diabolos*, the term for the devil (Satan), but *daimon*, which modern translations render as “demon.” The Bible frequently speaks of demons as “unclean spirits” (Matthew 10:1; 12:43; Mark 3:11; Acts 8:7). It is possibly the best term to describe these evil emissaries of the devil.

The Bible says little about the origin of demons. It is generally believed that they are the fallen angels who are not yet imprisoned.

Some Bible expositors take a different view, however, calling them unembodied spirits or disembodied spirits. According to this view they are spirits of a pre-Adamic race on earth that was under Satan’s rule and that fell with him.

2. *Work*. Demons afflict people with mental, moral, and physical disturbances. At times they endeavor to enter people and control them. They energize much idolatry, immorality, and human wickedness. Many times they drive the minds of people into frenzy, violence, and self-destruction. They actively assist Satan in his opposition to the work and will of God.

The gift of “discerning of spirits” is very important to the church (I Corinthians 12:10). It helps distinguish between the work of evil spirits and that of physical or human phenomena. For example, not all mental disturbances are due to demon possession, although many definitely are. Epilepsy is generally caused by scar tissue in the brain, which may be relieved by surgery. It is no more the result of demon activity than kidney stones that need to be removed. The majority of demon possession occurs in human beings who are quite sane but perverted,

twisted, and devilish in their thinking and actions.

The Lord delivered many who were possessed. These were not cases of ordinary insanity or epilepsy, for the demons recognized Jesus and spoke to Him. In turn, Christ spoke to the demons, not to those possessed.

The activity of demons is far reaching in bringing disease and torment to humans. Demons are also active in influencing the present government of the world system.

3. *The Christian's power over demons.* It is evident that the Christian has power over demons, for Jesus commissioned His disciples to cast them out (Matthew 10:8). It seems that for a person to be delivered, deep down inside he must desire deliverance, for God does not intrude upon a person's life against his will. (See Mark 5:6.)

To cast out demons a person needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit. At Ephesus some Jewish exorcists tried to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus without knowing Jesus themselves (Acts 19:13-16). The evil spirit inquired, "Who are you?" and attacked and overcame them.

Jesus stated that some demons can only be cast out as a result of prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21). That is, the person praying for a demon-possessed individual needs to have a consistent personal relationship with God and be filled with the Spirit and faith. The true saint can deal with the power of darkness with confidence and boldness.

If a person is filled with the Holy Ghost, he cannot be possessed or inhabited by any evil spirit. The One who dwells within is greater than any demon who might attack him (I John 4:4). The Spirit of God dwells in his body and imparts power to sanctify the whole person (I Corinthians 6:19-20; I Thessalonians 5:23).

D. Eternal destiny

In His infinite wisdom as a judge, God created the lake of fire for the devil and his angels: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

This is the eternal destiny of all the fallen angels. Some of these angels are already imprisoned in chains of darkness awaiting their eternal judgment. At the final judgment the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire especially prepared for him and his angels (Revelation 20:10). All of the evil spirits will share in his fate.

At that time the planet will be consumed by fire and the atmosphere purged (II Peter 3:10). Satanic and demonic activity will end. The judgment of fire will purge the world of evil and purify creation.

HUMANITY

by David F. Gray

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HUMANITY

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I. THE ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

The origin of humanity is unequivocally recorded in Scripture as an act of divine creation. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27). “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). (See also Genesis 5:1; Job 10:9, 11, 33:4; Proverbs 20:12; Isaiah 42:5; 45:12; 64:8; Jeremiah 27:5; Zechariah 12:1; Acts 17:24-29.)

Yet fallen humans have assiduously endeavored to eliminate the very thought of God’s existence from their consciousness (Romans 1:28). Therefore, people have put forth theories of their own that preclude a creative act. Among the antisciptural theories for the origin of life are abiogenesis and evolution.

1. *Abiogenesis, or spontaneous generation.* This ancient theory proposes that humans are a spontaneous product of the earth. It affirms that the earth was pregnant with the germs of all living organisms, and when circumstances became favorable, the earth produced all plants and living creatures.

A more modern view is that life is a product of a combination of physical causes and conducive conditions. Both the ancient and the modern views of abiogenesis contradict science as well as the Scriptures. All scientific studies and experiments establish that life comes from life and that like produces like. Additionally, life could not have existed eternally on the earth even in germ form; this view violates the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Since natural life forms increase in number there

must of necessity be a time when life began. Only the scriptural doctrine of creation by an eternal God who alone is the source of all life is a satisfactory solution.

2. *Evolution or Darwinism.* When applied to the origin of life, this relatively recent theory proposes that all living beings have a common origin and that all living matter came out of inorganic matter. It presupposes the existence of both matter and energy without accounting for either. The speculation is that matter was in a very unstable, chaotic, hot state, and in this morass of indeterminate chemicals and electrically charged particles, life somehow developed by pure chance. At first simple cells existed. These developed over vast periods of time into the diversities of organic life—including plants, animals, and humans—that we have today.

Various concepts have been developed to bolster the theory, including survival of the fittest, natural selection, intermediate forms, missing links, and so on. While this theory has difficulties at every turn, and every detail simply proposes more inconsistencies without satisfactory answers, it is still the most widely accepted theory for the origin of life and of humanity held in the civilized world today.

Truth compels us to say that while evolution is spoken of as a scientific theory, it actually cannot be verified by scientific methods. Evolution is a speculative philosophy. While some people adhere to theistic evolution, many use evolution to provide them with an alternative to the “unthinkable” scriptural doctrine of a divine creation. Let us particularly examine this theory as held by atheistic evolutionists.

Evolutionists must deal with glaring inconsistencies and unscientific conclusions for which they have no logi-

cal explanation. Some of these are as follows.

1. *The unbridgeable gap between living and inert matter.* Evolution teaches that all living beings on the earth developed out of inorganic matter. No trace of this supposed marvelous process remains, and inert matter today somehow does not seem to have any disposition to try to repeat the miracle. To believe that this actually transpired takes more faith than most Christians demonstrate in adhering to creation.

2. *The immense gap between the plant and the animal kingdoms.* Evolution insists that all animal creatures developed gradually out of the vegetable kingdom. But again, such a phenomenal process has no basis in empirical science, nor has any evolutionary experiment succeeded in duplicating to any degree whatsoever this supposed wondrous miracle. To be an evolutionist in the face of this unbridgeable gap again demonstrates an awesome amount of faith.

3. *The massive gap between the vertebrates and the invertebrates in the animal kingdom.* Most evolutionists insist the vertebrates evolved out of the invertebrates, or that two different branches of plant life produced the two vastly different types of animal life. Again the evolutionist must somehow believe this without even the hint of such a process ever existing.

4. *The vast gap between the mammals and other vertebrates.* There is no evidence to prove that there ever was a crossing from one to the other.

5. *The incredibly amazing number of gaps between species.* Instead of there being one “missing link” that if found would solve the break in the evolutionary chain, there are literally millions of missing links if

evolution is true.

6. *The colossal gap between humanity and the highest of the animal family.* To accommodate their theory, evolutionists have dubbed humans as “naked apes,” simply superior animals who have evolved to a place where they need to wear clothing. Evolutionists declare that humans evolved upward but are still just apes. This theory gives people no future to look forward to when they die; they die like dogs or rats. They have no soul, no hope, and no God.

The gap between humanity and the animal world confronts the evolutionary theory as do the preceding five gaps. The “missing link” is still missing.

The theory of evolution is supposed to be a theory of origins, an explanation of how all the diversity of organic matter came into existence. But origins are just what evolution conspicuously fails to explain. The evolutionist propounds the theory, but support is lacking from the very elements whose origin it purports to reveal.

Because of the absence of proof for Darwin’s evolutionary theory of natural selection and gradual change from one major form into another, evolutionists have in recent years endeavored to find alternate concepts in order to bolster their theory.

One of these concepts has been the “sudden changes” theory. Again without scientific proof, the argument assumes that evolution is true, except that changes were made from one species to another relatively quickly and not in graduated steps through a multiplicity of intermediate forms. This is an effort to explain why fossil remains show that species appeared on the earth at a particular time substantially the same as they exist today.

Those who believe the scriptural teaching of divine creation do not have to alter this fundamental concept to conform to scientific theories or discoveries. Scriptural creation and true science are in agreement.

The creation of all things by God is eminently logical and is in harmony with scientific discoveries and facts. It lifts humans from being merely superior animals into beings created by God in His own likeness and image. (See Genesis 1:26; 5:1; 9:6; I Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9.) Humans are moral, intellectual, spiritual beings patterned after God Himself.

God created humanity to fulfill a grand design. (See Psalm 8:3-9; Isaiah 40:12-15, 22; Ephesians 1:4-11; Hebrews 2:6-10.) That humanity was the purpose for which everything else on earth is created is scriptural.

Humanity is not an accident of unconscious nature, not some quirk or freakish event brought about through an unplanned circumstance. Humans are God's creation made in His image and likeness, noble beings, originally sinless, endowed with elements of divine origin and purpose, given an immortal soul and a will with the power to choose. Humans are God's workmanship, the work of His hands.

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O LORD our Lord, how

excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:3-9).

Humanity was the goal of the entire creation of earth. "For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:18).

Unconscious nature cannot enjoy its own beauty nor use what it has produced. In God's great design, He made the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, and stars—one purpose being to give light to this earth (Genesis 1:14-18). He then made the earth and filled it with blessings for humanity. He laced this earth with rivers and stocked them with fish, placed mountains over the earth and infused them with metals of all kinds, sprinkled forests of trees throughout all regions for humans to use, made it possible for humans to plumb the depths and tap reservoirs of oil, gas, and water, richly coated great expanses with fertile soils for the growth of edible vegetation so that humans might luxuriate in foods of an almost infinite variety. He put animal life in great numbers and species throughout the earth for the benefit of humanity, such as providing food, wool, leather, and fur. He designed the silkworm and commanded it to spin silk for humanity; the sheep for wool, and various plants for linen and cotton. In fact this earth was designed by a loving Creator as a garden of goodness in which He could place the highest of His creation, children of His, made in His own image, that they might "subdue" and "have dominion" over this marvelous heritage He created for them (Genesis 1:28).

God endowed humanity with the capacity to enjoy and use the wonders of the earth. He put beauty in all of His creation, which unconscious nature could not enjoy, and

then gave humans aesthetic powers by which to appreciate these beauties. The gorgeous and variegated flowers, the iridescence of the hummingbird and butterfly, the awe-inspiring grandeur of the redwoods, and the shimmering beauty of the sunlight shining upon the dewdrop were all designed by God for humanity. Of everything on the earth, only humans have the power to appreciate such magnificence and splendor as God placed upon the earth to make it a beautiful home for the people He created.

In sum, humanity is the reason for the earth. What is the reason for humanity? Isaiah 43:7 declares: “Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

God is the reason for humanity. We are created for God, for God’s glory, and for His fellowship. God made us for Himself. We are intricately woven into God’s grand design and plan.

II. HUMAN NATURE

A. Body, spirit, and soul

The divine origin of humanity is the only logical explanation for the vast complexity of human beings, who are infinitely more intricate and superior than the highest of the animal creation. (See Psalm 139:14.)

Humans are both physical (material) and spiritual (immaterial) beings, as Genesis 2:7 reveals: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Here the Scripture uses three terms to describe the essence of humanity:

Doctrines of the Bible

1. The *body*, formed by God out of the dust of the earth.

2. The *spirit*, which came into Adam as the breath of life when God breathed into him.

3. The *soul*, which was created by the uniting of the breath of God with the body.

Let us consider these three terms in order.

The body was formed from the dust of the ground. The Hebrew word for “ground” is *adamah*, meaning red earth, from which Adam’s name came. The color of the physical life force, blood, is red, and it flows under the skin. As lovely as the human body may be, it is from the earth and will return to the earth upon death (Genesis 3:19; Job 10:9; 34:15; Ecclesiastes 12:7).

The human spirit is given directly by God. In Adam it was the endowment of life as God breathed into the nostrils of the body that He had formed of the dust. Thus we might say that it is the principle of life that upon death goes back to God, who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26).

The Scriptures teach that the human spirit is more than the life principle, however. It is described as the “candle of the LORD” (Proverbs 20:27), for when it is lit by the Spirit of God coming within us at the new birth a person can search into the hidden recesses of his heart and truly know himself. The human spirit is the chamber in which the Holy Spirit desires to enter and abide.

The soul is the real person, created by the union of the spirit that comes from God with the body that comes from the dust. Thus “man became a living soul.” The soul lives on after death, after the body returns to the dust and the spirit goes back to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes

12:7). The soul is conscious after death and, depending upon the spiritual state of the individual at death, goes either to hades or to paradise (places of unrest or rest) to await the resurrection and judgment. The soul is the real person, containing all that he is, his essence and his personality.

Only the Word of God reveals the differences in the immaterial part of human beings, described as soul and spirit. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). The Word of God also reveals the divine origin of the material or physical part of humans, described by joints and marrow.

I Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of humans as spirit, soul, and body: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Some theologians regard the essence of humans as essentially twofold (physical and spiritual) and hold that the Bible often uses “spirit” and “soul” interchangeably or jointly to refer to the spiritual nature. Others regard the essence of humans as essentially threefold and strongly distinguish “spirit” from “soul.” One theologian has offered the following explanation of these three terms:

The body we may call the sense-consciousness; the soul, the self-consciousness, and the spirit, the God-consciousness. For the body gives us the use of five senses; the soul comprises the intellect which

aids us in the present state of existence, and the emotions which proceed from the senses; while the spirit is our noblest part, which came directly from God, and by which alone we are able to apprehend and worship Him.¹

Another author has given the following description:

The body touches the material world through the five senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. The soul uses the five senses of the body as its agents in the exploration of the phenomena of matter and historical research, and for its self-expression and communion with the outside world. The gates to the soul are imagination, conscience, memory, reason, and the affections. The gate of imagination of the soul corresponds to the gate of sight of the body, being the eye by which the soul sees. The gate of conscience corresponds to the gate of smell, by which the soul detects the presence of good and evil.

The gate of memory corresponds to the gate of hearing, by which the soul recalls what it heard. The gate of reason corresponds to the gate of taste, permitting the soul to compare facts as the taste compares foods. The gate of the affections corresponds to the gate of touch, being the hand by which the soul feels the person of the one it loves.

The spirit receives impressions of outward and material things through the soul and body. The sense faculties of the spirit are the spiritual faculties of faith, hope, reverence, prayer, and worship. In his unfallen state the spirit of man was illuminated from

heaven, but when the human race fell in Adam, sin closed the window of the spirit, and pulled down the curtain, and the chamber of the spirit became a death chamber, and remains so in every unregenerate heart, until the Holy Spirit floods that chamber with the life and light-giving power of the new life in Christ Jesus. We see then why the natural man cannot understand spiritual things. He cannot understand them until his spiritual nature has been renewed.

But the spirit of the natural man is not only darkened, his will stands as a guard at the door, and prevents the entrance of the Holy Spirit, and it is not until the will surrenders through the power of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, that the Holy Spirit can enter and take up his abode in the spirit of man.²

This author identified human nature as essentially threefold and likened it to the Old Testament Tabernacle as follows: The courtyard surrounding the Tabernacle represents the body in which the spirit and soul reside. The Holy Place containing the table of showbread, the candlestick, and the altar of incense represent the soul. The Holy of Holies, which can be entered only through the Holy Place and in which the ark of the covenant with the mercy seat and cherubim resides, represents the human spirit. Here God met with the high priest and communed with him. So the human spirit is the place deep within us where God desires to enter and dwell. He does so when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, and our bodies become the temple (containing the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies) in which God dwells.

Perhaps Christ's story of the rich man and Lazarus in

Luke 16:19-31 best illustrates the nature of humans. Both Lazarus and the rich man died and their bodies were buried. Their spirits went back to God who gave them (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Nevertheless, as souls they lived on in a disembodied state. They were both conscious, the rich man in torment and Lazarus comforted in paradise, which the Jews called “Abraham’s bosom.”

In the ensuing conversation between the rich man and Abraham, the rich man exhibited all the soulish qualities of imagination (verse 27), conscience (verse 24), memory (verse 25), reason (verse 30), and affection (verse 28). Yet he was in the torments of hades, and righteous Lazarus was at rest in paradise. They were in their soulish state retaining their own personalities, while their physical bodies were in the grave. In this story—which evidently really took place, for the righteous one is identified by name—Jesus effectively refuted the teaching of soul-sleep, the idea that upon death the soul immediately goes into an unconscious state and is only revived at the moment of resurrection of the body. Other passages of Scripture that contradict this concept are Revelation 6:9-11, Philippians 1:23, II Corinthians 5:4-8, and Luke 9:30-31.

B. The derivation and perpetuation of the human soul

Since the time of Adam, the physical part of humans, the body, is formed through the reproductive process with which God endowed humanity. Physical likenesses, tendencies, aptitudes, and characteristics are transmitted from parents to children. The human body with its accompanying traits comes from the parents as they fulfill God’s plan to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

As we have seen, the spirit of life is a gift of God; it originally came from God and it returns to Him.

From what source does a soul come? Three main theories have been advanced.

1. *The preexistent soul theory.* This theory proposes that the souls of all people were created by God long before God made Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden. Typically, proponents teach that these souls were originally angels, but after the angelic host fell with Lucifer, God punished them by making them dwell in the material bodies of humans. As a result of this discipline they will eventually be restored to their original high estate.

There is no scriptural basis for this theory. Rather, it is related to the Hindu belief in reincarnation and transmigration of souls. It actually contradicts the Bible, which teaches that sin in the human family originated in Adam, not in pre-Adamic souls (Romans 5:14-17; I Corinthians 15:22). In fact, the Scriptures neither teach that angels have souls or can become human souls, or that there is such a thing as a preexistent soul. Reincarnation is a pagan concept and is alien to sound Bible theology.

2. *The creation theory.* This theory teaches that God creates a new soul for every child that is born. Many Bible expositors have espoused this view, but there are scriptural reasons not to accept it. First, Genesis 2:1-2 tells us that God ceased creating after the sixth day, while this theory says God creates a soul every time a child is born. Second, this theory seems to make God the creator of sinful souls. Even if the soul given to the child was pure, it would appear to make God indirectly the author of moral evil, because He would be putting the pure soul He had

created into a body that would inevitably corrupt it. In order to avoid this pitfall, some adherents have taught that sin is in the body only, since only the body came from Adam. But if this were true, then it would be only our bodies and not our souls that would need redemption.

3. *The traducian theory.* This theory, which seems more in harmony with Scripture than the other two, holds that when God created Adam and Eve, He endowed them with the power to reproduce after their own image, and this power includes both the material and immaterial parts of humanity, that is, both the body and the soul.

Genesis 5:1-3 supports this view: "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created. And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth."

God made Adam in His own image and likeness, and this act involved the creation of his soul (Genesis 1:27; 2:7). Adam then sinned, plunging the entire human race (which was in his loins) into sin. Humans are therefore sinners, body and soul. When Adam sired children, they were born sinners, "by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). They were sinners since Adam begot children "in his own likeness, after his image." It appears that the begetting included the soul, for the Bible uses the same terms to describe Adam's begetting of his children as for God's creation of Adam in the beginning.

This view explains why everyone possesses a sinful nature, for it identifies each person, both soul and body, with Adam, which is a scriptural position. "Wherefore, as by

one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).

Humans are not sinners simply because they sin; they sin because they are sinners. Everyone is born with the nature of sin within him, and the whole person is contaminated, not only the body but also the soul. “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3).

One theologian made this observation about the traducian theory:

It seems best to accord with Scripture, which represents God as creating the species in Adam (Genesis 1:27) and as increasing and perpetuating it through secondary agencies (1:28; cf. 22). The breath of life is breathed into man’s nostrils only once (2:7, 22; 4:1; 5:3; 46:26; Acts 17:21-26; I Corinthians 11:8; Hebrews 7:10), and after forming man, God ceases from His work of creation (Genesis 2:2). . . . The observed transmission not merely of physical, but also of mental and spiritual characteristics in families and races, and especially the uniformly evil moral tendencies and dispositions which all men possess from their births, are proof that in soul, as well as in body, we derive our being from our human ancestry.³

C. The original state of humanity

God created humans in His image and gave them qualities that He possessed. Because He knew that Adam and Eve would sin, He included in His plan a Savior to

redeem humanity from the horrible results of their moral failure in misusing these qualities God gave.

1. God created humanity in His *spiritual likeness*, which involves the human personality. Even the fall of humanity with the resultant curse has not succeeded in entirely obliterating this likeness. Humans are essentially spiritual beings, even as God is a spiritual Being (John 4:24), and only the things of the Spirit can truly satisfy them. "Among all God's creatures, only humanity receives the image of God, and that quality separates us from all else. We possess what no other animal does; we are linked in our essence to God."⁴

2. God created humanity in His *moral likeness*, which the Bible calls holiness. Adam was not only innocent when he was created but he was also holy. Despite humanity's fallen state, vestiges of this original morality are still evident in the human conscience and in humanity's innate desire to be better. Romans 7 speaks of this desire.

3. God created humanity with a *will*, or power of choice, a power that God did not give to others of His creation, except some angelic beings. The angel Lucifer had this power. Before the creation of Adam he rebelled against God, causing God to drive him out of heaven for his sin, and he became the archenemy of God (Isaiah 14:12-20; Ezekiel 28:11-19). He apparently influenced one third of the angels to side with him (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:4).

So it was at great risk that God endowed Adam with the same power to choose, even to take a course at enmity with God. God, being omniscient and knowing that Adam would sin, prepared a plan of salvation for fallen humanity before He ever created Adam (I Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8).

Calvary was not an afterthought of God but part of His eternal plan. He planned that at a specific point in time (called “the fulness of the time” in Galatians 4:4) He would come down to the earth He had created, to the people He had made, clothe Himself in the “likeness of sinful flesh.” As Jesus Christ He would put Himself into the hands of His own disobedient children, who would despise Him, reject Him, and vent their deep hate and depravity upon Him in every way possible, finally heaping upon Him the ultimate indignity of nailing Him to a cross to die. But, wonder of wonders, Christ’s death would become the means of salvation for fallen humanity, for He would take their place and pay the penalty for their sin, which was death, thus becoming the propitiation for their sins. Consequently, all who trust Him and obey His plan of salvation would be saved.

In His foreknowledge God knew that many of His fallen children would use the same power He gave Adam when He created him, the power of the will, to choose to follow and obey Christ, so that out of the depravity of lost humanity would come a church, a pure and spotless bride for Himself, washed and sanctified by His own blood (Ephesians 1:4-7).

Although Satan, the fallen angels who follow him, and fallen humans who have come under Satan’s control are united in opposition to the design and plan of God, they cannot thwart it. God’s great plan will be carried out from eternity to eternity.

As we have seen, sin originated with Lucifer, and he was expelled from the abode of God. Lucifer became Satan, the bitter enemy of God, and although God has revealed in His Word that Satan will ultimately be defeated

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and judged, Satan continues to work, even to this day, to destroy God's plan.

When Satan saw that God had created humans in God's own likeness, as sinless beings yet with a will and the power to choose, he determined to win them over to his side and turn them against their Creator. He took the form of a beautiful and intelligent serpent, and in this friendly guise he approached Eve, insinuating questions into her mind against God and the loving provisions God had made for humanity.

To understand what transpired we must recognize that God had placed Adam and the wife He made for him in the Garden of Eden in a probationary state (Genesis 2:8-17). He allowed them to be tested as to their loyalty, love, and devotion to Him in their state of innocence.

Their innocence does not mean that Adam and Eve were like small children, for they were created with a high, mature intelligence and a moral nature like that of God Himself. They had the power to consciously and intelligently make choices for either right or wrong. They had sensibility, will, and the ability to make moral decisions. They had a conscience, and it is in conscience that human intellect, sensibility, and will function.

Therefore, we must not presume that they lacked the moral knowledge or ability to perceive that disobedience to God's command would destroy their status with God, or that they lacked the power to resist temptation, or that they could be led blindly into an act of disobedience. Rather, they had the power to make their moral choice in the full and complete stature of maturity and moral conscience.

The probation in which God placed our first parents

was not unreasonable. Rather it was for their highest development and for their eternal welfare. God was just, wise, and good in making the prohibition of Genesis 2:17. If Adam and Eve had resisted the temptation, as they had every ability to do, and had chosen righteousness, they would thereby have proved their love and loyalty to God.

III. SIN AND THE FALL OF HUMANITY

A. The scriptural record of the Fall

Adam and Eve fell from their first estate by disobeying the positive and personal command of God (Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12; I Timothy 2:14). The scriptural narrative of these events as recorded in Genesis 3 has been interpreted in various ways.

1. *Allegorical.* According to this theory, Adam symbolizes human rationality, and Eve human sensuality. The serpent symbolizes external temptations to do evil. This assessment of the narrative oversimplifies the story and robs it of profound and scriptural implications.

2. *Mythological.* According to this theory, the entire narrative is simply folklore, on the same plane as Greek mythology, an attempt to fictionalize a reason for the present condition of humanity. Those who espouse this view cannot explain why we should regard these few verses as mythical while accepting the remaining passages as literal.

3. *Literal.* There is not the slightest hint or indication, either in the account itself or anywhere else in the Bible, that the narrative is allegorical or mythological. The locations spoken of are geographically and historically correct. Speaking of God's plan of marriage, Jesus

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told His hearers how God made Adam and Eve “at the beginning,” that is, in creation (Matthew 19:4, 8). Later writers of Scripture who spoke of the beginnings of humanity all refer to the account as historically true, even to its details. (See Mark 10:6; I Corinthians 15:45; II Corinthians 11:3; I Timothy 2:13-15.) The curses upon both the man and the woman, as well as upon the earth itself, are literal, and all borne out by events.

In defense of the literal interpretation of this narrative, one commentator has written:

The reasonableness of the narrative of the fall is seen in view of the condition of man after he had sinned with his condition when he left the hand of the Creator. Compare Genesis 1:26 with 6:5, and Psalm 14. If the fall of man were not narrated in Genesis we should have to postulate some such event to account for the present condition in which we find man. In no part of the Scripture, save in the creation account as found in the first two chapters of Genesis, does man appear perfect and upright. His attitude is that of rebellion against God, of deepening and awful corruption.⁵

The essential elements of Adam and Eve’s sin, which resulted in their fall, involve several factors. First, the disobedience of our first parents was of a volitional character; that is, it was an act of their own will, just as all sin is. It involved a denial of the divine will and an insistence on the human will above God’s. It was the deliberate overstepping of a boundary marked by God, and in its essence was, as every sin committed since, an affirmation of

rebellion against God and a positive disbelief in God's Word. It accepted and believed Satan rather than God.

The same elements involved in the temptation of our first parents were also the elements of Christ's temptation (Matthew 4:1-11) and are in every temptation since (I John 2:15-17).

B. The results of the Fall

When God prohibited Adam from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He said, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). As the result of his sin, Adam died, and death came upon all Adam's descendants. This death, resulting from Adam's disobedience, was threefold.

1. *Physical death.* Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. Weakness and disease followed by death resulted from Adam's sin and his exclusion from the tree of life. (See Numbers 16:29; Isaiah 38:17-18; Romans 5:12-14; I Corinthians 15:21-22.) Since a day is as a thousand years to God (II Peter 3:8), we can see that Adam died physically in the day that he sinned (Genesis 5:5).

2. *Spiritual death.* Spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God. Adam suffered this immediately when he ate the forbidden fruit. All the sense of guilt, pain of conscience, loss of peace, and sorrow of heart that humans suffer accompany and are the signs of spiritual death, or alienation from God. (See Matthew 8:22; Luke 15:32; John 5:24; 8:51; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1, 5; I Timothy 5:6; James 5:20; I John 3:14.)

This is the death from which Christians are immediately delivered (John 11:26), and as a result they will not

suffer eternal death (Revelation 20:6).

3. *Eternal death.* Eternal death is the inevitable conclusion of spiritual death (Matthew 25:41). It is “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (II Thessalonians 1:9). It involves judgment upon the body and soul of the unbeliever and the evildoer (Matthew 10:28; Revelation 14:11). It is called the “second death,” into which death and hell (hades, the place of departed souls) are cast (Revelation 20:14).

The sin of Adam and Eve had drastic, far-reaching consequences upon the entire human race. Man, woman, and creation itself all suffer because of sin (Genesis 3:16-19). We can describe the results of the Fall as follows.

1. *Everyone is a sinner before God.* While there may be a difference between people in the degree of sin, there is none in the fact of sin. There has never been even one person, Jew or Gentile, who met God’s standard of holiness throughout his life. There is none righteous, no, not one. (See Psalm 14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-10, 22-23.)

2. *This universal condition resulted from the sin of Adam.* Adam rejected the sinless nature of obedience, which was at oneness with God and His will, and instead accepted the sinful nature of disobedience offered him by Satan, and he passed on this depraved, fallen nature to all his posterity (Romans 5:12-19; I Corinthians 15:22; Ephesians 2:1-3). Consequently, everyone inherited the sinful nature and subsequently has committed sinful acts, thereby being guilty before God.

3. *The whole world is under condemnation, wrath, and curse.* No one is able to attain to God’s standard of

holiness; no one is able to save himself. Only a new birth through faith in Jesus Christ can deliver him. (See John 3:3-5, 36; Romans 3:19-25; Galatians 3:10-14; Ephesians 2:1-10.)

4. *The entire race of unregenerate humanity is the captive of sin and Satan* (John 8:31-36; Ephesians 2:1-3; Hebrews 2:14-15).

5. *Human nature is depraved morally, spiritually, and physically.* One writer has explained:

The *understanding* is darkened (Ephesians 4:18; I Corinthians 2:14); the *heart* is deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9, 10); the *mind and conscience* are defiled (Genesis 6:5; Titus 1:15); the *flesh and spirit* are defiled (II Corinthians 7:1); the *will* is enfeebled (Romans 7:18); and we are utterly destitute of any Godlike qualities which meet the requirements of God's holiness (Romans 7:18).⁶

Another theologian commented that the sinful nature does not mean the entire absence of conscience (John 8:9) or of all moral qualities (Mark 10:19-21), nor does it mean that an individual is prone to every kind of sin. It does mean a lack of love for God (John 5:42), an aversion to the things of God (Romans 8:7), and the dominion of sin from which a person cannot free himself (Romans 7:18, 23).⁷ The sinful nature compels people to sin.

Only Christ can liberate people from the bondage of sin, and that is exactly what He does through the power of His Spirit when they obey the gospel. Jesus died to set people free. This is the good news for the world of people who groan and suffer in their slavery to sin and Satan.

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Even through the devastating results of the Fall, humans still retain a will, the power of choice. Although to an extent restricted by the sinful nature, they still have volitional powers. Although unable to grasp the things of the Spirit, they nevertheless can respond to the grace of God brought to them by the gospel.

The grace of God is universal; God loves all people equally, and He extends the same grace to all. He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). God is “no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34; see Romans 2:11; 10:12-13). Jesus died for all (John 3:16; II Corinthians 5:15). He provided a means of salvation that makes it possible for “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4).

The grace of God that precedes salvation is called common or prevenient grace. Humans in their fallen state are able to respond to the drawing power of this grace; they can accept or reject God’s grace. Titus 2:11 declares that “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,” and John 1:9 tells us that Jesus “was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” He is the Light who leads people to salvation if they will follow.

There are two major schools of thought concerning grace, election, and free will: the Calvinist and the Arminian. The difference between the two is as follows:

Those who follow the Calvinistic teaching concerning salvation recognize common grace as “that manifestation of the provision and plan of God for all mankind.” They also indicate that this common grace

may be resisted, therefore abused. But saving grace they believe to be irresistible for those who are the elect. When God moves toward them, or in behalf of their salvation, they are compelled to yield.

Those usually identified as being Arminian in beliefs hold to the view that there is little or no difference between common and saving grace. God exercises His benevolent oversight in behalf of all and fully exercises His saving influence toward all: but, instead of saving grace being irresistible, its benefits result from the decision made by the will of man. The Spirit draws, but man must yield.⁸

Contrary to Calvinism, the Scriptures reveal that everyone has the power to accept or reject God's saving grace. Revelation 22:17 says, "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." The plan of redemption is the same for everyone alike, and all without exception are invited to come freely.

Jesus made this truth plain even before He went to Calvary to purchase salvation for humanity: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:37-39).

All humans have the power to respond to the gracious invitation to come to Christ and drink of the waters of salvation. Any individual can believe the gospel, obey its terms, and let God save, empower, and transform him.

Prevenient grace thus becomes saving grace when by faith the gospel is accepted, received, and obeyed (Ephesians 2:8-9).

IV. THE EFFECTS OF SALVATION

While chapter 6 deals with the doctrine of salvation, it is important at this point to recognize the effects of salvation upon human nature. In this life, the experience of salvation does not eliminate the sinful nature, but it provides forgiveness for sinful acts and power to overcome the desires and promptings of the sinful nature.

The Scriptures use various terms to explain salvation and its fruits in an individual's life.

1. *Forgiveness* (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 2:13; James 5:15; I John 2:12). When we come to Christ confessing our sins, God graciously forgives us of our wickedness in sinning against Him. Our sins are "put behind His back," never to be remembered again. (See Isaiah 38:17.)

2. *Cleansing* (I John 1:7). The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins (Revelation 1:5). It leaves us clean, pure, and innocent from our sins.

3. *Remission* (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Hebrews 9:22; 10:18). Through the power of the name of Jesus Christ in baptism, the repented believer has his sins remitted; that is, completely removed and obliterated. The forgiveness, cleansing, and remission of sin was purchased for us at Calvary by the shedding of Christ's blood.

4. *Justification* (Acts 13:39; Romans 5:1, 9; 8:30-33; I Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 2:16; 3:11). The following definition from a Bible dictionary is helpful:

Justification is a divine act whereby an infinitely holy God judicially declares a believing sinner to be righteous and acceptable before Him because Christ has borne the sinner's sin on the cross, and "has been made unto him righteousness" (I Corinthians 1:30; Romans 3:24). A justified believer emerges from God's great court room with a consciousness that Another, his Substitute, has borne his guilt, and that he stands without accusation before the bar of God (Romans 8:1, 33, 34).⁹

5. *Reconciliation* (II Corinthians 5:18-20; Colossians 1:21; Hebrews 2:17). Sin separated the human family from God. The Cross reconciles sinful humanity to God (II Corinthians 5:18). It was not God that had to be reconciled to us, for He was always our Friend—He never ceased loving us. But we were at enmity with Him; we are the ones who had to be reconciled. Christ brings about reconciliation for all who come to God through Him, but for the most part people still stand aloof, refusing the free gift of God that is mercy and salvation. And so we are given the gracious gospel invitation: "Be ye reconciled to God" (II Corinthians 5:20).

6. *Regeneration* (Titus 3:5). Jesus came to give people a new birth (John 3:1-7; II Corinthians 5:17). Not only are a person's sins forgiven, but in the new birth he actually becomes a new creation. The Holy Ghost takes up abode within him, empowering him in every way that he needs: to witness, to resist sin, and to defeat the devil. God creates a new nature within him to enable him to overcome the fallen, sinful nature that has heretofore dominated his life (Ephesians 4:24;

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Colossians 3:10; II Peter 1:4).

7. *Adoption* (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:4-5). While the Bible speaks of salvation as regeneration, being born into the family of God, it also describes our position in the family as adoption (the placing of a son), which gives us all the legal benefits of sonship. We become the “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). Once an enemy of God, doomed to destruction, we are now reconciled and have become an heir to all the riches of Christ.

8. *Glorification* (Romans 8:17, 30; II Thessalonians 1:10). Jesus will return to earth for His church, which is His bride, and then He will come with His bride to set up His millennial kingdom on the earth. At this time God will finally eradicate all the effects of sin. We will enter into eternal life with God, with bodies that are like Christ’s glorified body. Our pilgrimage on earth will be over. The Cross will have triumphed, bringing us back from the Fall into the glorious and magnificent future that God planned for humanity from the beginning.

NOTES

- ¹Emery H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology*, 2nd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 188-89.
- ²Clarence Larkin, *Dispensational Truth* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1920), 98.
- ³Bancroft, 190-91.
- ⁴Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 21.
- ⁵William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1939), 130.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, 133.
- ⁷See Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1907), 637-39.
- ⁸Ernest S. Williams, *Systematic Theology* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 2:202-3.
- ⁹Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 624.

JESUS CHRIST

by David K. Bernard

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JESUS CHRIST

I. THE INCARNATION

- A. The deity of Jesus Christ
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- C. The distinction between Christ's deity and humanity
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V. THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS

I. THE INCARNATION

A. The deity of Jesus Christ

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is both God and man. He is the one God incarnate. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (II Corinthians 5:19). All name and titles of deity apply to Jesus.

As a human Jesus was conceived in the womb of a virgin by the Spirit of God (Matthew 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35). He had no earthly father; God was literally His Father. In this way, God united His own divine nature with humanity, thus making Jesus truly “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

Christianity rests on Jesus Christ’s identity as God incarnate, and Christians look solely to Jesus as Savior. Only if Jesus is truly God does He have power to save from sin, for only God is the Savior and only He can forgive sin (Isaiah 43:25; 45:21-22; Mark 2:7).

Thus acknowledging the deity of Jesus Christ is essential to salvation. In reference to His deity, Jesus said, “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24), and a few verses later He explained, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In these statements Jesus identified Himself by the name God used for Himself in the Old Testament: I Am (Exodus 3:14).

John 8:24 does not demand a thorough comprehension of the Godhead as a prerequisite for salvation; it is possible, and indeed likely, that someone would obey John 3:5 and Acts 2:38 without a theologically accurate understanding of the Oneness doctrine. It is impossible,

however, to receive remission of sins in the name of Jesus and to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit without relying upon the deity of Jesus Christ.

In the Incarnation, God did not surrender any divine attributes, for how could He do so and still be God? Thus, while Christ was on earth, He displayed omniscience and omnipotence, and His Spirit was omnipresent. He voluntarily veiled His glory and took on the form of a servant, but His divine nature did not change.

For further discussion of the absolute deity of Jesus Christ, see chapter 1.

B. The sinless humanity of Jesus Christ

The Scriptures emphatically proclaim Christ's genuine and complete humanity. He was the physical descendant of Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and Mary. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same. . . . For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren" (Hebrews 2:14, 16-17). Jesus "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3). Hebrews 5:7-8 graphically portrays One who wrestled with human emotions and weakness: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

Not only is Jesus truly God, then, but as to His humanity He is also the Son of God. The term Son

always has reference to the Incarnation, to the humanity in which God dwelt and revealed Himself. (For further discussion of this title, see chapter 1.) The role of the Son began when Jesus was conceived miraculously in the womb of a virgin by the Holy Spirit. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Hebrews 1:5). The Son was "made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

Jesus was both Son of God and Son of man. He was the only begotten Son of God since God's Spirit literally caused His conception (Luke 1:35). He was the Son of man (humanity) since He had a real human mother.

"Son of" means "having the nature or character of," as in the biblical phrases "sons of thunder," "sons of Belial," and "son of consolation." Jesus had the very character of God as well as that of perfect humanity. "Son of God" draws attention to His deity as well as His humanity, for no one can be like God in every way, be equal with God, or have God's complete character without being God Himself (Isaiah 46:9; 48:11; John 5:18). Jesus' title of only begotten [unique] Son of God actually tells us that He is God in flesh.

In whatever way we define the essential components of humanity, Christ had them.

- **Flesh.** "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14). The Spirit of Christ did not change into humanity, but the Spirit was manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). It was not a transmutation but an incarnation.

- **Body.** "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me . . . the body of Jesus Christ" (Hebrews 10:5, 10).

- **Soul.** "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto

death” (Matthew 26:38). “His soul was not left in hell” (Acts 2:31).

- Spirit. “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit” (Luke 2:40). “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

- Mind. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

- Will. “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Jesus was a perfect human. He was more than a theophany (a visible appearance of God). He was more than God animating a human body—God in a human shell. He was actually God incarnate—God dwelling and manifesting Himself in true humanity, with everything genuine humanity includes. If Jesus had anything less than complete humanity, how could the Incarnation be real? How could we explain His agony and struggle in Gethsemane? How could He truly be “in all points tempted like as we are” (Hebrews 4:15)? How could His life and death adequately substitute for ours? How could He qualify as our kinsman redeemer? How could His atoning sacrifice be sufficient to redeem us?

Belief in Christ’s true humanity is essential to salvation. “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist” (I John 4:3). Again, this statement does not require a complete theological understanding of Christology, but a belief that Jesus actually came in the flesh. Christ’s humanity is necessary to salvation because without it there is no death, burial, and resurrection for justification, no blood for remission of sin, no sacrifice of atonement. The very purpose of the Incarnation was to provide a holy man to mediate

between holy God and sinful humanity.

Christ's true humanity does not mean He had a sinful nature. He was subject to all human temptations and infirmities except sin (Hebrews 4:15). He committed no sin, and sin was not in Him (I Peter 2:22; I John 3:5). Sin includes a sinful nature as well as sinful acts, and Jesus had no sin whatsoever. True human nature does not have to be sinful, for God created Adam and Eve, the first human beings, in a state of moral innocence. In fact, sinful human nature is a distortion and perversion of God's original design for humanity. Neither does temptation require a sinful nature, for Satan tempted Adam and Eve in their state of innocence.

Jesus did not come in sinful flesh, but "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). He came as the second Adam, the second representative of the human race, so that through His obedience He could restore to humanity everything Adam lost by his disobedience (Romans 5:12-21; I Corinthians 15:45-49). God gave the human race a fresh start with Christ so that He might yet have the perfect humanity He originally intended when He created Adam. God will conform His church to the image of Christ that Christ might become the firstborn of a new, spiritual family of humans who have overcome sin and death (Romans 8:29). To fulfill this role, Christ came with an innocent, perfect humanity like Adam had in the beginning.

Since Christ was a descendant of Adam through Mary, how did He avoid inheriting Adam's sinful nature, unlike the rest of the race? From a legal viewpoint, the sinful nature comes from the father. Although Eve actually sinned first, Adam's sin had the legal consequences for the race. The Father of Jesus was the Holy Spirit of God,

so Jesus did not have a sinful father from which to inherit a sinful nature. Moreover, the Spirit of God sanctified Christ in the womb of Mary, separating Him from any taint of sin and keeping Him pure.

C. The distinction between Christ's deity and humanity

It is necessary to distinguish clearly between the deity and the humanity of Christ. While Jesus was both God and man at the same time, sometimes He spoke or acted from the human viewpoint and sometimes from the divine viewpoint. As Father, He sometimes spoke from His divine self-awareness; as Son He sometimes spoke from His human self-awareness. We cannot adequately compare our existence or experience to His. What would seem strange or impossible if applied to a mere human becomes understandable when viewed in the context of One who was fully God and fully man at the same time.

For example, as a man He slept one moment, yet as God He miraculously calmed the storm the next moment. On the cross He spoke only from human frailty when He said, "I thirst." Yet when Jesus said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," He spoke with the power and authority of God alone. When the Bible says Christ died, it refers to human death only, for deity cannot die. When it says Christ dwells in the hearts of believers, it refers to His divine Spirit.

Only as a man could Jesus be born, grow, be tempted by the devil, hunger, thirst, become weary, sleep, pray, be beaten, die, not know all things, not have all power, be inferior to God, and be a servant. Only as God could He exist from eternity, be unchanging, cast out devils by His own authority, be the bread of life, give living water, give

spiritual rest, calm the storm, answer prayer, heal the sick, raise His body from death, forgive sin, know all things, have all power, be identified as God, and be King of kings. In an ordinary person, these two contrasting lists would be mutually exclusive, yet the Scriptures attribute both to Jesus, revealing His dual nature.

Christ's prayer to God at Gethsemane is a clear example of the distinction between His deity and humanity. The agony, tears, sweat, desire to escape suffering, and reluctance of the will all relate to the humanity and could not in any way represent deity. Since God is absolutely one, this scene could not portray multiple personalities in the Godhead; rather, it shows the vivid contrast and distinction between the humanity and deity of Jesus.

D. The union of Christ's deity and humanity

Although we must *distinguish* between Christ's deity and humanity, it is impossible to *separate* the two in Christ. His human spirit and His divine Spirit were inseparable; in fact, it is more proper to speak of the human aspect and the divine aspect of His one Spirit. While two distinct wills were present in Christ—divine and human—the two never acted in conflict. While Christ lived as a man, at the same time He was always conscious of His deity.

The Scriptures describe this inseparable union. "The Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh" (John 1:1, 14). "I and my Father are one. . . . The Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:30, 38). "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that

I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake" (John 14:10-11). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). Christ's basic nature cannot change. He will never cease to be God and man united.

Why did not Jesus simply say, "I am the Father," instead of, "I and my Father are one"? Jesus was not only stressing His identity as the Father but also the union of deity and humanity in Himself. He was more than the invisible Father—He was the Father in the Son, the Deity in flesh. He did not say, "My Father and I agree in one," as if He and the Father were two separate persons united in purpose only. Rather He expressed that the Father had united with humanity to form one being—Jesus Christ, the Godhead incarnate.

Christ's statement "The Father is in me" is a powerful Oneness text, but why did Christ say, "I am in the Father"? His humanity was elevated in a total union with deity. He did not lose the distinctiveness of His humanity, but His humanity was joined with deity in a way not true of any other man. His words speak of a permanent, inseparable, essential union.

Even the cross did not destroy this union. Christ offered up His blood to God as a sacrifice of atonement "through the eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9:14). The Father remained with and in Christ to the end. "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32). When He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was not stripped of His deity. He simply expressed genuine human emo-

tion as He experienced the feeling of separation from God—the separation that unrepentant sinners will actually undergo at the last judgment. He quoted Psalm 22:1, in which David felt forsaken but was not actually forsaken by God. The Spirit of God still dwelt in Christ but did not protect Christ's humanity from the full brunt of the human suffering.

Death separated the divine Spirit from the human body, but Christ's humanity was more than a body. Even while His body lay in the grave, both humanity and deity remained united in His Spirit. At the resurrection Christ's humanity was glorified, and at the ascension His humanity was exalted. While He is still human, He no longer submits to human limitations and frailties. His humanity is submerged (but not absorbed or obliterated) in the deity, and in eternity His human mediatorial role will disappear into the divine office (I Corinthians 15:24-28). Nevertheless, He will still manifest Himself through His glorified body throughout eternity (Revelation 22:3-4).

While on earth Jesus was fully God, not merely an anointed man. At the same time, He was fully man, not just an appearance of man. He possessed the unlimited power, authority, and character of God. He was God by nature, by right, by identity; He was not merely deified by an anointing or indwelling. Unlike a Spirit-filled believer, the humanity of Jesus was inextricably joined with all the fullness of God's Spirit.

Only in these terms can we describe and distinguish the humanity and deity in Jesus; we know that He sometimes acted and spoke from one role or the other, but we also know that the two were not actually separated in Him. We can make only a distinction and not a separation

in the humanity and deity that blended perfectly in Him.

How were Christ's humanity and deity united? How did God become man? How did the divine self-awareness and the human self-awareness interact in Christ from birth to childhood to adulthood to death? This is the true mystery of godliness—that God was manifest in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). This truth has been revealed to New Testament believers, but in this life the Incarnation will always contain areas of mystery for us. We can proclaim the biblical truth that the infinite God manifested Himself in finite human flesh, but we cannot offer a complete explanation as to how He did so.

Jesus participated fully in the human experience just as everyone else. He grew and developed normally and received no special help from His deity in facing the difficulties of human life (Luke 2:40, 52; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15). It seems likely that the Spirit imparted to the human brain as much as it could physically comprehend, so that as a young child Jesus gradually grew into a full awareness of the plan of the Spirit. Probably from the earliest times of human self-consciousness and memory His brain had some awareness of His divine identity and mission. Probably there was no single moment of blinding revelation but a growing understanding that kept pace with the developing brain. Luke 2 reveals that by age twelve His human mind understood His unique mission and relationship to the Father.

Some question whether Jesus could sin. This question is more theoretical than practical, more speculative than substantive, since Jesus did not sin. The humanity of Jesus, when viewed alone, theoretically had the capacity to sin, just as Adam had originally. As a man Jesus was

tempted; He actually felt the pull and struggle as we do, and He overcame as we can do. At the same time Christ's humanity always willingly submitted to the indwelling deity, and God cannot sin or be tempted to sin. As a practical matter, Jesus—viewed as the union of humanity and deity that He was—could not sin, for the Spirit was always in control.

If we nevertheless try to imagine His humanity attempting to sin, then we must imagine the Spirit of God departing immediately and the humanity dying, for God cannot participate in sin. If we say Jesus could have sinned and then continued living as a sinful man, then somehow God could have existed apart from Jesus and vice versa, but this notion destroys both Christ's essential deity and the inseparable union of deity and humanity in Christ.

It seems to divide Christ too much to say He had two personalities; He had a unified personality. Christ's humanity was fully integrated with His deity at all times to the maximum extent possible, given human limitations. The divine personality permeated and colored every aspect of the humanity to the point that we should speak of divine and human characteristics of Christ's Spirit rather than of two spirits dwelling side by side. Perhaps we can say that Jesus possessed the complete essence of humanity (whatever humans have in common that makes them human), with His personality seated in His deity.

We can identify four major themes in the biblical description of the Incarnation: (1) the absolute and complete deity of Jesus Christ; (2) the perfect, sinless humanity of Jesus Christ; (3) the clear distinction between the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ; and yet (4) the

inseparable union of deity and humanity in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the fullness of God dwelling in perfect humanity and manifesting Himself as a perfect human being. He is not a man only, a demigod, a second person “in” the Godhead, a divine being temporarily stripped of some divine attributes, the transmutation of God into flesh, the manifestation of a portion of God, the animation of a human body by God, God manifesting Himself in an incomplete humanity, or God temporarily dwelling in a separate human person. Jesus Christ is the incarnation—embodiment, human personification—of the one God.

E. Purpose

As part II of this chapter will discuss, the purpose for the Incarnation was to provide salvation for God’s fallen creation. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). We can subdivide this central purpose under several headings.

1. *To reveal the Father* (John 1:18; 14:9; Hebrews 1:3; I John 1:1-3). As a man Jesus served as an apostle—one sent by God with a mission (Hebrews 3:1)—and He also served as a prophet—one who speaks a message from God (Acts 3:20-23; Hebrews 1:1-2).

2. *To put away sin and destroy the works of the devil* (Hebrews 9:26; I John 3:5, 8). To do so, He became our high priest, sacrificial lamb, substitute, propitiation, kinsman redeemer, reconciler, advocate, mediator, intercessor, second Adam, and Savior.

3. *To prepare a church for His second coming* (Hebrews 9:28).

4. *To establish the messianic kingdom on earth,*

physically as well as spiritually (Isaiah 9:6; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Zechariah 14:16-17).

5. *To judge the world* (John 5:22-27; Romans 2:16).

H. THE DEATH OF JESUS

A. Essentiality and purpose

God came in the flesh as Jesus Christ in order to make a way of salvation for fallen humanity. The Incarnation was for the purpose of the Atonement. The gospel, literally the “good news,” is that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again for our salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Christianity is unlike any other religion in that the death of its founder is essential to its message.

Since God is holy and just, He cannot overlook sin or have fellowship with sinful humanity. The holiness of God, which is the essence of His nature, demands that He separate Himself from sinful humanity. Separation from God, the source of all life, means death, physically and spiritually. Eternal separation from God is the ultimate spiritual death (Revelation 20:14). Thus, divine justice—God’s holy law—requires death as the penalty for sin (Romans 6:23). God chose to bind Himself by the principle of death for sin. Without the shedding of blood (the giving of a life) there can be no remission or release from this penalty and no restoration to fellowship with the holy God (Hebrews 9:22).

God’s love and mercy, however, sought to restore humanity to fellowship with Him by providing a substitute to die in our place, thereby fulfilling the requirements of His justice and yet saving us. The death of animals is not sufficient to remit our sins (Hebrews 10:4), because we

are much greater than they in that we were created in the spiritual image of God. Neither can an ordinary person suffer the penalty in our place, for each one deserves eternal death for his own sins. Only a sinless person could deliver us, but there was none.

God was sinless, but He did not have flesh and blood. As a Spirit He could not shed blood for our sins; He could not die. In order to provide a suitable substitute, God came to earth as a sinless man—Jesus Christ. Jesus was the only sinless man who has ever lived, so He was the only One who did not deserve to die and who could be a perfect substitute.

Thus God's grace provided a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin through the death of the sinless man Jesus Christ. Christ took our place and suffered the penalty of sin on our behalf. If we believe in Christ and apply His death, burial, and resurrection to our lives by obedience, then His work effects salvation in us.

God does not excuse sin but has inflicted the penalty for sin on the innocent man Christ. The death of Christ was made necessary by (1) the sinfulness of all humanity, (2) the holiness of God, (3) God's law requiring death as the penalty for sin, and (4) God's desire to provide salvation for sinners.

There is no salvation outside the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus asserted, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). (See also John 8:24; 10:1-9; Romans 10:9-17.)

B. Significance

Theologians often use the word *atonement* to describe the significance of Christ's death. The verb

atone appears frequently in the Old Testament (King James Version) as a translation of the Hebrew word *kaphar*. The primary meaning of *kaphar* is “to cover,” but in a theological sense it means to cover sin, that is, “to pardon, forgive, remit, or expiate.” In the Old Testament sin was dealt with only temporarily; the penalty was deferred until the death of Christ. If the word *atone* is used in that sense, to mean a temporary covering rather than a permanent wiping away, then it does not accurately describe what Christ’s death accomplished. In the New Testament (KJV), the word *atonement* is used only once, in Romans 5:11, where the Greek word *katalage* actually means reconciliation. (The English word originally carried the same connotation of reconciliation, as it was formed from “at-onement,” but that meaning does not correspond to Old Testament usage.) The New Testament KJV word that conveys the meaning of *atone-ment* in its fullest sense is *propitiation*.

The Old Testament foreshadowed Christ’s death by animal sacrifices. God’s people offered blood sacrifices to atone for their sins. These sacrifices did not actually take away sin, but they demonstrated people’s faith in God by obedience to His plan. On the cross, Jesus died for the sins of all time, and His sacrifice avails to all in every age who believe and obey God. “God set forth [Jesus Christ] to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26, NKJV). Thus Christ’s death was necessary not only to provide salvation

for New Testament believers but also to purchase the salvation of Old Testament believers, whose sins God had passed over in anticipation of the Cross. The Cross showed that God had not arbitrarily ignored past sin, but made a provision for the sins of all time.

The Bible describes Christ's death in several ways.

1. *Redemption* or ransom. Jesus said, "The Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), and I Timothy 2:6 records that He "gave himself a ransom for all." Consequently, we are "justified freely by his [God's] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

To redeem means to deliver completely by paying a price, and the ransom is the price paid. Redemption is an analogy from the slave market; it refers to buying a slave out of bondage in order to set him free. The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament before the time of Christ) used the same Greek word as in Romans 3:24 (*apolutrosis*) to translate the Hebrew word for kinsman redeemer in Leviticus 25:47-49. According to that passage, if someone sold himself into slavery to pay his debts, a near kinsman could redeem him (buy back his freedom). God manifested Himself in the flesh through Jesus Christ so that He could become our brother (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:17) and therefore our kinsman redeemer.

What ransom did Christ pay? It was His blood. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world,

but was manifest in these last times for you” (I Peter 1:18-20). (See also Revelation 5:8-10.)

To whom was the ransom paid? Some say the ransom was paid to Satan since sinners are his captives. But this view falsely implies that Satan has a legal right to humanity, whereas in fact he obtained his hold by lies and deceit (Romans 7:11). Moreover, it seems that Christ’s resurrection would have rescinded the bargain or else taken away from Satan the agreed price. It is more accurate to view the ransom as being paid to satisfy the requirements of God’s justice and holiness.

From what have we been set free? We are set free from sin—from all its aspects and all its consequences. First, we are delivered from the condemnation of past sins—the record of sins and the resulting penalty of death (Romans 8:1). In this sense we can also say we are delivered from the law, for the law demands death for sin. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13).

Second, we are delivered from the lifestyle, bondage, or dominion of sin. “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. . . . If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:34, 36). “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. . . . God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:6-7, 17-18). We are no longer compelled to commit sinful acts; we can resist temptation, turn away from sin, disown sin’s rule, and live a holy life.

2. *Propitiation*. “God hath set forth [Christ Jesus] to be a propitiation through faith in his blood” (Romans 3:25). “He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (I John 2:2).

A propitiation is something that allows God to act mercifully or forgivingly, something that allows Him to pardon sin without compromising His holiness and justice. It is a sacrifice of atonement; something that turns aside God’s wrath and takes away sin; an appeasement of divine wrath; a satisfaction of divine justice.

Christ’s death fulfilled God’s just requirements, thus providing remission of sins. Jesus said, “My blood . . . is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28), and John the Baptist testified of Him, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The Septuagint used the same Greek word as in Romans 3:25 (*hilasterion*) for its translation of “mercy seat,” the golden lid of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle and Temple. Once every year the high priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of the people. Thus the word *propitiation* can also mean a place of atonement. Jesus Christ is our means of receiving God’s forgiveness and mercy; He is our mercy seat or place of atonement.

Christ’s death is indeed an appeasement or a turning away of divine wrath. It was not to make God love us, but it happened because He loved us (John 3:16). It revealed both His hatred of sin and His mercy for the sinner. It was not an appeasement offered by sinful humanity or by a second deity; God Himself provided the sacrifice. (See

Genesis 22:8; Isaiah 59:16; 63:5.) God publicly presented the man Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. (See Hebrews 10:1-20.)

Christ is our propitiation “by His blood, through faith” (Romans 3:25, NKJV). These are two independent clauses in the Greek. In other words, the propitiation is effective because of two things: blood and faith. The propitiation itself came by the blood of Christ. We apply the propitiation to our lives through faith.

Blood is essential to life; it supplies life-sustaining oxygen and nutrients to all the body. “The life of the flesh is in the blood. . . . It is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life” (Leviticus 17:11, 14, NKJV). The shedding of blood represents life given up in death. The blood of Christ represents the sinless life that He lived on earth and voluntarily gave up on the cross. The blood of Christ stands for the death of Christ.

3. *Reconciliation.* “When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). “God . . . hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (II Corinthians 5:18-20).

To be reconciled means to be restored to favor, restored to a relationship. It means the barrier between holy God and sinful humans has been removed. The believer has changed from being God’s enemy to being His friend and His child. From God’s viewpoint Christ’s

death is a propitiation; from humanity's viewpoint it is a reconciliation. God is propitiated; humans are reconciled.

The man Christ is the mediator between God and humanity (I Timothy 2:5). He is the only One who could represent the sinless God to sinful humanity and vice versa, and thus He made reconciliation possible.

4. *Substitution.* "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6). "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" (I Peter 2:24).

Jesus Christ suffered what we as sinners deserved. He tasted death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9). In dying, He not only suffered physical torture but He also felt the agony of spiritual separation from God that an unrepentant sinner will actually experience in eternity, which is called the second death (Revelation 20:14). As a result, believers will never have to undergo this death. He did not become a sinner, but He became the sin bearer, the sin offering, the sacrifice for our sins. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (I Corinthians 5:7). "For he [God] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21). "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28). (See also Hebrews 10:10-22.) Christ took our place and bore our sins. For this reason, theologians often speak of the sub-

stitutionary or vicarious atonement.

In short, Christ's death is the basis for salvation in every age. Salvation originates in God's grace and is appropriated by obedient faith based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

C. Inadequate views

Liberal theologians have offered false or inadequate explanations of Christ's death and its significance. Let us look briefly at some of the more prominent of these views.

1. *Accident Theory*. Christ's death was an unforeseen, unexpected accident that thwarted His plans.

2. *Martyr Theory*. Christ was simply a martyr for truth.

3. *Moral Influence Theory*. Christ's death is intended to be a noble example for us, to influence us to improve ourselves morally.

4. *Governmental Theory*. God used Christ's death merely as an object lesson to show us that sin is displeasing to Him and will have drastic consequences.

5. *Love of God Theory*. The only purpose of Christ's death is to show us that God loves us and thereby to awaken in our hearts a reciprocal love for God.

While there is some truth in all but the first of these theories, ultimately they are inadequate. They portray Christ's death as simply a motivation for humans to do what is necessary to save or reform themselves. Thus they promote a form of salvation by works instead of teaching complete faith and dependence upon Christ's work for us. They cut the heart out of the Cross and thus out of Christianity.

D. Extent

Christ died for the entire human race. The Bible says that He died for the whole world (John 1:29; I Timothy 2:6; I John 2:2). He specifically died for each individual (Hebrews 2:9). He died for sinners (Romans 5:6-10).

The benefits of His death come only to those who believe. God's grace is available to all, but it is applied to each individual through obedient faith (Ephesians 2:8-9; Hebrews 5:9). In this sense, Christ died for the church (Ephesians 5:25-27). That is, He died to bring the church into being, and He died for those who will believe and obey Him. This statement does not mean that He died only for an exclusive few who were preselected, for He wants everyone to become part of the church and be saved (I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9).

E. Results

Christ's death, then, makes salvation possible for us. It makes all the benefits of salvation available to the believer, some in the present and some in the future. It reverses the physical, spiritual, and eternal death caused by sin.

Today the creation suffers under the curse brought on by sin (Genesis 3:17-18), but one day Jesus Christ will establish His kingdom upon the earth, physically as well as spiritually. Creation itself will finally be liberated from the curse of sin and be reconciled to God (Romans 8:19-23; Colossians 1:20; Revelation 22:3).

Christ's suffering and death purchased healing. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . With his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5). (See I Peter 2:24.) This promise includes physical healing, for Matthew

8:16-17 quotes Isaiah 53:4 and says it was fulfilled by Christ's healing of people who were sick. The healing ministry of Christ did not end with His earthly life; it is part of His work in the church today (Mark 16:18; James 5:14-15). Moreover, whatever healing or release from handicaps and weaknesses we do not receive in this life we will obtain in the resurrection, for our mortal bodies will be glorified and given immortality, and death itself shall be destroyed (I Corinthians 15:26, 49-57).

Christ's death has broken the power of Satan (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14). Consequently, believers have power to resist the devil (James 4:7), cast out demons (Mark 16:17; Luke 10:17-20), and overcome the world (I John 4:4; 5:4).

Spiritually, we have already seen that Christ's death brings freedom from sin, both from the record of past sins and from the bondage of the sinful nature. Believers enjoy this freedom now, amid continual struggle, but one day it will be complete and irrevocable. After earthly life, believers will inherit eternal life (instead of eternal death), and they will receive a glorified body from which the nature of sin will be totally eradicated (Philippians 3:21; I John 3:2).

In sum, the Cross reverses all the consequences of sin. Everything the human race lost because of sin, the church will more than regain in Christ (Romans 5:15-21). Believers enjoy many resultant blessings in this life and will receive the fullness in eternity. The benefits of Christ's work include forgiveness of sin, new spiritual life, power over the devil, healing for the body, and ultimately, liberation of the creation from sin's curse and eternal life for believers.

III. THE BURIAL OF JESUS

After Christ died, His body was buried in a tomb. According to I Corinthians 15:1-4, the burial of Christ is a significant part of the gospel message.

First of all, Christ's burial in a sealed tomb proves His death was a reality. It dispels any notion that He did not really die but merely swooned or otherwise escaped from the cross.

Second, His burial has an important application to the New Testament salvation experience. "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" (Romans 6:3-4). (See also Colossians 2:12.)

Finally, the Bible teaches that while Christ's dead body lay in the tomb His soul descended to "hell" but did not remain there (Acts 2:25-32). Since Jesus was a complete human being, in His humanity He surely experienced everything that any human does when he dies. If the souls of deceased humans go to a place of conscious existence while awaiting the resurrection, then His soul did too. The Greek text of Acts 2:27, 31 states that Christ's soul was in *hades*, the place of departed souls (not *gehenna*, the lake of fire). Some commentators teach that this statement simply refers to the grave, but several passages of Scripture indicate a deeper significance.

Romans 10:7 says that when Christ died He descended to "the deep." The Greek word is *abussos*, meaning "abyss, depth, underworld." Ephesians 4:8-10 says that Christ first descended into "the lower parts of the earth" and then ascended, leading "captivity captive." And I Peter 3:19 speaks of Christ preaching to "the spirits in prison."

Taken together, these passages suggest that when Christ died the Spirit of Christ (the divine-human union) descended to the place of departed souls. (There are alternate interpretations, however: perhaps Romans 10:7 refers to burial in the grave; Ephesians 4:8-10 to the Incarnation, ministry on earth, and victorious ascension; and I Peter 3:19 to the ministry of Noah.)

What did Christ do in hades? He was not a captive of Satan, nor did He go to hades or gehenna to suffer, for the substitutionary atonement occurred on the cross itself. He did not offer people a second chance to be saved, for the Bible indicates that the choice to believe and obey God must be made in this earthly life (John 5:28-29; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:13). If I Peter 3:19 applies, then Christ proclaimed victory over the underworld and liberty for the righteous dead. (The word for “preached” in that verse is *kerusso*, meaning to proclaim as information, not *euangelizo*, to preach the good news of salvation.) Furthermore, the statement that He led captivity captive may mean that He visited the souls of the righteous dead who were awaiting the atoning sacrifice, released them from a temporary place of rest in hades (apparently described in Luke 16:22-26), and ushered them into the immediate presence of God (where the souls of the righteous apparently wait today, according to II Corinthians 5:8 and Philipians 1:23).

In Revelation 1:18 Jesus asserted, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades] and of death.” By descending into hades and then arising out of it again, Jesus Christ conquered death and hades. He also demonstrated His power over sin, for “the sting of death is sin”

(I Corinthians 15:56), and His power over the devil, for the devil heretofore “had the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14). Thus Christ’s burial and subsequent resurrection proclaim that He has power to deliver everyone from sin, the devil, death, and hell.

IV. THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

A. Essentiality

On the third day, Jesus arose from the dead with a glorified body, victorious over death and hell. His resurrection is essential to our salvation, for it made His death effective and secured His victory over death. He “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:25). “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. . . . If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (I Corinthians 15:14, 17). Without the resurrection, Christ’s death would have no power; it would be a defeat and not a victory. The reality of Christ’s resurrection and experiential belief in it are essential to salvation (Romans 10:9). Thus Christianity is the only religion that depends on the resurrection of its founder.

B. Reality

Christ was truly resurrected physically; He did not merely return in spirit form. He had a real human body of flesh and bones (Luke 24:36-43). At the same time, it was a glorified, immortal body (I Corinthians 15:42-54; Philippians 3:20-21).

From the Gospel accounts it is apparent that Christ’s glorified body had a strong resemblance to His mortal

body, for His disciples recognized Him. Moreover, it had natural abilities such as eating and drinking, although such functions would no longer be necessary for an immortal body. His body apparently had supernatural abilities as well, for He hid His identity, appeared in a locked room, and disappeared at will.

Although some liberal theologians deny the resurrection of Jesus, everyone who takes the Bible at face value must believe its clear statement that Jesus rose again. His resurrection was the primary theme of the apostolic preaching in Acts. Several powerful points demonstrate the reality of His resurrection.

1. *The empty tomb.* It is impossible to argue that the disciples stole the body of Jesus, for the tomb was sealed and a guard was posted to prevent that very occurrence. For the same reason, the theory that Jesus merely swooned and later revived and left the tomb is not credible. Moreover, the guards themselves verified that a supernatural event took place (Matthew 28:2-4, 11).

2. *Ten recorded postresurrection appearances to over five hundred witnesses.* The Gospels record five appearances on the day of the resurrection: to Mary Magdalene, to other women, to Peter, to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (including Cleopas), and to the apostles (minus Thomas) and others. There were at least five later appearances as well: to the apostles including Thomas, to seven disciples in Galilee, to a great number of disciples on an appointed mountain in Galilee, to James (half brother of Jesus), and to the disciples on the Mount of Olives at the time of the ascension. There were probably other occasions also (Acts 1:3).

In affirming Christ's resurrection, Paul wrote that

over five hundred people saw the resurrected Christ at one time, “of whom the greater part remain unto this present” (I Corinthians 15:6). If it were not so, Paul would not have written so boldly and specifically, and sceptics would have had ample opportunity to interview the witnesses for themselves.

3. *The transformation of Jesus’ four half-brothers.* Before the resurrection, the Lord’s brothers did not believe in him (John 7:3-5). After His resurrection, however, they waited with the 120 for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). What changed them so dramatically from unbelievers to believers, especially after they knew indisputably that Jesus had been killed in seeming defeat? It had to be His personal appearance to James (and undoubtedly to the others as part of a group).

4. *The transformation of the disciples.* After the crucifixion of Jesus, the disciples were dispirited, fearful, and filled with despair. They did not comprehend the prophecies of His resurrection, they refused to believe the initial reports of it, and they even doubted when they first saw Jesus. (See Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:9-12, 19-27, 36-39; John 20:9, 19.) Yet later they boldly preached in Jesus’ name and proclaimed His resurrection even when they suffered beatings, imprisonment, and martyrdom because of it. And the band of believers grew rapidly. Only the resurrection of Christ could have caused such a drastic turnabout.

These proofs caused a respected Orthodox Jewish scholar, Pinchas Lapide, to argue in *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective* (1977) that the Christ’s resurrection is a historical fact. While not accepting Jesus as the Messiah, he tried to explain Jesus’ resurrection as

a Jewish faith experience: comparable to accounts in the Old Testament of God's raising of dead people. He asserted that it is impossible to dismiss Christ's resurrection as a vision or hallucination, for that would not explain the revolutionary change in the believers.

In addition to the authoritative statement of Scripture and to these logical proofs, believers have another witness to the resurrection of Jesus: the Spirit of the living Christ in their hearts (Romans 8:9; Colossians 1:27).

C. Significance

The resurrection of Jesus Christ validated His unique claims and His teachings (Romans 1:3-4). It proclaimed that God has accepted Christ's death as our atonement and has vindicated Him (Romans 4:25). It initiated the gospel message (I Corinthians 15:3-8), and it destroyed the power of death and the devil (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Because of His resurrection we have new life in Christ; His Spirit in us imparts sanctifying and preserving power. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. . . . Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. . . . For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. . . . If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 5:10; 6:4; 8:2, 10).

We also have assurance of bodily resurrection and future immortality. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by

his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Romans 8:11). “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. . . . But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (I Corinthians 15:20-23).

V. THE ASCENSION AND EXALTATION OF JESUS

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, where He is exalted forever. His ascension serves as a promise that He will return bodily to earth one day (Acts 1:9-11).

Jesus ascended to heaven in order to usher in a new era in which each believer would be filled with His Holy Spirit. Instead of His disciples relying upon His physical presence, they were to develop an individual, spiritual relationship with God. Moreover, believers were to spread across all the world, dwelling in many locations simultaneously. The baptism of the Holy Spirit would not be given until Christ’s glorification (John 7:39). Thus He told them, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).

No longer would the disciples have to seek out Christ physically to answer their requests, resolve their disputes, and dispel their confusion. Because they would have a direct relationship with God by the indwelling Spirit, they would be able to pray directly to God in faith, based on the blood of Christ (John 16:23-27). Of course, the indwelling Spirit was none other than Christ Himself in a new dimension or relation—no longer *with* them in the flesh, but *in*

them in the Spirit (Matthew 28:20; John 14:16-18).

Some people teach that a secret ascension occurred before the public ascension, basing their belief on Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene shortly after He arose: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father" (John 20:17). They suppose that Jesus then ascended to heaven briefly to offer His blood in a heavenly tabernacle and that Mary could not touch Him prior to that event lest His blood be polluted.

This interpretation does not seem likely, for only a few minutes after His appearance to Mary, Jesus allowed other women to grasp His feet in worship (Matthew 28:9). Moreover, the Greek text of John 20:17 conveys the idea that Jesus did not want Mary to restrain or detain Him; it is likely that she did touch Him initially. Thus the NKJV translates, "Do not cling to Me . . . but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father'"; and the NIV says, "Do not hold on to me. . . . Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father.'" Jesus had only a limited time to appear to the disciples, so instead of conducting a lengthy conversation with Mary, the first one to see Him, He wanted her to go tell the other disciples to prepare to meet Him. He was also showing that His followers would no longer relate to Him in a physical, earthly way but in a spiritual, heavenly way. And it is important to realize that Christ actually offered up His blood on the cross itself and became the sacrifice for sin at that time, not at some later place or time (Hebrews 9:14, 28; I Peter 2:24).

The ascension of Jesus is closely connected to His exaltation. During His earthly life, He relinquished divine

prerogatives of visible glory, honor, and recognition and submitted to human limitations and agony. He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). But He does so no longer. In heaven, Jesus Christ is openly invested with all power, authority, and glory as God.

The Spirit of God raised Christ from the dead “and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church” (Ephesians 1:20-22). “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Jesus is “by the right hand of God exalted”; God has made Him “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:33, 36).

The Spirit of Christ has always been God and Lord, but the man Christ was declared to be Lord over all the enemies of humanity by His resurrection and ascension. Jesus openly demonstrated His right to be called Lord and Christ by His sinless life, sacrificial death, and triumphant resurrection. The Spirit gloried the humanity, and while the distinctiveness of the humanity is not obliterated, Jesus no longer acts or appears in a merely human role. For this reason, John, who had seen Jesus many

times on earth, fell at His feet as dead when He saw a vision of the ascended Christ (Revelation 1:17).

Christ's exaltation is described as His being on the right hand of God (Mark 16:19; Acts 5:31). Since God is a Spirit, He is invisible and does not have a physical right hand apart from Christ. Throughout Scripture, the right hand is symbolic of strength, power, preeminence, and glory. (See Exodus 15:6; Psalm 44:3; 98:1; Matthew 26:64.) Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God does not mean a physical positioning of two divine beings, for God is indivisibly one and Jesus Christ is the One we will see on the throne in heaven. Rather it means that the visible man Christ is invested with all the power, authority, and glory of the invisible Spirit.

When Stephen saw a vision of heaven, he did not see or call upon two divine beings; he saw and called upon one—Jesus Christ. Yet he did not see Jesus merely as He had appeared on earth but saw Him invested with all the glory of God and in the position of preeminence. Thus the Bible records that he “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” and that he said, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56). He called upon God by saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

The right-hand position also signifies Christ's present mediatorial role. Because of His resurrection and exaltation He is able to be our high priest, mediator, intercessor, and advocate. In that sense, the Epistles speak figuratively of Christ as being on the right hand of God (rather than on the throne as in Revelation). In His humanity, He is still our mediator, and not until after the final resurrection and judgment will this role cease. “It is

Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

We must not suppose that Christ is somehow praying on our behalf to another deity, for God is one. His prayers occurred "during the days of his flesh" (Hebrews 5:7), including His prayer for every believer (John 17:20). He is not continually offering sacrifices or pleas on our behalf. The Cross was the one, final propitiation for all time. "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). The words "sat down" show the finality of Christ's sacrifice. His one, supreme sacrifice was His act of intercession (Isaiah 53:12); it continues to provide present intercession for our sins and free access to the throne of God (I John 2:1). On the basis of the Cross, we can approach God today and continually receive His grace in our lives, and in that sense Christ is our present mediator or intercessor (Hebrews 4:14-16). In addition, His Spirit makes intercession as we yield our minds to Him in spiritual prayer (Romans 8:26).

The death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ provide and proclaim salvation for everyone who will believe. Jesus is truly our God and Savior (Titus 2:13), and in Him we find everything we need, both now and for eternity. "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:9-10, NKJV). In the words of Jude 25, "To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

SALVATION

by J. L. Hall

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SALVATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Salvation is the central theme of the Bible, the grand drama in which God has revealed Himself in redemptive love. This unfolding drama had its beginning in the Garden of Eden, was foreshadowed in the Mosaic law, reached its climactic moment in the death of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, burst upon the world in transforming power on the Day of Pentecost, and will culminate in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ for His people.

Salvation became necessary when humanity fell into sin through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. All are now born with a sinful nature, and all have sinned (Romans 3:9, 23). Sin marred our created nature of being in the image and likeness of God, leaving us with a natural propensity toward sin. Thus every person is not only historically a sinner but also possesses a sinful inclination and orientation.

But God, who is rich in mercy, did not abandon us to a hopeless eternity of death and destruction. Rather His plan of salvation, a plan emanating from His mercy and grace but violating neither His holiness nor His justice, centered on the coming of Jesus Christ, God incarnate. The Word or plan that was with God in the beginning and was Him in His earthly manifestation, moved the central drama from the domain of heaven to a stable, a dusty road, a cross of death, an empty tomb, and an upper room.

Since we live after the events of Jesus Christ's birth, death, resurrection, and ascension, we cannot equate our salvation experience with salvation in the Old Testament. The Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices are no longer necessary. We live in a new era and under a new covenant,

for Jesus Christ is the end of the law and the beginning of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. What was given in typology, law, promise, and prophecy in the time of the old covenant became reality in the new covenant.

The old covenant lost its authority when Jesus died on the cross, for God laid it aside so that we might enter the better covenant made possible through Jesus Christ. While the old covenant viewed God from afar, the new covenant brings God and man together. We now know not only about God but God Himself, for He no longer dwells in buildings or hides in a cloud, but by His Spirit He dwells in our lives.

This chapter on salvation explores how a person experiences the salvation Jesus made available by His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The teaching and preaching of the biblical salvation experience is the gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ died for us. The gospel is called the “gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13) because it contains both the means of salvation and the biblical response that makes salvation personal.

There is only one gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). Its message must not be altered or evaded, for it alone offers us a way to escape sin and its tragic consequences and experience eternal salvation. (See Hebrews 2:1-3.)

This chapter will explain and explore doctrines associated with salvation, but its main thrust will be to examine four essential aspects or elements in the salvation experience: faith, repentance, water baptism, and the reception of the Holy Spirit.

II. SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

In general, the word salvation means “preservation or

deliverance from evil or difficulty.” In theology, it refers to “the deliverance of man or his soul from the power or penalty of sin: redemption.”

The Bible teaches us that we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). No one can earn salvation by good works, religious ceremonies, or sacrificial commitments, for only God’s grace extended to us through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross can cleanse us from our sins. Grace is bestowed upon all without partiality. It cannot be bought or earned, but for it to save us we must receive it by believing in Jesus Christ. We are justified, or counted as righteous in God’s sight, by faith (Romans 1:16-17; 5:1).

Faith itself, however, does not save us. A person may sincerely believe in gods carved from stones or wood, or gods of nature, or in gods proclaimed by a false prophet, and yet be lost. The faith that saves must be in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

A correct belief in the person of Jesus is therefore necessary to salvation. To believe that He was merely a prophet, a holy man, or a true teacher of the way of God is inadequate. John wrote his Gospel so that people would believe “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life through his name” (John 20:31).

John also wrote that a person who believes in Jesus but denies that Jesus came in human flesh is not a Christian, but an antichrist (I John 2:18). The apostle Paul stated that saving faith includes confessing that Jesus is Lord, believing in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, and calling upon the name of Jesus (Romans 10:9-10, 13). Saving faith, Paul concluded, comes from hearing the gospel message and is inseparably fused with

obedience to that message (Romans 10:16-17).

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul outlined saving faith as believing that Jesus died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day (I Corinthians 15:1-4). If a person fails to hold firm to these fundamental truths, his faith is in vain (I Corinthians 15:2).

Jesus defined saving faith to mean believing on Him as the Scriptures teach (John 7:38). In his Gospel, Matthew identified Jesus from prophecy to be Jehovah and Elohim (Matthew 1:23; 3:3; Isaiah 40:3). Jesus identified Himself as the Father incarnate (John 10:30; 14:8-11), and proclaimed that for a person to be saved from sins, he must believe in Jesus' deity (John 8:22-24, 58). After His resurrection, Jesus not only accepted Thomas's confession of Him as "my Lord and my God" but also commended him for his expression of faith in Him (John 20:28-29). The apostle Paul identified Jesus as God manifested in flesh (I Timothy 3:16), as our great God and Savior (Titus 2:13), and as the embodiment of all the fullness of the Godhead, or Deity (Colossians 2:9).

Saving faith accepts the biblical view that Jesus was both man and God, that He possessed full humanity and yet was fully God. He lived an authentic human life on earth, yet through that life He revealed His full deity. Faith also embraces His death as the atoning sacrifice for our sins; that is, we receive God's grace through Jesus' death on the cross. Salvation, therefore, is found only in the person and name of Jesus. (See Acts 4:12.)

The salvation experience comes by grace through faith, but a profession of faith alone is not the salvation experience. Saving faith is obedient faith, for faith is

equated with calling upon His name, confessing Jesus' death and resurrection, repenting of our sins, being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. (See Romans 10:8-16; Mark 1:15; 16:16; Acts 5:32; John 7:38-39.) To merely state that we accept Jesus as our Savior is inadequate, for faith without obedience is merely a profession without possession. Faith sees God's love, grace, and mercy in the death of His Son on the cross and then obeys His plan of salvation.

Faith is the primary element, for whatever is not of faith in Jesus Christ is in vain. Faith replaces a feeling that we can save ourselves, and it then through obedience embraces the provision that God has made for us. By faith a person confesses that he is a sinner. By faith he turns from his sinful past to live for God. By faith he receives remission of sins through the name of Jesus in water baptism. And by faith he receives the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Grace makes possible salvation. Since no one can pay the penalty of sin except by eternal death or earn salvation by good works, his only hope of salvation is by the grace of God. Grace, then, is God's offer of salvation through the death of Jesus Christ to anyone who believes and obeys the gospel. In other words, grace is God's kindness expressed through the Cross to the whole human race, and it is freely given to "whosoever will." To refuse God's grace means that a person will pay the penalty of his own sins, which is eternal destruction in the lake of fire.

The New Testament asserts that the process of becoming a Christian is through faith, and it reveals that this faith is expressed in repentance of sins, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38). We may call repentance, water baptism, and

the reception of the Spirit steps or links in the salvation process, for together they constitute the full experience of salvation. These links also correlate to the new birth of water and the Spirit that Jesus proclaimed as necessary to enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5).

The truth that salvation is a free gift of God does not void the need for repentance and water baptism, for these are not works of the law or human efforts to earn salvation. On the contrary, they are the scriptural faith response a sinner makes to the preaching of the gospel. Both repentance and water baptism find their meaning in the Cross. Failure to make this faith response to the Cross reveals that the person has no faith or a faulty faith.

The twelve apostles preached repentance and water baptism as essential to the salvation experience. On the Day of Pentecost people asked the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" 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. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:37-39). A church or minister cannot be in error if he gives the same answer to sinners today. It may satisfy a person's purpose to use such phrases as "believe on Jesus Christ" and "accept Jesus as your Savior," but these, while true, are incomplete without further explanation.

What is sometimes overlooked is that the goal of God's grace is not for a person to possess faith but for sinners to be reconciled to God through obedient faith in God's plan of forgiveness of sins and spiritual regeneration by the Holy Ghost.

In summary, saving grace does not negate the need of repentance, water baptism, and the infilling of the Spirit. On the contrary, grace finds its way into our lives through our faith response to the Cross. Without faith any response is empty and void, but the faith response becomes the means of receiving God's saving grace.

III. REPENTANCE

Jesus made repentance a priority. From the beginning of His ministry, He preached, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). He stated that His mission was to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17). He did not present repentance as an option; He told the Jews (and us) that a person will either repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Moreover, prior to His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to preach repentance to all people: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

On the Day of Pentecost while the disciples were worshipping God, the Holy Ghost filled them. This was the birth of the church. A crowd gathered and were amazed at what they saw and heard. Peter, the spokesman for the disciples on that occasion, explained to the people that the death and resurrection of Jesus made the outpouring of the Spirit a reality. Conviction gripped the audience, and people called out to the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In his answer, Peter echoed Jesus' words: "Repent . . ." (Acts 2:38).

The Bible teaches that a person cannot be saved unless he repents. Among evangelical churches the trend is to substitute repentance with other expressions such as

“accept Jesus as your Savior,” “make a public confession of faith,” and “turn your life over to God.” While these expressions are in harmony with the Bible, we must always bear in mind that to accept Jesus, to confess faith, and to surrender our lives to God are only aspects of repentance, and one of them alone does not constitute repentance.

Jesus defined repentance by His use of the word. In Matthew 11:20-22, He scolded the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida because they did not repent, saying that had Tyre and Sidon witnessed the miracles they had seen, these latter cities “would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.” He thus associated repentance with sorrow and contrition for sins. In Matthew 21:29-30, He illustrated that repentance is a change of mind that results in doing the will of God. The son who answered his father, “I will not go,” repented (changed his mind) and then worked in the vineyard as his father had asked him to do. In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus defined repentance as turning from a life of sin. Although the self-righteous Jews of Jerusalem believed in God and the Scriptures, they were sinners who had to repent of their sins (turn from sin) or perish.

The blessing of repentance offers a sinner the opportunity to begin anew; to change his mind, heart, and will about Jesus Christ, sin, self, and purpose in life; to experience sorrow and contrition for his sins; to confess his sins to God; to forsake his sinful past; to submit himself humbly to God; and to accept Jesus’ substitutionary, atoning death on the cross for his sins. Moreover, repentance leads the person to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and prepares him to receive the Holy Ghost.

To those convicted of their sins, the apostles commanded them, “Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins,” joining repentance and water baptism as the faith response to the gospel whereby a person receives the remission or washing away of his sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Peter gave this same command and promise to another group in Jerusalem: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out . . .” (Acts 3:19). Faith, repentance, and water baptism flow together to effect remission of sins.

In Acts 8:22, Peter told Simon the sorcerer, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart be forgiven thee.” Repentance means confessing sin, turning from sin, and asking God to forgive sin.

Paul told the Greek philosophers at Mars’ Hill that God once winked at the ignorance of idol worship but “now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30). Repentance is turning away from idol worship to the worship of God.

Standing before King Agrippa in the Roman court at Caesarea, Paul told the ruler that his mission was to preach to everyone—Jews and Gentiles—“that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). Repentance includes turning to God, and it results in “works” that testify to the person’s change.

In II Corinthians 7:10-11, Paul listed several elements in repentance: godly sorrow; carefulness (diligence to do right); eagerness for clearing (to make amends for errors); indignation (against sin); fear (reverence of God); zeal (fervent desire to do the will of God); and revenge

(desire to correct the situation in which sin flourished).

In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul wrote that “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). In other words, while problems, sufferings, sickness, fear of death, and even preaching about the torment of hell may stir a person, repentance occurs only when he realizes that the Cross reveals the goodness of God, that God through Jesus Christ offers a supremely better life now and forever.

Can a backslider be saved? The term is used in the Old Testament to describe Israel’s condition when the nation turned from God to serve themselves and idols. The New Testament assures us that a fallen believer can be restored. (See Luke 15:1-32; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; I John 1:9; 2:1-3; Revelation 2:5; 3:19-20.)

If a saved person sins, he simply needs to turn to God in faith and repentance to find forgiveness and restoration. If he persists in sin, however, God’s Spirit will soon depart from him, leaving him once again to be a servant to his own sinful nature from which God had delivered him. Even then he can return to God in repentance and be restored. However, if he chooses to remain in sin, he will suffer the eternal curse of the unsaved (Romans 11:20-22; Hebrews 10:38-39; Jude 4-6; Revelation 2:5; 3:5).

Repentance is a blessing therefore to both sinners and saints. Although Christians do not have to sin and should not sin, they are capable of sin and in fact might sin. In such a case, repentance is the way to be forgiven and restored.

For saints and sinners, Jesus Christ the righteous is our advocate and high priest, and we can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace in time

of need. (See I John 1:9; 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-16; II Timothy 2:25-26; Revelation 2:5, 16, 21-23; 3:3, 19.) To those who err doctrinally, fall into sin, fail to serve God, or develop a lukewarm attitude toward Him and the church, God gives the opportunity to repent. They can start with a clean record before God, a spiritual renewal, and a fresh reality of the Spirit.

The biblical teaching that a person must repent to be saved conflicts with the view that a person takes no active part in accepting his salvation. A faulty interpretation of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith has led some people to classify the conscious act of repentance and submission to water baptism as human works, and therefore unnecessary for salvation. But neither repentance nor water baptism is a human attempt to earn salvation but the biblical faith response to the Cross. No one can earn salvation, and obedience to the gospel repentance is a work of faith. (See Romans 1:5; 6:17; 10:16; 16:26.) Faith without obedience to God's Word is not faith but merely a dead profession of faith. (See James 2:14-26.) Since repentance and water baptism relate to the Cross and concern remission or forgiveness of sins, a person cannot ignore them and be saved.

Another false belief is individual predestination, that God decided before we were born to either save us or doom us to the lake of fire. While God has predestined the church, it is an error to apply this concept to individual predestination. Each person has a free will to choose whether to obey the gospel and be saved or whether to reject the message of the Cross. In numerous places, the Bible assures us that "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). God's will is that

all people should be saved (I Timothy 2:4); He is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). These verses and others reveal God’s offer of salvation to anyone and refute the false teaching of individual predestination. It is wonderful to know that God so loved the world (all mankind) that He gave His only begotten Son, who died for the sins of the whole world (all sinners) so that we can be saved from our sins and enjoy everlasting life with Him. (See John 3:16.)

Man was endowed with intellect, moral conscience, and free will at his creation, and although his entire nature became corrupt when Adam sinned in Eden, he did not lose any aspect of his being. He suffered spiritual death, a loss of righteousness, and he became depraved in his nature, but his loss and depravity did not deprive him of his intellect, moral conscience, and free will. He became a servant to his own fallen sinful nature, and he was incapable of saving himself. But he still had a free will to respond or not to respond to God’s grace that appeared in Jesus Christ, who gave Himself as our substitute sacrifice on the cross.

Grace is the basis of salvation and by faith we are justified before God, but neither God’s grace or our faith operate outside the gospel message of the Cross, which includes repentance, baptism, and the infilling of the Spirit.

In summary, faith operates through repentance and water baptism to respond to God’s free offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. By faith we acknowledge our sin and our inability to save ourselves. And by faith we obey the biblical plan of being born again. In sorrow for our sins, we

confess them to God, turn from a sinful lifestyle, and commit ourselves to live in holiness unto the Lord. Thus we repent, a necessary experience before we continue our obedience to God's plan of water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins.

IV. WATER BAPTISM

A. Significance

When the apostle Paul arrived in Ephesus, he met twelve men who appeared to be Christians. However, when he discovered that they had not received the Holy Ghost, he asked them, "Unto what then were ye baptized?" (Acts 19:3). With this question, he probed their experience and understanding of God's plan. When they answered that they had been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist, he immediately taught them of Jesus Christ and then baptized them in Christian baptism.

The question Paul asked the Ephesian believers is still pertinent today, for a person's baptism may be the best indicator of his concept of God and his level of experience in Christ. Water baptism is one of the foundational stones of the church (Hebrews 6:1-2), and it relates to the doctrinal structure and spiritual experience of its members. (See Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:10-13; Titus 3:5; I Peter 3:21.)

The Bible does not present water baptism as optional. Jesus gave the command of baptism in the great commission: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). At the least, this command of Jesus requires the church to make

disciples by baptizing believers in the name of God. Thus water baptism here and throughout the New Testament is associated with Christian initiation. This commission from the Lord leaves us no option or alternative. We must baptize believers or disobey God's plan of salvation.

The numerous references to baptism in the Book of Acts reveal that the disciples diligently obeyed Jesus' commission. There are at least nine separate baptismal services recorded in Acts, and baptism is mentioned in the conversion experience of Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. (See Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-16; 8:36-39; 9:18 and 22:16; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:3-5.) Wherever people believed the preaching of the gospel, they were baptized.

The record in Acts therefore establishes the apostles' commitment to the commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples through water baptism. It is recorded in Acts that they baptized Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, an Ethiopian, Philippians, Corinthians, and followers of John the Baptist. No believer was excluded, and there is no record of any believer refusing to be baptized. As the disciples preached Jesus Christ they proclaimed that through repentance and water baptism a person can receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Ghost. (See Acts 2:38.)

The scriptural foundation of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4). In our regeneration, we are to identify with Christ in each of these aspects. Repentance and water baptism identify with Christ's death and burial, and the infilling of the Spirit identifies with His resurrection. (See Romans 6:4.) Thus water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is one way we identify with Jesus and His work of our redemption.

It should be noted that in the Old Testament God assigned an important role to water in delivering His people and in dealing with sin. While Israel was still in Egypt, the Passover lamb was slain, its blood placed on the houses, and its flesh eaten, but what finally separated the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was their crossing the Red Sea. Israel was “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (I Corinthians 10:2).

In the Tabernacle service, the priests were instructed to wash at a laver of water before they went before the Lord in the sanctuary. So important was washing at the laver that the priest who neglected to do so would die (Exodus 30:20).

If God would not allow Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, to enter the Promised Land because he broke the typology of Calvary by smiting the rock the second time, can anyone expect God to save those who break the gospel pattern on this side of Calvary by ignoring baptism and denying its place in God’s plan to save lost humanity?

Some people suppose that Paul in his letter to the church in Corinth taught that water baptism was optional, but this supposition is an error. In dealing with the internal strife and division that centered around the ministries of Paul, Peter, and Apollos, the apostle used the argument that he had not baptized in his name and that he had baptized only a few of them. It is evident from Acts 18:8 that all the Corinthian believers were baptized. Apparently Paul baptized the leaders and they in turn baptized others.

We only need to look at two events in Paul’s ministry to determine his commitment to water baptism. Late at

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night, after midnight, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises in spite of their chains and the darkness of the dungeon in the prison. Earlier, they had been beaten by orders of the city authorities, who then had them cast into the prison. But while they sang, a miracle occurred. An earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the chains fell from them. They witnessed to the jailer, who heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Some people end the story at this point because they do not want to admit how the jailer expressed his faith. Paul and Silas told him about God's plan of salvation, and upon the jailer's confession of faith in Jesus, they ignored their pains, set aside needed rest, and did not wait for the morning sun to shine to baptize this Philippian jailer and those of his household (Acts 16:25-34).

The second event happened in Ephesus, where Paul felt that Christian baptism was so necessary that he baptized twelve disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-5). In this passage Paul clearly linked Christian faith with water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ and with receiving the Holy Ghost.

Paul's teaching on baptism reveals its central role in the salvation experience. (See Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; Titus 3:5.) Galatians 3:27 is an example of his belief that baptism is essential to salvation: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

We must not think, however, that water baptism is synonymous with salvation. A person could be baptized and still be lost. (See Acts 8:13-23.) But a person should not think he can be saved without obeying the command of baptism. It is presumptuous for anyone to reject God's

commandment in the matter of baptism, especially for someone who claims to be a believer of the gospel.

In the New Testament, Jesus told Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). If "born of water" refers to water baptism, there is no mistake about its necessity. But some people attempt to evade the necessity of baptism by interpreting "born of water" as "born of the Word." The Word is important in the salvation experience, for it is the source of our faith (Romans 10:17). However, to be born of the Word a person must believe and obey the Word.

Since the Word points us to the Cross, to repentance, to water baptism, and the infilling of the Spirit, the only way to be born of the Word is to believe, repent, be baptized, and receive the Spirit. It is significant that the apostles interpreted Jesus' teaching of being born again to mean water baptism and Spirit reception. (See Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:44-48; 19:1-6.)

We should notice that the Bible speaks of baptism "for the remission of sins." (See Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38.) On the cross Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:22), and later He gave His disciples the authority to remit sins (John 20:23). Jesus' sacrificial death is the only means of remission of sin; He died once, and there is no other offering for sins. We do not offer sacrifices at altars today, but God gave us a way to receive remission of sins. (See Hebrews 10:18.) And that way is water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. (See Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 22:16.)

Faith, repentance, the name of Jesus in water baptism, and the infilling of the Spirit flow together to wash

away our sins, sanctify our sinful nature, and justify us before a holy God. (See I Corinthians 6:11; Romans 6:1-7; Ephesians 5:26-27; Romans 15:16; Luke 24:47.)

We receive remission of sins through His name (Acts 10:43; Luke 24:47), which is enjoined in the baptismal formula. Ananias said to Paul, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). At baptism, the blood and water agree (I John 5:8). It is not the blood without the water or the water without the blood, but the blood and the water. By faith in His shed blood for the remission of sins, we repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to receive remission of our sins.

It does not matter if the water is salty or fresh, muddy or clear, still or running, in a pond, lake, or river. But what does matter is the person's faith, his repentance, and the name of Jesus Christ. The name of Jesus is vital, for only through the name of Jesus can a person experience salvation, including the remission of his sins (John 20:31; Acts 4:12; 10:43; Luke 24:47).

B. Formula

The great commission as recorded in Matthew 28:19 states that baptism is to be administered "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." We must notice that the word name is singular and that the name is not given in this text. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are not proper names but titles of relationship. If Son were the name of the One born of Mary, why was she instructed to name Him Jesus (Matthew 1:21)? While it is true that when we refer to the Son of God we know of whom we are speaking, it is equally true that Jesus and

not "Son of God" is His name. Moreover, Jesus indicated that His name was associated with the Father and the Holy Ghost, for He said that He came in His Father's name and that the Holy Ghost would come in His name (John 5:43; 14:26).

Every reference to a baptismal formula in the Book of Acts and the references in the Epistles either explicitly state or indicate that the name of Jesus and not the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost was used in the baptismal formula. (See Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16; Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12.)

It is evident that the apostles did not repeat the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the commission but interpreted Jesus' instructions as baptism in the name of Jesus Christ or Lord Jesus. Neither did they require a confession of belief in God as three distinct, eternal persons. But they did expect a confession of faith in Jesus as the Son of God, Christ, and Lord. (See Acts 8:12, 35-38; 10:43-48; 16:30-33; 19:5; 22:16.)

The use of the trinitarian formula began after the apostolic era, probably in conjunction with the development of the doctrine of the trinity. It is ironic that most trinitarians find their strongest doctrinal support in a formula that was not used by the apostles. Although trinitarians are without a single biblical example to support their trinitarian interpretation of Matthew 28:19, the trinitarian formula is so vital to their doctrine of the trinity that they oppose anyone who uses the apostolic formula. They apparently view the Jesus Name formula as a serious threat to the belief that God eternally exists as three distinct persons.

Oneness theology does not see a conflict between

Matthew 28:19 and the many examples and references to water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ or Lord Jesus in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. On the contrary, it views the roles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as how God revealed Himself to us in redemption and regeneration. It recognizes that Jesus used the singular word name, indicating that there is only one salvation name for the three titles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That one name was clearly understood by the disciples to be Jesus (Acts 4:12), for without a single exception the only name they used in baptism was Jesus, which they used with Lord or Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 22:16). The name of Jesus is important in our salvation experience, for it is the only name “under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

While there is not one hint or suggestion in the Book of Acts that the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were ever used in water baptism, there is abundant evidence to support the formula of baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ or Lord Jesus. Let us notice five recorded examples of evidence.

- “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .” (Acts 2:38).
- “Only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).
- “And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). Modern versions such as the NIV read “Lord Jesus” or “Jesus Christ.”
- “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).
- “Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, call-

ing on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). This verse reveals that the name of Jesus was invoked during baptism. Just as the disciples fulfilled Jesus’ similar command to heal the sick and cast out demons in His name by actually invoking the name of Jesus (Acts 3:6; Acts 16:18), they fulfilled Jesus’ command to baptize in the name by actually calling on the name of Jesus in water baptism.

Why is the formula used in water baptism significant? By repeating the titles of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, trinitarian believers affirm the doctrine of the trinity, that God eternally exists in three distinct persons. For Oneness believers, baptism in the name of Jesus follows the apostolic pattern, affirms their faith that God is one, that He was incarnate in His Son Jesus Christ, and that He now dwells in us by His Spirit. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ expresses faith in the Incarnation, the authentic human life of Jesus, the death of the Son of God on the cross for our sins, and the remission of sins through the name of Jesus.

No proof other than the Bible is necessary to convince a believer that he should be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We do not need secular records to embrace and follow this formula, but for the benefit of confirmation we refer to a few historical sources that affirm that baptism in the primitive church was in the name of Jesus Christ and that the trinitarian formula was not known among the Christians until after the apostolic era. The quotes below come from reputable, scholarly works concerning water baptism:

- “The evidence of Acts 2:38; 10:48 (cf. 8:16; 19:5), supported by Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3, suggests that baptism in early Christianity was administered, not in the

three-fold name, but ‘in the name of Jesus Christ’ or ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’.” (*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962], 1:351)

- “Different from the post-apostolic and later Christian liturgical praxis, which is marked by the trinitarian formula of Matthew 28:19, the primitive church baptized ‘in’ or ‘into the name of Jesus’ (or ‘Jesus Christ,’ or ‘the Lord Jesus’; See I Corinthians 1:13, 15; Acts 8:16; 19:5).” (*Dictionary of the Bible*, James Hastings, ed. [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963], 88)

- “The earliest known formula is ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus,’ or some similar phrase; this is found in the Acts, and was perhaps still used by Hermas, but by the time of Justin Martyr the trine formula had become general. It is possible that the older formula survived in isolated communities, but there is no decisive contemporary evidence.” (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Hastings, ed., [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951], 2:389)

In baptism, our faith in Christ, our repentance of sins, the blood shed for the remission of sins, and the name of Jesus come together in a holy moment to wash away sins. Through water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, God sanctifies and cleanses us “with the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost,” by which we become spotless, without wrinkle, a glorious bride for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. (See Titus 3:5; I Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:26-27.)

V. THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. Significance

The baptism of the Holy Ghost is uniquely an experi-

ence of New Testament Christians. Although the Spirit had come to people in the Old Testament, He had never come as He came on the Day of Pentecost. Holy men in the Old Testament were moved by the Holy Ghost, and through that anointing, they performed miracles, prophesied future events, and wrote the Scriptures. But the Spirit also revealed to them that the infilling of the Holy Ghost was for another generation and not theirs (I Peter 1:10-12). They were anointed for ministry and mission, but they could not receive the regenerating, life-giving experience that is ours in the church era. (See Hebrews 11:39-40.) God has something better for us on this side of Calvary: the abiding, indwelling presence of His Spirit.

The prophet Joel foretold of the day when Jehovah would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, a prophecy that is being fulfilled in the church (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-17). Isaiah told of the identifying sign of the indwelling Spirit, that of speaking with tongues (languages) as the Spirit gives the utterance (Isaiah 28:9-12; I Corinthians 14:21-22; Acts 2:4). Jeremiah described the coming experience as the new covenant in which God would write His laws on the “inward parts” and “in their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-13).

When John the Baptist proclaimed Christ, he said that He would baptize His converts with the Holy Ghost (Matthew 3:11). Jesus proclaimed, preached, and promised that those who believed in Him would receive the Holy Ghost, but the experience had to await His crucifixion and resurrection (John 7:37-39). To encourage His disciples, Jesus said, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).

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This promise began to be fulfilled in Jerusalem with the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:33), but the promise of the Spirit did not cease with the 120 disciples or the Jews and Gentiles of the first century. Indeed, millions of people living today in all nations have received the Holy Ghost with the same sign of speaking with tongues. As long as God's church is on the earth, the Spirit will be the means by which people are sanctified, regenerated, and sealed. (See II Thessalonians 2:13; John 3:3-5; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30.) Without His presence, there is no salvation: unless the Spirit draws, convicts, and indwells us, we will remain lost in our sins.

By the Spirit we are born into the kingdom of God (John 3:5, 8). By the Spirit we are baptized into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance and the seal of our salvation (Ephesians 1:13-14). By the Spirit we have access to God (Ephesians 2:18). The Spirit sanctifies us (Romans 15:16; I Corinthians 6:11), renews our natures (John 3:5), makes us sons of God (Galatians 4:5-6; Romans 8:15), witnesses that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16), and will one day resurrect us (Romans 8:11). The Holy Ghost experience is the essence of the new covenant, replacing the old covenant of the law (II Corinthians 3:3-18). The promised blessing of Abraham is "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14).

The Bible states, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). The apostle Paul also wrote, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost" (I Corinthians 12:3). He is not our Lord until we have submitted ourselves to Him and allowed His Spirit to ascend to the throne of our lives. The

Christian is not only born of the Spirit but he also prays in the Spirit, lives in the Spirit, and walks in the Spirit. (See Jude 20; Galatians 5:25.)

The church era is the age of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit is life, the rivers of living water from which all Christians drink. He is the unique force in redemption, bringing illumination, conviction, regeneration, transformation, and sanctification to our lives. It is by the indwelling Spirit that we are made free from sin in Christ (Romans 8:1-2, 9). Individually, each Christian is a temple of the Holy Ghost (I Corinthians 6:19), and collectively all Christians form the holy temple, the one building “fitly framed together” for “an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22).

Jesus called the transforming of a person from sin to the kingdom of God a birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). This new birth is more than water baptism, for it includes the transforming work of the Spirit of God. A person may be baptized in water in the name of Jesus and still not be born again; he will remain outside the kingdom of God until he also receives the Holy Spirit. (See I Corinthians 12:13; Romans 14:17.)

Without the infilling of the Holy Spirit, a person’s birth is not complete; he may be forgiven of his past sins, but he is not born again. His new birth is not finished. He needs a spiritual change of his sinful nature that comes only by the infilling of God’s Spirit.

A saved person, then, is one who is both forgiven and regenerated, both pardoned and transformed. He is no longer controlled by the nature of sin, and he no longer follows a sinful lifestyle. The new birth does not mean, however, that a person will no longer battle his sinful

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nature or that he has become incapable of sinning. God does not make His people to be robots; He does not take from us our free will, but He does give us power through his indwelling Spirit to resist the temptation to sin. While a Christian is still capable of sin, he does not have to sin.

It is evident that the Bible makes no distinction between the Spirit of Christ, Spirit of God, and the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:9, for example, the Spirit is called the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ." The early Christians believed the Holy Ghost to be the risen Christ. (See II Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:19; Colossians 1:27.)

Jesus said to His disciples, "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 with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:16-18). From this passage we see that the Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus told us, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). The Son ascended, but the Holy Spirit, which is Christ with us and in us, has come to abide with us forever. There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit is none other than the God who created all things, who lived among us in Jesus Christ, and who now lives in us. He is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of the risen Christ.

Unfortunately, many sincere people are confused as to the ministry of the Holy Ghost. Some religious leaders teach that the Holy Ghost baptism is merely an added blessing that comes after salvation and is therefore not a

part of the salvation process. They try to separate the “birth of the Spirit” from the “baptism of the Spirit,” contending that a person can possess the Spirit without being baptized with the Spirit. But the Bible does not make this separation; their theology is in error on this point.

Some people have tried to establish several levels of Spirit reception, identifying these levels by such terms as baptized, filled, poured out, received, came upon, and fell on. But these New Testament terms express the same reception of the Spirit, and they are used interchangeably in reference to the one salvation work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. (See Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4, 17-18, 33, 38; 8:15-19; 9:17; 10:44-47; 11:15-17; 15:8; 19:2, 6; I Corinthians 12:13.) There is no difference between being filled with the Spirit, receiving the gift of the Spirit, and being baptized with the Spirit. The terms simply view the same experience from different perspectives.

The overwhelming evidence of the New Testament affirms that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is an essential experience in salvation. It is merely human sentiment that argues against the necessity of the Spirit on the basis that it would mean that countless millions of Christian believers, not only those in past centuries who did not receive the Holy Ghost but also those living today without this experience, are not saved. While we are to leave the judgment of others to God, we cannot ourselves ignore the clear biblical statements on this subject.

A person will not go astray if he stays with the plan of salvation as expressed in Acts 2:38, that of repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is significant that the New

Testament presents only one plan of salvation and calls all others false (Galatians 1:6-10). The one gospel message of hope and truth and power saves all who respond in obedient faith. (See Romans 10:11-17.)

B. Speaking in Tongues, the Initial Evidence

On the Day of Pentecost, God's Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, and with the Spirit came the experience of speaking with tongues (Acts 2:1-4). Approximately 120 disciples received the Holy Ghost at this time (Acts 1:15), but the outpouring was not limited to these. Indeed, Peter preached that the Holy Ghost was a promise that every person could receive.

Speaking with tongues (languages) is closely linked with the reception of the Holy Ghost not only at the initial outpouring in Act 2 but also at other events in Acts. Moreover, speaking with tongues is referred to in the Gospel of Mark and in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians.

When the Gentiles in Caesarea received the Holy Ghost, the sign of speaking with tongues convinced the Christian Jews that God had given them the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:44-47; 11:15-18). Moreover, the twelve disciples Paul met in Ephesus spoke with tongues when they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:6). Further, the Bible reveals that the saints in Corinth spoke with tongues (I Corinthians 14), a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 28:11). Jesus said that those who believed the gospel would "speak with new tongues" (Mark 16:17). It is obvious therefore that speaking with tongues is a biblical experience linked with the reception and activity of the Holy Ghost.

Jesus indicated that the birth of the Spirit would be

accompanied with the sound of the Spirit: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter identified speaking with tongues as the “sound” of the Spirit: “Therefore [Jesus] being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). What the people heard was speaking with tongues (Acts 2:6-11).

The biblical record of the Gentiles receiving the Holy Ghost clearly reveals that speaking with tongues was the expected sign of Spirit baptism. It is doubtful that Peter or any of the Jews who came with him expected the Gentiles to be filled with the Spirit, but they could not deny the validity of the experience when they heard them speak with tongues: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And 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. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44-46).

The Jewish Christians witnessed the same sign of Spirit reception among the Gentiles as happened to them when they received the Spirit. Acts 11:15 further supports the conclusion that the manner of Spirit reception on the Day of Pentecost established the pattern for all subsequent receptions.

The church in Acts recognized that people could believe, repent, and be baptized in water and still not be

filled with the Spirit. This is what happened in Samaria. When Philip preached Christ to the city, the people believed and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. But they did not receive the Holy Ghost until later when Peter and John came from Jerusalem to pray for them with the laying on of hands (Acts 8:15-16).

How did Philip and the apostles determine that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Ghost? The fact that the people believed was not the sign, nor was water baptism. The church looked for a definite sign, and since the sign was not present they concluded that not any of the Samaritans had received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:16). For this reason the apostles came from Jerusalem and laid their hands on them in prayer that they would receive the Holy Ghost.

Although we are not told on this occasion what sign accompanied the reception of the Holy Ghost, we know that it was observable to others. When Simon, the converted sorcerer, saw the sign he was so impressed that he foolishly offered money to purchase the power to give the Holy Ghost by laying on of his hands (Acts 8:18-19). We can safely infer that what he saw was the same sign that came on the Day of Pentecost and other occasions.

When Paul met the twelve disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus, he inquired if they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed (Acts 19:2). They answered that they did not know the Holy Ghost was available. After a short discourse, Paul baptized the men in the name of the Lord Jesus, but they did not receive the Holy Ghost in water baptism. The physical sign was not present. Therefore Paul prayed for them with the laying on of hands that they might receive the Holy Ghost. If there

were no expected sign, Paul could not have known that the men had not received the Spirit. The Bible reports that when they received the Holy Ghost they spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:6).

The record in Acts reveals that a person does not necessarily receive the Holy Ghost the moment he believes or even in his water baptism (Acts 8:16; 19:1-6). Indeed, he may receive the Holy Ghost even before water baptism (Acts 10:44-48). We can therefore conclude that neither believing nor baptism signifies the reception of the Holy Ghost. Only one sign accompanies Spirit reception, that of speaking with tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance.

We must not, however, be diverted from the Spirit's work in the new birth by an overemphasis on speaking with tongues, which is merely the physical sign and not the reception of the Spirit Himself. The goal is not to speak with tongues but to be filled with the Spirit. While the sign is important to certify the baptizing presence and work of the Spirit, we should not encourage people to merely utter sounds, for even when such encouragement is done with good motives, it could lead to deception. The gospel stresses faith, repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and a person's desire, and when these come together he will receive the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking with tongues.

If God were merely an abstract idea and not a personal being, then the person who possesses the idea of God would possess Him. But God is more than an idea. He is a personal Spirit being, and when a person receives Him, God personally enters into his life. Such a moment cannot pass unnoticed either by the person himself or by

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others around him. God gives an inner witness and an outward physical expression emerging out of the inner experience as the initial sign of Spirit indwelling.

THE CHURCH

by Ken Gurley

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The purpose of Christ's ministry was to establish the church (Matthew 16:18; John 17:9). Jesus not only identified Himself with the church (Acts 9:4), but He also openly declared His selfless love for the church (Ephesians 5:25). In the future, the Lord Jesus Christ will return to gather His church unto Himself (Ephesians 5:27).

Christ was not alone in His love for the church. The apostle Paul and others sacrificed to see the church flourish. Paul considered his persecution of the church to be his most serious crime (I Corinthians 15:9; Philippians 3:6).

Since the New Testament church is the principal object of Christ's attention, we should give more than cursory attention to its understanding. Ecclesiology is the study of the church's founding, purpose, organization, doctrine, and lifestyle.

I. THE ORGANISM

A. Definition and terms

The church as an organism, or a living system, has a distinct existence.

1. *Ekklesia*. The primary Greek word for the church in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. This term is formed from the preposition *ek*, which means "out from among," and the noun *klesis*, which means "a calling." Thus, *ekklesia* refers to a called-out body of people.

The New Testament used the term *ekklesia* in three ways. First, it is used in a secular sense to describe simply an assembly of individuals (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Second, the word is used to describe the assembly of the Israelites in the wilderness (Acts 7:38; Hebrews 2:12). However, the greatest usage of this word in the New

Testament—appearing over one hundred times—is to describe a group of believers in Christ. In this sense, the word *ekklesia* means a “group of people called out from the world and belonging to the Lord.”¹ This definition draws due attention to the necessity of the new-birth experience (John 3:5; Acts 2:38) and to the fellowship found in sanctification (Romans 12:1-5; II Corinthians 7:1; I John 1:7; 2:15).

2. *Local and universal.* The word *ekklesia* is used in both a local and universal sense. In the local sense, a church is a group of believers in a particular locality. Thus the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles contain references to local churches: the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:22), the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17), the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2), the churches of Galatia (Galatians 1:2), the churches of Judea (Galatians 1:22), and so on. The local church can be as small as two or three believers (Matthew 18:20; Colossians 4:15), but regardless of its size, it should be a faithful replica of the universal church.

The universal church is the complete company of believers who have experienced the new birth, thus being baptized into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). Hebrews 12:23 describes the church as a universal institution. In this same sense, the Bible speaks of Jesus building, loving, purifying, and sanctifying His church (singular) rather than churches (plural) (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:25-26).

3. *Visible and invisible.* We can speak of the visible church and the invisible church. The visible church is comprised of those who profess to be Christians, while the invisible church is limited to those who not only profess to be Christians but whose names are also found in

the Lamb's Book of Life. Thus the membership of the universal church and the invisible church are the same.

To be a member of the invisible church requires faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ and His gospel. (See Luke 6:46; John 8:31; II Thessalonians 1:8.) In Christ's Sermon on the Mount, He urged His hearers to be followers not merely by profession but in spirit and conduct (Matthew 7:15-23). The apostle Paul was more concerned with his membership in the invisible church than in any honor the visible church would show him (I Corinthians 9:27). He warned Timothy that in the last days people would arise in the church who would have the appearance of godliness but would be corrupt within (II Timothy 3:1-9). Clearly, there is a difference between those who merely profess Christianity and those who belong to Christ.

4. *The kingdom of God.* The kingdom of God is closely related to the New Testament church. The coming kingdom of God, also known as the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3; Luke 6:20), was the subject of John the Baptist's message (Matthew 3:2). This subject also formed the central theme of Christ's preaching in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While the Jews expected a future, earthly kingdom established by the Messiah, Jesus offered an immediate, spiritual kingdom that provided forgiveness of sins and spiritual deliverance (Matthew 12:28; Mark 2:1-12). Thus the kingdom of God today is the reign of Christ in human hearts through regeneration.

The kingdom has both wheat and tares (Matthew 13); in this way it is similar in constituency to the visible church. The church is the present manifestation of Christ's rule or kingdom to this world. (See Acts 2:36.) In this age the church assumes the visible form of the kingdom in this

world, and as such is the salt of the earth and light of the world. The basis of the gospel message is Christ's authority (Matthew 28:18).

The kingdom of God is now in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:20-21). One day the King of kings shall come again visibly, gloriously, and with great power (II Thessalonians 1:9-10; I John 3:2). Satan will be bound, and then Christ will reign with His resurrected saints over this earth for a thousand years, known as the Millennium or the kingdom age (Revelation 20:1-4).

There are other views regarding the kingdom. The "kingdom now" proponents insist that the present church has power and jurisdiction over every domain of life including politics, science, art, industry, and commerce. Others have interpreted the kingdom of God to be a "social gospel" that leads to massive social reform. These views tend to ignore both the church's true mission and the world's future, thus diminishing Christ's kingship in this earth.

B. Founding of the New Testament church

The origin of anything reveals much of its nature. The New Testament church had a unique beginning that highlights its distinctive nature.

1. *The old and new covenants.* The writer of Hebrews identified two significant covenants: one is new and the other is old or obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). God entered into covenants with individuals such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David (Genesis 6:18; 9:9-17; 15:8-18; 17:6-8; Exodus 6:7; Deuteronomy 29:12-13). The old covenant to which Hebrews refers, commonly called the Mosaic covenant, was made between God and

the nation of Israel in the wilderness. It required numerous blood sacrifices, strict observance of feasts and holy days, and obedience to the many commandments, statutes, and ordinances of the law.

The new covenant is different and better (Hebrews 8:6-7). It is established through the blood of its mediator, Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:14, 15). This covenant has no stone tablets of commandments, but the laws of the Lord are written upon the fleshy tablets of believers' hearts (II Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 8:10). The new covenant is to "whosoever will" rather than Israel exclusively (Romans 10:11-13; Revelation 22:17). Circumcision was the outward identifying sign of Israel; its counterpart today is the new-birth experience, an inward transformation that now identifies the true believer (Romans 2:28, 29; Colossians 2:11-13).

In the requisite of faith, the New Testament church resembles Israel, God's Old Testament people. However, the dissimilarity of the old and new covenants precludes the New Testament church and Israel from being totally synonymous. The apostle Paul distinguished among Jews, Gentiles, and the church (I Corinthians 10:32). The church is a new creation composed of believing Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 3:11). The Jews who refused to accept Jesus Christ were broken off as branches from the trunk, and the believing Gentiles were grafted (Romans 11:13-25). Thus believers are one in Jesus Christ, who is the root (Isaiah 53:2; Revelation 22:16) and the true offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:16). In a prophetic sense, it appears that Israel still has a future role distinct from that of the church (Acts 1:6; Romans 11:25-27; Revelation 7).

2. *The Day of Pentecost.* The New Testament church did not begin in the Gospels but after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke of a future time in which He would build His church (Matthew 16:18). The New Testament church was established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Just prior to His ascension, Christ instructed His disciples to preach the gospel first in Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-49). This message was preached by Simon Peter following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the 120 individuals in the upper room (Acts 1:15; 2:4). In response to Peter's message of repentance and remission of sins, 3,000 individuals believed and were baptized into the church (Acts 2:41).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost marked the birth of the church: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (I Corinthians 12:13). No one was baptized with the Holy Spirit in the Gospels, but all of them record John the Baptist's proclamation that the baptism of the Spirit would come (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). In the closing verses of Luke and in the opening verses of Acts, Jesus promised that this baptism of power was soon to come (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5). The ascension of Christ had to transpire prior to the outpouring of His Spirit (John 7:39; 16:7; Ephesians 4:7-9). The Day of Pentecost after the Ascension marked the fulfillment of the prophecies of John the Baptist and of Jesus regarding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17).

3. *The law of Moses and the grace of Christ.* The law was given by Moses, but grace emanates from Jesus Christ (John 1:17; Titus 2:11). In the church age, to be "under law" is the opposite of being "under grace," and a

person who is under the law is still a slave to the guilt and power of sin (Romans 6:14). Through the new-birth experience, a person is delivered from the law, for Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, comes to live within, imputing and imparting the righteousness taught by the law (Romans 7:4-6; 8:1-4; Galatians 2:19-21). The law was the schoolmaster to bring people to Christ (Galatians 3:23-25).

Faith in Christ's grace does not destroy the law of Moses; rather, it establishes the righteousness of the law in the hearts of believers who do not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit (Romans 3:31; 8:4). The Holy Spirit pours the love of God into their hearts, creating an atmosphere in which the inward man delights in the law of God (Romans 5:5; 13:10; I John 2:5). Believers are under the law of Christ (I Corinthians 9:21), which is the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). The law of Christ is His grace, which teaches believers how to conduct themselves (Titus 2:11-15).

The ceremonial laws and ordinances of the Old Testament were types and shadows. They were fulfilled and abolished at Calvary (Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 7:18). Of course, the moral laws of God are unchanging, and they remain relevant to the New Testament church (II Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 10:16).

C. Analogies

The Scripture provides several metaphors to define and describe the New Testament church. These metaphors—bride, body, children, and temple—apply to the universal church (Romans 8:16; II Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 1:23; 5:25), to the local church (I Corinthians

3:16; 12:27; II Corinthians 11:2; I Peter 1:14), and to each believer (Romans 7:4; I Corinthians 6:19). While the metaphors discussed here are not comprehensive, each describes the church as a living organism totally dependent upon Jesus Christ.

1. *The bride of Christ.* Ephesians 5:22-23 describes the New Testament church as the bride of Christ. The bride is presently espoused to Christ (II Corinthians 11:2) and is preparing herself for the wedding ceremony (John 3:29; Revelation 19:7-8). This analogy draws attention to the unity of purpose—the “one flesh” of Ephesians 5:31—that believers should share with Jesus Christ.

2. *The body of Christ.* The church is the body of Christ, who is the head of the body (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19; 3:15). Jesus Christ is the source of the church’s life and the One who causes the church to grow (Acts 2:47; Colossians 2:19). This analogy reveals that Jesus Christ gives direction and life to the church.

This metaphor also explains the relationship between church members. Believers are individual “members” of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 5:30). The relationship between believers is based on their mutual faith (Acts 2:42; I John 3:23). This relationship is evidenced by and strengthened through love, which is the “more excellent way” (John 13:35; I Corinthians 12:31). The fruit of love is unity, respect, and appreciation among the members of Christ’s body. (See Ephesians 1:1-16.)

3. *The children of God.* The relationship of Israel to God in the old covenant was that of children to parent (Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 14:1). Similarly, the Bible describes the New Testament saints as children of God.

Through faith in Christ, a person experiences the new birth and becomes a child of God (Galatians 3:26). As children of God, we have the man Christ as our elder brother, the forerunner and captain of every believer's salvation (Hebrews 2:10-12).

This analogy further defines the church's relationships. Believers are no longer children of wrath, darkness, and disobedience but children of light (Ephesians 2:2-3; I Thessalonians 5:5). The church's Father is God through the adopting work of the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-8). With the same Father, the relationship between church members is that of brethren (Galatians 4:12). Christ, Paul, the writer of Hebrews, Peter, and John all used the word *brother* to describe the fraternal bond between the church's members (Mark 3:35; II Thessalonians 3:15; Hebrews 13:23; I Peter 5:12; I John 5:16). This bond is to exemplify itself in brotherly love (Hebrews 13:1).

4. *Spiritual temple.* The church is a spiritual temple. The believers, individually and collectively, comprise the temple that the Holy Spirit inhabits (I Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 2:22). Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone and foundation of this building (I Corinthians 3:11; I Peter 2:6-7).

Since the church is a spiritual temple, each believer performs priestly service (I Peter 2:5). No longer does a veil separate the believer from the presence of God. (See Matthew 27:51.) Through Christ, each believer can come boldly before the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:15-16; 10:19-20). The church's priestly service results in the declaration of God's transforming power to humanity (I Peter 2:9).

D. Purpose

To know the purpose of the church is to grasp its significance. Scripture describes the church's manifold purpose, which mandates the present activities of every local church.

1. *Worship*. One chief purpose of the church and of individual believers is to glorify God (Romans 15:16; II Thessalonians 1:12). Ephesians 1 firmly proclaims the church's purpose of providing "praise of his glory." (See verses 6, 12, 14.)

Worship is the church's means of glorifying God (Philippians 3:3). The most common Greek words for worship are *proskuneo*, which means to make obeisance, and *latreno*, which means to render religious service. To the woman of Samaria, Jesus told of the day when His true followers would honor and serve God in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24). Worship in spirit and truth includes prayer, praise, and devotion to Christ's teachings. (See John 8:31; Ephesians 6:18; I Peter 2:9.) The New Testament church also worships and glorifies God by living in a godly manner (John 15:8).

2. *Evangelism*. Evangelism is another important facet of church life. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" were the words of Jesus to His fledgling church (Acts 1:8). God established the church for the purpose of evangelizing the world with the message of Christ (Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:46-48). The early history of the New Testament church reveals that it was obedient to Christ's command (Acts 2:47; 5:42; 6:5-8; 10:34-48; 15:7). The cause of evangelism requires prayer (Matthew 9:36-38), finances (I Corinthians 16:1; II Corinthians 11:8-9), and trained and approved laborers (Acts 13:2-4; Romans 10:15; III John 7-8).

Teachings, activities, and issues that tend to divert the church's evangelistic efforts should be suspect. Evangelism is Christ's priority (Luke 19:10; John 3:16). The church is to evangelize the entire world, although we must recognize that not everyone will be saved (Matthew 7:13-14).

3. *Discipleship*. To the church, God gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to prepare the believers for service (Ephesians 4:11-15). The purpose of the church steps beyond evangelism into the area of discipleship. The Greek word for disciple is *mathetes*, which literally means a learner or a pupil. Clearly, teaching and training is a major purpose of the New Testament church (Matthew 28:19-20).

The apostle Paul emphasized discipleship through teaching and example in all the places he evangelized (I Corinthians 4:15-17). As a person learns God's Word, he becomes firmly rooted and established (Colossians 2:7-8), and he ceases to be susceptible to every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). Mature believers are to teach younger believers; for example, older women are to teach the younger women (Titus 2:4). Paul urged Timothy to be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (I Timothy 4:6-11). Through Timothy's instruction and example, Paul said that both the teacher and the hearers could be saved (I Timothy 4:12, 16).

4. *Fellowship*. "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is another purpose of the New Testament church. *Koinonia*, the Greek word for fellowship, means the sharing of common interests. The common interests of the apostles' doctrine preceded the fellowship in Acts 2.

In describing the salvation that was common to all believers, Jude used the Greek term *koinos*, which is the root word of *koinonia* (Jude 3). Through the new-birth experience, there exists a common bond of fellowship (I Corinthians 1:9; I John 1:7).

Because of the common interests each believer possesses, there is a special relationship that only believers enjoy. This fellowship causes believers to give offerings to fellow believers in need (Romans 15:26; II Corinthians 8:4; 9:13). The church also demonstrates its fellowship by restoring those who have fallen, bearing one another's burdens, and showing special kindness one to another (Galatians 6:1-10).

II. THE ORGANIZATION

The New Testament church was organized. As we have already seen, the early church adhered to a definite system of beliefs (Acts 2:42), and it conducted an organized effort to provide for the needs among local congregations. Organizations are characterized by officers, governmental structures, and philosophies of leadership, and on these grounds the New Testament church qualifies as an organization.

A few characteristics of the early church that identify it as a distinct organization are: (1) regular times and places of meeting (Acts 2:46; 20:7); (2) elected or appointed officers (Acts 1:23-26; 6:5-6); (3) disciplinary procedures (Matthew 18:15-20); (4) uniformity in customs and ordinances (I Corinthians 11:16, 23-26); and (5) letters of instruction and commendation (Acts 15:22-29; 18:24-28).

A. Ministerial offices

The New Testament church has offices, which we can view in terms of function or position.

1. *Functional offices.* To the New Testament church, the risen Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers—commonly called the fivefold ministry (Ephesians 4:11). Similar lists appear in other portions of Paul’s writings (Romans 12:6-8; I Corinthians 12:28). These passages draw attention to ministerial or service gifts placed in the church by the Spirit of Christ. (See also Luke 11:49.)

The fivefold ministry is more functional than positional. Rather than providing stereotyped offices, these and other gifts from God are various means of service. Timothy served the Lord as both an apostle and an evangelist (I Thessalonians 1:1; 2:6; II Timothy 4:5) while still maintaining some sort of positional office (I Timothy 1:18, II Timothy 2:2). The ministers of the church, regardless of their formal office, serve and strengthen the body of Christ in one or more of the following functions: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

a. *Apostle.* The apostle (*apostolos*) is one who is sent forth. The twelve disciples chosen by the Lord were called both apostles and simply “the twelve” (Luke 6:13; I Corinthians 15:5). Jesus also sent forth Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13). While Paul and the twelve original apostles retained a respected position in establishing the doctrine and fellowship of the early church, Christ’s commissioning or sending forth of ministers did not end with these men.

We should not confuse the qualifications for restoring the number of apostles to twelve due to the betrayal of

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Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:21-22) with the qualifications of an apostle in the more general sense. There was an eschatological significance to restoring the number of the original twelve apostles (Revelation 21:14), and their role as founders of the church, eyewitnesses of Jesus, and establishers of doctrine was unique. Paul did not qualify to be one of the original twelve, yet he was qualified to be an apostle (Colossians 1:1). The essential requirement of being an apostle remains the sending forth by Jesus Christ for this ministry. The Bible lists a host of other apostles besides the original twelve: James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19); Barnabas (Acts 14:4); Adronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7); Silas and Timothy (I Thessalonians 2:6).

The ministry of apostle in the more general sense still operates in the church today, particularly in connection with those whom the Lord sends to preach the gospel in unevangelized regions. Moreover, ministers today should function in an apostolic manner by casting out demons and anointing and praying for the sick. (See Mark 6:7-13; 16:15-18; Acts 2, 3, 4, 14, 16.)

b. *Prophet*. Every Christian has the potential of prophesying (Acts 2:18; 21:9; I Corinthians 14:1). At the same time, there is a special ministry in the church known as the prophet (Acts 13:1). Agabus is one of the few prophets specifically named in the New Testament. Only two of his predictions are recorded in Scripture, and they are separated by a period of almost twenty years (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11).

The New Testament prophet may predict or proclaim, communicating special messages from God to His people. The purpose of the prophet's forthtelling message is for

“edification, and exhortation, and comfort” and must harmonize with the apostolic doctrine (I Corinthians 14:3, 37-38; I John 4:1-3). The response of unbelievers to the prophet’s proclamations demonstrates that prophecy includes the message of sin and salvation (I Corinthians 14:24-25). In proclaiming the apostles’ doctrine today, Spirit-empowered preachers can function in a prophetic manner.

c. *Evangelist*. To evangelize means to proclaim the gospel or the good news of Jesus Christ. The apostles on their missionary journeys evangelized or “preached the gospel” (Acts 8:25; 14:7; 17:18). Outside of Ephesians 4:11, the term *evangelist* appears only twice in the New Testament, in connection with Philip and Timothy (Acts 21:8; II Timothy 4:5).

Philip preached as an itinerant evangelist. He experienced great revival in Samaria, left abruptly to preach to an Ethiopian eunuch in the desert, was whisked away by the Spirit to Azotus, and continued to preach in various cities until he settled down in Caesarea (Acts 8:5-40; 21:8). Although it seems that Timothy’s service to the church was mainly local and pastoral, Paul encouraged him to do the work of an evangelist. That work is to proclaim the good news of Christ to the unsaved, and all ministers, whether itinerant or local, need to place a priority on this work.

d. *Pastor and teacher*. The functions of pastor and teacher are generally considered to be complementary. Ephesians 4:11 indicates that the role of pastor includes that of teacher. The pastor must be “apt to teach” (I Timothy 3:2).

A pastor (*poimen*) is a shepherd, or one who cares

for a flock. The primary responsibility of this ministerial function is to lead God's people, particularly in a local setting, and to "feed the flock" (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-2). In feeding the flock, the pastoral and teaching ministries are evident. The pastor/teacher should understand the dietary differences of the lambs and the sheep (John 21:15-16). The various levels of maturity in the flock will cause the minister to adjust his teaching accordingly (I Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:12-14).

As discussed earlier, teaching is a vital part of the New Testament church, yet Christ's gift of the pastor/teacher is unique. He bestows this function to those individuals responsible for the oversight of the church (Acts 20:28).

2. *Positional offices.* In addition to the functional ministries provided as Christ's gifts to the church, the New Testament identifies two specific offices in the local church, each with attendant responsibilities. The first office is that of the bishop, elder, or presbyter and the second office is that of the deacon.

a. *Bishop, elder, or presbyter.* These three terms refer to the same office in the New Testament church. The term *bishop* (*episkopos*) literally means an overseer. "Elder" and "presbyter" come from the same Greek word (*presbuteros*), which originally simply meant an older man. Acts 20:28 identifies the elders or presbyters of a local church as overseers/bishops and shepherds/pastors. Titus 1:5-7 uses "elder" and "bishop" to describe the same office of leadership in local churches. Similarly, I Peter 5:1-2 identifies an "elder" as a shepherd/pastor and an overseer/bishop by the phrases "feed the flock" (literally meaning to "tend" or "shepherd" the flock) and "taking the oversight thereof."

The term *bishop* refers to the duties of the pastoral office, while the term *presbyter* or *elder* indicates the honor of the office. The term most often used today to describe the biblical office of bishop, elder, presbyter, overseer, or shepherd is *pastor*, a term that appears only once in the KJV New Testament in Ephesians 4:11.

The qualifications for this position of responsibility and honor are numerous. Primarily, they center on morality, character, and reputation (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). In addition, the ability to teach and lead others is the distinguishing feature of the overseer of the church (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7). Moreover, this office carries with it leadership authority (I Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17).

It is interesting to note that many New Testament churches were apparently led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). Perhaps the reference is to all the pastors of individual congregations that met throughout a large city, which comprised one church (Romans 16:5, 14, 15), or to several elders of one large congregation. It is doubtful that several elders would be needed for a small congregation. When enumerating the requirements for this office, Paul described the bishop in the singular (“he”), while describing the deacons in the plural (“they”), thereby possibly indicating the normal situation for a local congregation: one pastor and several deacons (I Timothy 3:1-13). Other passages indicate that a local congregation typically had one senior leader or pastor (Acts 15:13; 21:18; Revelation 1:20, 2:1).

b. *Deacon*. The word *deacon* (*diakonos*) means one who serves. Although the New Testament uses the word in several ways, some passages use it in a specific way to identify a certain office in the New Testament church

(Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:8-13). Apparently, the first deacons, or forerunners of the office of deacon, were the seven men of “good report” who relieved the apostles of tending to the needs of widows (Acts 6:1-6). The qualifications for the deacon are quite similar to that of the elder or bishop, emphasizing the need of moral leadership in all phases of the church’s organization.

It appears that the function of the deacons is to assist the elder of the local church in the temporal matters of business and administration. Two aspects of the deacon’s qualifications lead to this conclusion. First, a noteworthy qualification of the deacon is that he not be “greedy of filthy lucre” (I Timothy 3:8), implying that the deacon is involved in the business matters of the church. Second, the ability to teach is a requirement for an elder but not for a deacon, suggesting that the deacon performs functions that free the pastor to study and teach the Word. The account in Acts 6 also supports this view.

B. Organization and government in the church

As we have seen, the New Testament church was definitely organized. While the church was indeed young, it was not immature or infantile in organizational structure. Apparently, the early structure permitted and supported the rampant growth of the church.

1. *Church organization.* Luke recounted the history of the early church in the Book of Acts. In this narrative, it is possible to detect many facts about organization in the New Testament church.

a. *Meetings and membership.* The church gathered for worship and preaching on Sunday, the first day of the

week (Acts 20:7). They also met at other times for worship, prayer, teaching, evangelism, and fellowship (Acts 2:46-47). The church met at various places at its inception: the upper room, the houses of church members, the Temple, and eventually in special meeting places (Acts 1:13; 2:46; I Corinthians 11:18). Some sort of roll was kept of the members of the church (Acts 1:15; 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7). The requirements for membership in the New Testament church were experiencing salvation by repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and being filled with the Holy Ghost; continued adherence to the doctrine of the apostles; and continued fellowship (Acts 2:38, 42). The collection and delivery of offering between local churches to meet special needs is another evidence of organization (Acts 24:17).

b. *Offices and credentials.* The offices of pastor and deacon are perhaps the greatest evidence of organization. As discussed earlier, the local church had at least one pastor (elder) and could have several deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1, 8). These offices had specific qualifications (I Timothy 3:1-13). Consequently, there was an examination and approval process (I Thessalonians 5:12; Revelation 2:2). We find examples of installation to an office, ordination to preach the gospel, and commissioning to missionary service. These ceremonies typically included an admonition or a charge, prayer, and the laying on of hands by the elders (Acts 6:5-6; 13:2-3; I Timothy 4:14; 5:22).

Ministers traveling to various places usually carried a letter of recommendation from a respected elder, apostle, or church body (Acts 18:24-28; Romans 16:1; II Corinthians 8:22-24). Paul and Barnabas were sent from

Antioch with the blessings of other ministers (Acts 13:1-4). Some of the ministers whom Paul commended were Timothy, Epaphroditus, Tychicus, Onesimus, and Mark (Philippians 2:19-30; Colossians 4:7-10). The apostle John commended certain ministers including Demetrius (III John 12). These credentials served to open the doors of the churches to these ministers.

Credentials were revoked as well. Paul issued a warning concerning those who had forfeited their commission through false doctrine or immorality: Phygellus, Hermogenes, Hymenaeus, and Philetus (II Timothy 1:15; 2:16-18). The apostle John revoked whatever commendation Diotrephes had obtained as well (III John 9).

2. *Church government.* In church history, three general forms of church government have been utilized: the episcopal, the presbyterial, and the congregational.

The episcopacy governs through its chief ministers, the bishops, and through lesser ministers known as priests (presbyters) and deacons. The presbyterial form of church government emphasizes the importance of elders or presbyters. Local churches are governed by a group of elders comprised of the pastor (the “teaching elder”) and the session (the “ruling elders”). The congregational form of government places legislative authority in the hands of the local church members. The local church is autonomous, yet it may cooperate with an organization for such purposes as fellowship and missionary work.

The episcopal form of government attempts to elevate the apostles and their delegates or presumed successors above the pastors (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The original apostles were chosen by Christ and enjoyed high visibili-

ty in the early chapters of Acts. In the council of Jerusalem, however, it appears that the elders of the local churches were on equal footing with the apostles (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23). The authority of the early apostles was quite similar to that of modern missionaries who establish and build a thriving church (I Corinthians 4:15). Clearly, the goal of the early apostles was to establish churches capable of existing under the leadership of elders or pastors (Acts 20:28; I Timothy 5:17). The episcopal form of government developed early in church history and is still practiced by many organizations such as the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of England.²

The New Testament form of church government appears to include elements of both the congregational and presbyterial forms. Based on established guidelines, the congregation was allowed to fill the first offices of the church (Acts 6:1-6). The word “ordained” in Acts 14:23, used for the selection of elders, literally means to “raise the hand,” and thus it may indicate the congregation’s participation in electing a pastor. The local church is the final court of appeal in disputes between members (Matthew 18:17). While the congregation had a voice in the selection of its leadership, it appears that there was a prior endorsement by others in leadership (I Timothy 4:14; II Timothy 1:6).

The pastor is entrusted with the responsibility of ruling the local church with whatever assistance he needs from the deacons (I Timothy 3:5; 5:17). He is not the church’s hireling, nor is he a monarch or an aristocrat, but he is the chief representative of the church in all of its affairs.

C. Principles of authority

While the Spirit of Christ has granted to the pastor of each congregation the authority of leadership, a pastor must not be a tyrant who exerts sovereign authority over the masses (Matthew 20:25-28). He is neither lord, nor master, over the church but simply an undershepherd (I Peter 5:3-4). He adopts the traits of a servant: humility, obedience, and sacrifice (Philippians 2:5-8). Through self-discipline, the pastor experiences personal growth (I Timothy 4:14-16). Through supervision and example, a pastor influences and leads (I Timothy 4:11-13; Titus 3:9-11; I Peter 5:1-4).

For the pastor to exercise leadership, there must be a willing congregation. Christians are admonished to obey and submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17). Instead of competition, submission should characterize the Christian's attitude toward the pastor and other Christians (I Peter 5:5).

The church has certain authority to protect its unity and purity, but this authority does not equal or supersede Scripture (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19). To the church, Christ gave the authority of binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). This is the authority to make decisions, especially in regard to church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20). The resolution of disputes or correction of error begins with a private admonition (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1). Should this step be unfruitful, two or three believers are to meet with the offending party (Matthew 18:16). If repentance and reconciliation do not occur, then the matter is taken to the church (Matthew 18:17). If this fails to bring reconciliation, the church has the authority to sever fellowship with

the disobedient party (Matthew 18:17-20). This authority is given to protect the church from divisions that would cripple its effectiveness. Should a disfellowshipped person eventually repent, the church also has the authority and the responsibility to restore him and renew fellowship (II Corinthians 2:6-11).

III. CHURCH LIFE

The church is a living organism. Although the doctrine of the church is fixed, the body of Christ is alive. This life animates believers in several ways.

A. Corporate worship

United worship is part of the church's life. In the upper room, 120 of Christ's disciples waited together with "one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). Corporate prayer was common in the early church and closely associated with the power and presence of the Spirit (Acts 4:31; 12:5, 12). Gathering for preaching and studying the Scriptures was also integral to the early church's life (Acts 17:11; 20:7).

The church praised God together when they met (Acts 2:47; 11:18). An important and frequent means of praising God together was by singing (Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16). It is also evident that musical instruments are appropriate in New Testament worship. They were highly valued in Old Testament worship (Psalm 150; II Samuel 6:5), and the New Testament advocates the singing of psalms, many of which referred to instrumental worship (Ephesians 5:19). Moreover, Revelation 5:8 pictures the church in heaven

playing harps and singing praises unto God. The New Testament does not seek to controvert this established mode of worship but confirms it.

B. The Lord's Supper

Another facet of the church's corporate life is the partaking of the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 11:20). Upon the eve of Christ's betrayal, He broke bread and distributed it to His disciples with the command: "Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). He also took a cup containing the "fruit of the vine" and said, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Mark 14:23-25). The bread and the cup do not constitute Christ's literal body, for Christ was already bodily present during the supper. Clearly, Christ used figurative language in keeping with the symbolism of the Passover feast (Exodus 12:14-24; I Corinthians 5:7). Thus the bread and cup are emblems of Christ's presence.

The regular partaking of the Lord's Supper was an integral element in early church life (Acts 2:42; I Corinthians 11:23). The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember the life and death of Christ for our salvation (I Corinthians 11:24-25). Since the Lord's Supper is to be practiced until the return of Christ, it is also prophetic of the Second Coming as well (Luke 22:18; I Corinthians 11:26).

The participants of the Lord's Supper are those who have experienced the new birth and whose lives are obedient to Christ (Acts 2:42; 20:7). A participant should examine himself before partaking of the Lord's Supper, repenting of any sin and partaking in an appropriate manner (I Corinthians 11:27-32).

C. Footwashing

Coupled with the Lord's Supper is the practice of washing believers' feet. Due to the dusty roads in Christ's day, washing of feet was a sign of hospitality usually performed by the most menial slave (I Samuel 25:41; Luke 7:44). In washing the disciples' feet at the Lord's Supper, Christ promoted humility as the vital attribute of a believer (John 13:4-5). Citing His actions as an example, Christ commanded His disciples to "wash one another's feet" (John 13:14-15).

Washing the saints' feet is one of the noble attributes of a believer (I Timothy 5:10). Hospitality, which the washing of feet symbolizes, is enjoined of all believers (Romans 12:13; I Peter 4:9). Footwashing is a valuable accompaniment to the Lord's Supper, providing an opportunity to seek forgiveness of offenses and grudges and thereby assisting a believer in his self-examination. In a practical and specific way, it teaches humility, service, and unity.

D. Spiritual gifts

The exercise of spiritual gifts is another important practice of the New Testament church. Salvation itself is God's gift to humanity (Ephesians 2:8). After salvation, the ascended Christ bestows additional gifts (*charisma*) to believers. As we have already seen, the fivefold ministry is Christ's gift to the church (Ephesians 4:11-12). In addition, individual believers are recipients of other gifts for the edification of the body, including the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, diversities of tongues, the interpretation of tongues,

helps, and governments (I Corinthians 12:8-10, 28). (See also Romans 12:4-8.) Let us examine the nine gifts of the Spirit as recorded in I Corinthians 12:8-10 and two other gifts mentioned in I Corinthians 12:28.

1. *Revelation gifts.* At least three of these supernatural, spiritual gifts concern thoughts: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and the discernment of spirits. The Spirit provides intuitive understanding and guidance through the word of wisdom. By the word of knowledge God reveals otherwise unknown facts or enables the recall of truth. Through the Spirit, a believer can have the ability to discriminate between true and false spirits (I John 4:1).

2. *Power gifts.* At least three of these gifts involve displays of God's power through an exalted measure of faith: faith, healings, and miracles. The gift of faith, also called "all faith," is a supernatural trust in God to do great exploits by the Spirit (Matthew 17:19-20; I Corinthians 13:2). The gifts of healing are endowed by the Spirit to restore the sick miraculously (Acts 8:7; 28:8). The Spirit-given ability to work miracles is revealed in other "mighty signs and wonders" (Romans 15:19; II Corinthians 12:12).

3. *Speech gifts.* Three of these spiritual gifts involve speech: prophecy, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. The gift of prophecy includes both foretelling and forth-telling messages from God in the language of the hearers. The tongues described as a gift (*charisma*) of the Spirit should be distinguished from the initial evidence of the gift (*dorea*) or baptism of the Spirit. While all individuals speak with other tongues when baptized with the Spirit (Acts 2:4, 38; 10:45-46; 19:1-6), not every believer exercises the supernatural gift of proclaiming a message in

another tongue (I Corinthians 12:30). In the church, the gift of interpreting messages given in tongues is needed so that the entire congregation will benefit from such messages (I Corinthians 14:13, 27).

4. *Service gifts.* At least two gifts of service are mentioned in Scripture: governments and helps. Some believers are given the ability to govern, which involves guiding and piloting the church. The gift of helps enables the recipient to minister to those who need assistance or who are in need. These two gifts seem to relate to the offices of elder and deacon. Other service gifts appear in Romans 12:6-8.

God endows individuals with various gifts (Romans 12:6; I Corinthians 1:7; 12:11; II Timothy 1:6; I Peter 4:10). The church needs to seek spiritual gifts, recognizing that in corporate worship prophecy is preeminent (I Corinthians 14:1). All spiritual gifts must be exercised in love and for the edifying of the church rather than the individual (I Corinthians 12:7; 13; 14:12). These gifts are to be used in an orderly manner (I Corinthians 14:23-40). At the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom ("when that which is perfect is come"), the spiritual gifts will have fulfilled their purpose and will no longer be needed (I Corinthians 13:10-12; I John 3:2).

E. Divine healing

The Lord Jesus Christ not only preached about the kingdom of God but He also healed all types of sicknesses and diseases, curing conditions that were physical ("divers diseases and torments"), spiritual ("possessed with devils"), and emotional ("those which were lunatick") (Matthew 4:23-24). Isaiah prophesied that through the Cross

Christ would provide access to both physical and spiritual healing (Isaiah 53:4-5; Matthew 8:16-17; I Peter 2:24).

To the church, Christ committed the authority to heal the sick in His name (Matthew 10:1; Mark 16:18; I Corinthians 12:9). The history of the early church records healings performed through the prayers of the apostle Peter, the apostle Paul, the evangelist Philip, and others (Acts 3:1-11; 5:11-16; 9:32-35; 14:9-10; 16:18; 19:12; 28:8). James 5:14-15 teaches that the elders of local churches should anoint the sick with oil and pray in the name of the Lord for their healing. Clearly, divine healing is part of the church's life.

While God used the apostle Paul in the area of divine healing, his life and ministry reveal that divine healing or other deliverance from trials did not always come automatically or instantaneously. Timothy, Paul's son in the faith, suffered with stomach trouble and other infirmities (I Timothy 5:23). Paul left his associate Trophimus sick in Miletum (II Timothy 4:20). Paul also suffered from a long-standing trial that he called a "thorn in the flesh" (II Corinthians 12:7). The sick person must have faith, and prayer should be made in the name of the Lord, but it is the Lord who chooses to heal or not to heal or deliver. (See Acts 14:9-10; II Corinthians 12:8-9; James 5:14-15.)

F. Ministry of each believer

The purpose of the fivefold ministry in the church is "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). This verse describes one task, not three. In other words, the New Testament church leadership is responsible for teaching and training individual believers for min-

istry or service. Through this service, the body of Christ is enlarged and strengthened.

Through Christ, the Mediator, each believer is a priest (I Peter 2:9, Revelation 5:10). As such, each Christian can commune directly with God through prayer and Bible study (II Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:16). The believer is an ambassador of Christ, and as such he has the ministry of reconciling the world to Christ (II Corinthians 5:18-21). This reconciling work can be seen in the two believers, Aquila and Priscilla, who took the fervent Apollos and “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:26).

The Bible calls believers to be fishers of men, the salt of the earth, and the light of the world (Matthew 4:19; 5:13-14). It also compares them to athletes, living sacrifices, and warriors (Romans 12:1; I Corinthians 9:24-26; Ephesians 6:10-18). These metaphors allude to the believer’s threefold service: to Christ, to the lost, and to the household of faith. The ministry of believers is the result, not the basis, of faith (Hebrews 2:14-18).

IV. CHRISTIAN LIVING

Since the church is a living organism, it follows that its members are alive as well. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). Christ’s life is evident in individual believers by their lifestyle of holiness and Christian disciplines.

A. Holiness of life

The Bible admonishes us, “Follow peace with all men,

and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Another term used interchangeably with holiness is sanctification. (See Leviticus 21:8.)

These terms mean to be set apart or separated from what is unholy. Broadly defined, sanctification is “a separation to God, an imputation of Christ as our holiness, purification from moral evil, and conformation to the image of Christ.”³

Sanctification is both instantaneous and progressive. The initial act of sanctification occurs at the new birth with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and a separation from sin unto the Lord (Hebrews 10:10; 13:12). Sanctification is progressive in the sense that the believer must by God’s grace continue the process of “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Corinthians 7:1).

As already noted, the process of sanctification involves a separation unto God, a purification of flesh and spirit, and a conformation to the image of Christ (Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 6:17-7:1). Thus a life of holiness both inwardly and outwardly reveals Christ’s work in a believer’s life.

1. *Inward holiness.* As a believer purifies his heart, he draws closer to the Lord (Psalm 24:3-4; Matthew 5:8; James 4:8). The heart is capable of harboring both good and evil thoughts (Matthew 15:19; Luke 6:45). The apostle Paul urged believers to set their affections on heavenly things and to think thoughts that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Colossians 3:2; Philipians 4:8).

Attitudes are another facet of the inward person. The Word of God has the ability to judge the “thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV). An attitude is

a mental habit or the normal disposition of a person. Spiritual competitiveness, prejudice, worry, greed, and hatred are a few of the attitudes judged by Scripture as impure (III John 9; Galatians 3:28; Matthew 6:25-34; I Timothy 6:10; I John 3:15, respectively).

The way to displace impure thoughts and attitudes is to “gird up the loins of your mind” (I Peter 1:13). The Christian must exercise stewardship over his mind. He can resist the thoughts and attitudes of the world by renewing his mind daily (Romans 12:2; II Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:23). He is to adopt the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). Only thoughts that are pleasing to Christ should remain in the believer’s heart; he must resist and bring into captivity all others (II Corinthians 10:5).

The gateway to the believer’s heart and mind is the eye. The eye affects the heart, and the heart governs the believer’s actions (Lamentations 3:51; Matthew 9:4; 15:19; Mark 7:21). Thus the forms of communication that feed the eye and mind should be guarded closely and measured by the mind of Christ.

2. *Outward holiness.* The contents of the believer’s heart will affect his words, actions, and lifestyle (Matthew 15:19). To perfect holiness, the Christian must cleanse himself of filthiness of the flesh (II Corinthians 7:1). The believer is to present his body to God in holiness (Romans 12:1). Through this offering, the Christian crucifies his flesh and ceases to be a servant of sin (Romans 6:6; 13:14; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 3:5).

The Christian’s actions should not be self-seeking but fashioned after Christ (I Peter 2:11-12; 4:2). Temperance, unselfishness, sound speech, sobriety, and righteousness all elevate Christ (Acts 24:25; Titus 2:2). Galatians

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5:19-26 provides a partial list of fleshly actions that displease God and a contrasting list of spiritual fruit. The Christian's actions must be constrained by scriptural admonitions and through brotherly love (Galatians 5:13).

Christ is concerned about the believer's appearance. Modesty in appearance is an outward expression of inward purity. Rather than the wearing of gold, pearls, or costly array, the Lord desires modesty of dress, spirit, and character (I Timothy 2:9-10; I Peter 3:3-4). Men should not wear feminine styles of clothing, and women should not wear masculine styles (Deuteronomy 22:5). The Christian woman should allow her hair to grow long, for short or cut hair is a shame for her; likewise a Christian man should cut his hair short (I Corinthians 11:6, 13-15). The Bible teaches a clear distinction between the appearance of the sexes. Cosmetics that alter the appearance should also be avoided as contrary to modesty. Since God looks at the heart, appearance-altering cosmetics are intended to capture something other than God's attention (I Samuel 16:7). The Bible always speaks negatively of makeup (II Kings 9:30; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40).

Both the Christian man and the Christian woman should have a modest appearance. The admonition to men to be of "good behaviour" uses the same Greek word (*kosmios*) as the admonition to women to be "modest" (I Timothy 2:9). Thus modesty of dress, character, and spirit should govern the Christian appearance of both men and woman.

To be a friend of God, the believer cannot love the world or the things of the world (James 4:4; I John 2:15). Amusements that promote the world's system of values and philosophies should be avoided (Romans 12:1-2; Titus

2:11-12). Because the entertainment shown in movies, television, and commercial videos is predominately worldly, promoting sinful activities, Christians should avoid them. Dancing, worldly music, worldly sports, and gambling do not promote Christ's lordship but draw attention to the "fleshly lusts" from which the Christian should abstain (Colossians 3:5-10; I Peter 2:11).

Christians need to exercise caution in the area of relationships. "Bad company corrupts good character" (I Corinthians 15:33, NIV). They should build relationships that have a positive, godly influence, avoiding associations that have the appearance of evil (I Thessalonians 5:22). Believers should refrain from marrying or entering into closely binding business partnerships with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:7).

The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, the Christian is to exercise stewardship over his body and to "glorify God" in his body (I Corinthians 6:19-20). The health and well-being of the body, mind, and emotions should be of concern to him. Alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics abuse God's temple and should be avoided. Likewise, Christians should be temperate in eating habits and not gluttonous. Lifestyles that damage the body's faculties for Christlike thoughts, speech, and actions should not be practiced (I Peter 4:1-4).

As the Christian purifies himself inwardly and separates himself from the world outwardly, he draws close to Christ. Association with the Lord is the privilege of following after holiness (II Corinthians 6:17-18). The Christian does not make himself holy, but his conservation of and submission to the grace of God enables him to be a partaker of God's holiness (Hebrews 12:10).

B. Christian disciplines

The Christian's life is more than a studied avoidance of worldly pleasures; it is an active pursuit of Christ (Philippians 3:12-15). The Bible instructs us in several disciplines that assist us in attaining a mature knowledge of and relationship with Christ.

1. *Prayer.* Prayer is an encompassing word that includes praise, thanksgiving, confession, petition, supplication, and intercession (I Timothy 2:1). When asked to teach His disciples to pray, Jesus provided a pattern for prayer to be offered personally and privately (Matthew 6:6-15). Jesus taught the necessary attitudes for effective prayer: faith, importunity, determination, humility, contrition, simplicity, vigilance, and expectancy (Matthew 26:41; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-14). He taught that prayer was to be in His name and according to His divine will (John 14:7-14; I John 5:12-15).

The apostle Paul urged believers to pray incessantly (Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; I Thessalonians 5:17). Prayer is a discipline based on the indwelling Spirit and faith in the Lord's willingness to respond to the needs of His church (I Corinthians 14:14-15; Philippians 4:6-7). Systematic, incessant, fervent prayer is an essential discipline for the Christian (Acts 3:1; James 5:16).

2. *Bible study.* The Bible is the word of life (Philippians 2:16), the word of truth (Ephesians 1:13), and the word of salvation (Acts 13:26). The Bible provides food for the spiritual man (I Peter 2:2), light for the believer's walk (II Peter 1:19), and a decisive weapon against the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:17). When read and absorbed, the Bible provides purification (John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26), instruction (Isaiah 2:3), and correction (I Corinthians 10:11).

The apostle Paul admonished Timothy to “study to shew thyself approved . . . rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). Christ admonished people to “search the scriptures” (John 5:39). The Bereans were complimented for their daily search of the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). The apostle Peter enjoined believers to “add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge” (II Peter 1:5). Knowledge comes from studying and applying the Scriptures (Proverbs 2:1-6; John 7:16-17; II Timothy 3:15-17). Only believers who continue in the Word of God are true disciples (John 8:31-32). The Word of God provides the believer the strength to stand during temptations (Matthew 4:1-11). Clearly, the discipline of studying and obeying Scripture is a daily task for the Christian.

3. *Church attendance.* Believers are to attend church faithfully (Hebrews 10:25). Under the old covenant, Christ consistently attended the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). The apostles were faithful in their attendance to worship as well (Luke 24:53).

Because of Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9), the first day became known as the Lord’s day (Revelation 1:10), and it became the disciples’ day of gathering together for worship. One week after the Resurrection, the disciples met together on the first day of the week and Jesus appeared to them (John 20:19). The Holy Spirit fell on the waiting disciples on Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2:1). The disciples of Troas met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian believers to give offerings on the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:2). The seventh-day Sabbath was part of the ceremonial law that pointed to Christ and was abolished at the Cross (Colossians 2:14-17).

4. *Tithes and offerings.* Giving is a Christian discipline that brings many benefits (Matthew 6:1-3; Luke 6:38). There are at least two major types of giving in Scripture: tithes and offerings. The word *tithe* literally means a tenth of the material increase an individual receives. The practice of tithing preceded Moses, beginning with Abraham if not before (Genesis 14:20). Abraham's grandson, Jacob, continued the practice (Genesis 28:22). Tithing was formally incorporated in the law of Moses (Leviticus 27:32). The Pharisees even tithed on the herbs growing in their gardens (Luke 11:42). The New Testament never discontinued the practice of paying tithes to support the work of the ministry; to the contrary, both Jesus and the writer of Hebrews spoke approvingly of the practice (Matthew 23:23; Hebrews 7:4-10). Moreover, Paul emphasized the responsibility of believers to support the ministry financially (I Corinthians 9:7-13; I Timothy 5:17-18).

In addition to tithes, a Christian should give other offerings (Malachi 3:8-10). These should be given regularly, willingly, and cheerfully (I Corinthians 16:2; II Corinthians 9:7). While the believer's tithe already belongs to the Lord, offerings indicate the liberality of a believer. People who gave an offering in the early church "laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:37), indicating that money given to the Lord went through human agencies.

5. *Fasting.* Fasting means going without food or drink for a specified period of time. Often water is drunk, especially on longer fasts. Fasting was a common practice in the Old Testament (Exodus 34:28; I Samuel 7:6; Ezra 10:6). Christ began His ministry with a lengthy fast of forty days (Luke 4:1-2). The Lord predicted that after His departure His disciples would fast (Mark 2:18-20).

According to Jesus, supernatural power is available through prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). The Spirit called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries through the prayer and fasting of the church leaders at Antioch (Acts 13:2-3). A season of fasting and prayer accompanied the selection of elders in the cities of Lycaonia (Acts 14:23).

Fasting is not a means of earning blessings, for they come by God's grace, nor is it practiced to punish the body. Rather, fasting helps us discipline the flesh, establish priorities, focus on spiritual matters, and exercise faith for special needs. Fasting cannot substitute for obedience to the Lord (Isaiah 58:1-12; Jeremiah 14:11-12).

Fasting should be in secret if possible (Matthew 6:17-18). Of course, God's people may sometimes participate in a specially called group fast (Joel 2:15). The length of fasts in Scripture ranges from one day (I Samuel 7:6) to forty days (Exodus 34:28; I Kings 19:8; Luke 4:2), with the longer fasts representing the atypical or supernatural. Christians should enter into times of fasting, at the same time exercising prudence so as not to damage the temple of God.

V. CONCLUSION

The church is a living organism. The purpose of the church requires a dynamic body with organization, leadership, and ministries. Each believer is part of the church and should follow the Lord in holiness and Christian disciplines, thereby truly becoming a disciple.

Jesus Christ loves the church. He prayed for the church in the hour of His passion (John 17:9). Christ gave His life for the church so that His eternal purposes

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might be fulfilled (Ephesians 5:25-27). The risen and ascended Christ still expressed concern for the visible churches of Asia (Revelation 2, 3). Christ will soon return to catch His bride away (I Thessalonians 4:16-18). Clearly, the church is of great importance to the Head of this body, the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTES

¹Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 311.

²Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: 1984), 239.

³Thiessen, 287-88.

THE LAST THINGS

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THE LAST THINGS

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I. INDIVIDUAL DESTINY

A. The destiny of the lost

The only place to learn about the destiny of the lost is in the Bible. Human science knows nothing beyond death. Human experience is limited to life and does not reach beyond the grave. If we on earth are ever to know what is beyond this life, we must learn it from God. Heaven and hell, rewards and retributions, happiness and sorrow beyond the grave are matters about which the Word of God is the only valid authority.

The lake of fire is a place, not just a state, where the lost will ultimately go. As heaven is a place and not a mere state of mind, in like manner the unsaved go to a place.

This truth is indicated by the Greek words *hades* (Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Revelation 1:18; 20:13-14) and *gehenna* (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; James 3:6). The destiny of the lost is a condition of extreme misery and discomfort, as indicated by various figurative terms: “place of torment” (Luke 16:28); “everlasting fire” (Matthew 25:41); “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44); “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” (Revelation 21:8); “the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:2); “a furnace of fire . . . wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42); “outer darkness . . . weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30); “blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 13); and “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night” (Revelation 14:11). Most of these expressions fell from the lips of Jesus. He has revealed almost all that we know about this place of retribution. These figurative terms are an attempt to declare in

language something beyond the power of words to describe.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals that God responds to sin in judgment. In the end, He will separate good and evil for eternity. Let us discuss various terms used in connection with the destiny and judgment of the lost.

- *Hell*. The English word *hell* comes from the Old English word *helan*, meaning “to hide or cover.” It appears fifty-two times in the King James Version of the Bible. It has been used to translate the Hebrew word *sheol* and three Greek words, *gehenna*, *hades*, and *tartarus*.

- *Sheol*. This Hebrew word literally means a deep pit under the earth. As a figure it refers to the realm of the deep. Usually when *sheol* is translated “hell” in the King James Version of the Old Testament, it does not refer to eternal punishment but to a place where good and evil people continue to exist after death. People of the Old Testament believed that the dead continued existence in the shadowy underworld of Sheol. Later Sheol was conceived of as being divided into two compartments where the good dwelt and where the evil dwelt.

- *Hades*, one of the Greek words usually translated as “hell,” is basically equivalent to *sheol*. It comes from the Greek infinitive *idein*, meaning “to see.” The form of the word here is negative, meaning “not to see.” Therefore, *hades* means “the unseen world.” The word was used to mean the same as the Old Testament Sheol, or “the unseen world of the dead.” The word *hades* is translated “hell” eleven times in the King James Version of the New Testament. In nine places it seems to be a general reference to the dead or death (Matthew 11:23;

16:18; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27, 31; I Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13). In two verses *hades* refers specifically to the place of the departed wicked (Luke 16:23; Revelation 20:14). In Acts 2:27, 31 the Old Testament reference to *sheol* is rendered *hades* in the Greek.

- *Gehenna*. The most prominent Greek word translated “hell” is *gehenna*. It appears eleven times in the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). The only other occurrence of *gehenna* is in James 3:6, which describes hell as a source of the evil of an uncontrolled tongue. *Gehenna* is a transliteration of the Hebrew words *ge* and *hinnom*, the name for the Valley of Hinnom located southeast of Jerusalem. *Hinnom* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “lamentation.”

During the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, some Jews erected a temple to the Canaanite fire god, Molech, in the Valley of Hinnom (Jeremiah 7:31). The worship of Molech included putting a child in the arms of a heated idol and burning it to death. This brought screams from the children and wailings from the mothers. Josiah, king of Judah, destroyed the temple and forbade worship of Molech. The Valley of Hinnom afterwards became a despised place to the Jews, and the people dumped their trash there. Fires were kept burning continuously to keep the place sanitary.

Thus *gehenna* meant something abominable, and it became a way to express the eternal destiny and destruction of the wicked. It appears to be equivalent in terminology to “lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14).

- *Tartarus*. The other word translated “hell” in the

New Testament is *tartarus*. It is used only one time, in II Peter 2:4: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment. . . ." *Tartarus* is the Roman and Greek equivalent of the concept of *gehenna*. In the literature of the intertestament period, the word was used as a place reserved for the fallen angels.

The teachings of Jesus about hell (*gehenna*) indicate that it is a place of eternal existence and eternal judgment. In contrast to this view, some people teach that the wicked will be "annihilated." The doctrine of annihilation is held in two ways. First, some join it with the doctrine of conditional immortality and the sleep of the soul between death and the general resurrection of the dead: the bodies of the wicked are raised at the last day, judged, and punished before passing into oblivion and nothingness. In contrast, the righteous live forever in the presence of God. Second, some teach that though humans possess immortal souls, the wicked will nevertheless fall into nonexistence after a period in hell. This approach accepts the reality of hell and punishment, but presumes that it is not eternal in the same sense as heaven is eternal. The doctrine of annihilation is based more on the assumed character of God and ideas of punishment than upon detailed biblical exegesis.

We must accept the sayings of Jesus and His apostles regarding the immortality of the soul. "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46). "Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (II Thessalonians

1:9). These verses along with many others describe the everlasting, conscious suffering of the wicked. There is a natural appeal in evading the idea of everlasting suffering, but rationalizing the doctrine of the final destiny of the wicked can weaken zeal for the gospel. The gospel should be preached with passionate urgency, for without it people are eternally lost.

How profoundly moved we ought to be to think of hell and the millions who will go there! The motive of saving sinners from hell moved Paul. He was so burdened for souls that upon leaving Ephesus he called together the preachers of the city and reminded them: “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

B. The destiny of the saved

Everyone will spend an eternity somewhere, in one of two places. According to Scripture, every human will live forever, either in heaven or in hell, either with the Lord or with the devil. This being the case, it is important to find out everything we possibly can about our future abode. In the previous section we discussed hell; now let us discuss heaven.

The word *heaven* occurs almost six hundred times in the English Bible. In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, three words are translated as “heaven.”

1. *Shamayim*—a general term for the heavens.
2. *Galgal*—commonly used for the atmospheric heaven encompassing the earth.
3. *Shackaq*—usually refers to the third heaven, or dwelling place of God.

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Three Greek words in the New Testament are translated as “heaven” and are similar to the Hebrew words in their meaning.

1. *Ouranos*—a general term usually referring to the immediate heavens around the earth.

2. *Mesouranema*—the middle sky, or planetary heavens.

3. *Epouranios*—what is above or beyond the skies.

Of the almost six hundred times the word *heaven* occurs in the Bible, the majority of the references are to the first two heavens, the lower and the middle heavens. In only a comparatively few of the instances does it refer to the heaven of heavens, or dwelling place of God and the angels and ultimate destiny of the saved.

Heaven in this third sense is a definite place, not merely a condition or a state. Somewhere beyond this universe is a place prepared by God which in a special sense is the place of His abode and administration. In this place Jesus in His human, resurrected, glorified body is seated, surrounded by angels and the saints of God. In this heaven there is being prepared a great city of gigantic proportions called the New Jerusalem. Someday this city will actually descend from God out of heaven to be suspended in the atmosphere above the earth to be the dwelling place of the church.

While we do not know where heaven is, or how large it is, there are many things we do know about heaven.

It is, first of all, the place where God dwells in a very special sense. “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1). “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven” (Psalm 11:4).

Of course, God is infinite. He is boundless. He cannot be contained in or confined to any one certain place. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of heaven as God's dwelling place, it does not imply that He is confined to heaven. It means rather that heaven is the center of His administration, the seat of His authority, and the place from which He issues His commands and sovereign decrees.

Around His throne in heaven are the inhabitants of this place. First, there are the seraphim and cherubim, special supernatural beings called "living creatures" whose function is to give glory, honor, and praise to God.

The next group of heaven's inhabitants are angels. They are the messengers of heaven. They are called "ministering spirits" sent forth to minister for those who shall be the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14). They execute God's orders and deliver messages from the throne.

John saw a third company grouped about the throne in heaven, namely, the saints of God. All the saved of all ages who have died since Adam are in heaven.

The Bible mentions four things about heaven that are exceedingly precious for the redeemed of the Lord.

First of all, heaven is a place where perfect peace is realized. It is a place of relaxation, perfect rest (Revelation 14:13). It is where we will dwell with the Lord forever (I Thessalonians 4:17). It is a place of satisfaction, where every care will be forgotten, every hope realized, and every need supplied (Revelation 21:4).

Heaven is for eternity. There will be no more parting, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more death, and we shall reign with our Lord forever and ever.

The New Testament indicates that there is a distinction in the abode of the departed saved individuals before

and after Christ's resurrection.

It seems that before Christ's ascension *hades* (*sheol*) had two divisions—the abode of the righteous and the abode of the wicked. The former was called *paradise*, the intermediate state of the righteous, or “Abraham's bosom.” Christ used both designations (Luke 16:22; 23:43), and both are mentioned in the Talmud. The wicked were separated from the righteous by a great gulf (Luke 16:26).

After the ascension of Christ, no change of the intermediate place or condition of the wicked dead is revealed in Scripture. But it appears that a change has taken place regarding *paradise*. *Paradise* is now the immediate presence of God. This change is indicated in Ephesians 4:8-10: “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)” Christ apparently led a multitude of captives of death—those in *paradise*—to the immediate presence of God.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that there is another intermediate place for the righteous dead, called *purgatory*. It is “temporary fire, where slight and minor sins (which could not have been forgiven on earth through penance) are purged.” The souls in *purgatory* may be helped by the prayers of the church on earth. The Roman Catholic doctrine on *purgatory* is based on tradition, not Scripture. The Scriptures teach nothing of *purgatory* after life.

Some people teach that souls are unconscious, or asleep, in the intermediate state as they await the resurrection and judgment. The description of the state of

physical death as sleep is found in a variety of languages and cultures. It is the kind of metaphor that comes to mind to describe the state of the dead physical body, especially when the body lies with eyes closed and in an apparent state of peaceful contentment. Therefore, it is not surprising that sleep is used figuratively of death in the Old Testament and New Testament.

In the Scriptures the statement that someone “slept with his fathers” is fairly common (II Kings 14:16, 22, 29; 15:7, 22, 38). It means that a person died an honorable death. The Bible also uses the metaphor of sleep for the intermediate state between physical death and resurrection. Here are some New Testament examples.

- “And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose” (Matthew 27:52).
- “Our friend Lazarus slepeth” (John 11:11).
- “When he [Stephen] had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60).
- “David . . . fell on sleep, and was laid unto his father” (Acts 13:36).
- “They also which are fallen asleep in Christ” (I Corinthians 15:18; see also verses 6, 20).
- “Since the fathers fell asleep” (II Peter 3:4).

In general these texts refer to death, saying the person who has died is at peace with the Lord. Some people use these passages to teach the doctrine of soul sleep, however. Usually they deny the immortality of the soul, argue that sleep refers to the cessation of conscious existence, and point to the last judgment as the moment when eternal destiny is decided. They present soul sleep either as extinction or as a kind of suspension of existence in anticipation of the last day. But this doctrine denies the

scriptural emphasis that the believer dies in the Lord. Death cannot separate him from the Lord. Whatever precisely is the nature of the intermediate state, it is not the suspension of existence. Believers who die enter into the presence of the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23).

The ultimate destiny of believers is the heavenly city called the New Jerusalem. It is described "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). The figure of marriage is used for the church, for Israel, and here for the city in which the saints will dwell. The fact that the marriage figure is used for more than one entity in Scripture should not be considered confusing, nor should the city be identified exclusively with the New Testament church. It is rather that the New Jerusalem has all the beauty and freshness of a bride adorned for her husband. Revelation 21:3-8 reveals that the New Jerusalem will be a place of indescribable joy where there will be no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, and no pain.

In the idiom of the East, the entrance of a king into his capital to rule from there was represented by the figure of a marriage. In other words, he was wedded, intimately and permanently united, to the city or people. The use of this figure in Scripture designates the permanent union of the saints with the city, as in Isaiah 62:4: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah [Married]: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married."

In Revelation 21:10-11, John saw the New Jerusalem

as “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” The general appearance of the city was that of bright light compared to a precious jewel, with its major structure being a clear substance “like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (Revelation 21:11).

Revelation 21 further describes the city as being foursquare with the length, breadth, and height each measuring 12,000 furlongs (1,500 miles). Its walls are beautifully adorned. The twelve foundations are beautified with precious stones. It has twelve gates, three gates on each side, which are of pearl. Its streets are pure gold. The glory of the city is the glory of God. Her light is the radiance of God’s complete character, clear as crystal, reflecting the fullness of the facets of God’s being.

The city does not require a temple, or a place of worship and access to God, simply because God is actually present and constitutes the temple. The city requires no sun or moon since the glory of God and the Lamb will light the city.

The city is not only the dwelling place of God but also the dwelling place of the bride, the Lamb’s wife (Revelation 21:9). To reveal the glory of the bride, Scripture describes the dwelling place of the bride with which the bride is identified. This heavenly city is promised as the eternal dwelling place of the bride.

The city is also the dwelling place of the Old Testament saints. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in

heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Hebrews 12:22-24). “The spirits of just men made perfect” refers to the saints of the Old Testament who will also inhabit the New Jerusalem. According to Hebrews 11:10, Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Moreover, the Bible says of the saints of the Old Testament who died without receiving the promises fulfilled as stated, “They desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:16).

The holy city will be inhabited by God, by the New Testament church, and by the saints of the Old Testament. When the church (the bride) has been joined to the Bridegroom and is installed in the place prepared for her, she will never be separated from it again (I Thessalonians 4:16-18). Thus the church is ushered into her eternal state at the translation and catching away of the saints. When the Lord returns with His bride to reign on earth for a thousand years, the dwelling place of the bride will be transferred from heaven to a position over the earth. Thus John saw the “great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” During the Millennium the heavenly city will be brought into a relation to the earth, although not settled on the earth, casting its light onto the earth so that “the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it” (Revelation 21:24).

II. GENERAL EVENTS

A. Signs of the last days

“Tell us,” the disciples asked the Lord, “when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matthew 24:3).

Did the Lord ignore these questions? Does He reprove those who inquire? Certainly not! He answers them.

The New Testament, like the Old, abounds with signs. Signs attended every phase of Christ’s life, continued in the apostolic church, and project into the last days.

God’s method is to reveal truth by parts. Each newly revealed truth fits, but is not already fitted, into the whole. Each truth progresses, but is not already organized, toward the ultimate revelation.

Human nature prompts people to attempt to group these progressive parts into a complete system. Since our understanding of truth is only partial, however, there are gaps in the system. To bridge these gaps people often supply human interpretations. Because of this human additions may confuse what God intends to reveal. For this reason let us simply arrange the signs of the end time into groups.

A. Moral Signs

1. Days of Noah (Matthew 24:37)
2. Days of Lot (Luke 17:28-30)

B. Political signs

1. Revival of the nation of Israel (Ezekiel 37)
2. The rise of Russia (Ezekiel 38-39)
3. Gentile world government (Daniel 7)

C. Physical Signs

1. Natural disturbances (Matthew 24:7)

2. Manmade disturbances (Matthew 24:9)
- D. Space and atmospheric signs (Matthew 24:29; Luke 21:11)
- E. Spiritual signs
 1. Apostasy (II Thessalonians 2:3)
 2. Satanism and demon worship
 3. Pleasure addiction (II Timothy 3:4)
 4. Worship of creature instead of Creator (Revelation 13)
 5. Humanism and the "New Age"

Signs are given for the purpose of confirmation, counsel, comfort, and challenge. The wise person who heeds the prophetic signs will rejoice as he sees the supreme sign, the coming of the Lord. The foolish person will mourn, but too late. The coming of the Lord looms on faith's horizon as the golden prospect. It furnishes an inspiration for vision, an inducement to holy living, an incentive to patience, an impetus to witnessing, an expectation of deliverance, an anticipation of reunion, and the gateway to glory.

When the apostle Paul spoke of "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," he was encouraging spiritual vision (Titus 2:13). And this kind of looking gives perspective to our whole life. To keep ever before our attention and constantly in our hearts' affection our actual meeting with the Lord of glory has an inspiring effect.

B. The rapture of the church

The main passage on the catching away of the church is I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Verse 17 says, "Then we which

are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds." The words "caught up" come from a Greek word that literally means to seize as one seizes a prize. The Latin word is *raptō*, meaning to seize forcefully. The most commonly used Greek word in connection with this event is *parousia*, ("coming") which stresses the actual personal presence of the one who arrives. At "the coming [*parousia*] of the Lord" the dead in Christ will be raised and believers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (I Thessalonians 4:15-17).

The doctrine of the rapture of the church, or the catching away of the saints, with its promises of the resurrection of the dead in Christ and the translation of the living church, was a prominent feature in the church of the first century. Most scholars agree that the early church believed in the imminent return of the Lord and considered it a possibility that the Lord could come at any time. Such hope permeated apostolic thinking. In I and II Thessalonians, for instance, it is mentioned in every chapter. Most of the epistles make some mention of the coming of the Lord and anticipate the end of the age.

In introducing this subject, the apostle Paul stated, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (I Thessalonians 4:13). The hope of the catching away of the saints and the Lord's return was a large factor in the faith of the early church.

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of

God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thessalonians 4:15-16). A threefold event will take place in connection with the resurrection of the dead in Christ. First, the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. This involves the descent of the Lord from the third heaven, or the immediate abode of God, into the atmospheric heaven. At His arrival on the earthly scene, the Lord will give “a shout.” The particular Greek word used for “shout” has the meaning of a military command. No explanation is given as to the exact character of this command, but it undoubtedly refers to the resurrection of the dead and possibly the translation of the church.

Accompanying the shout of command that the Lord Himself issues will be the voice of the archangel, who is called Michael five times in the Scriptures. The voice of the archangel may be best interpreted as a shout of triumph. The voice of the command of the Lord is accompanied by the archangel’s voice of triumph.

The third element in I Thessalonians 4:16 is the sounding of the trumpet of God. This trumpet has to do with the resurrection of the dead and the translation of the church and should not be confused with other trumpets in Scripture.

The expression here, “the trump of God,” is a parallel to “the last trump” of I Corinthians 15:52, but it should not be confused with the trumpets of angels in Revelation 8:2-9:21 and 11:15-18. This is a trumpet of God, a trumpet of grace, a trumpet of triumph, and a trumpet pertaining to the righteous dead and living saints. The trumpets of angels in Revelation, by contrast, are related to judgments poured out upon a Christ-rejecting world and signal various catastrophes in the future time of trib-

ulation. They announce an entirely different aspect of the divine program.

At the threefold event of the shout of the Lord, the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first. Immediately following the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the living saints will be caught up together to meet the Lord with the resurrected. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thessalonians 4:17).

The expression "caught up together" is the biblical source of the word *rapture*. Though often the word *rapture* means to be carried away with joy, here it refers to a bodily snatching up, that is, the bodily removal of the living church from the earth and meeting the Lord in the air.

The wonderful revelation concerning the coming of Christ both for the dead in Christ and living saints culminates in the exhortation, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18). The word translated "comfort" implies much more than simply help in times of sorrow. It has the idea of help in general, of exhortation, of urging on in the task, and of encouragement. The subject of the Rapture should be included not only in the teaching and preaching ministry of the church but also in the conversation of Christians.

Students of prophecy have different views regarding the timing of the Rapture. Of course, no one knows or can set the time of the Rapture or coming of the Lord. Nevertheless, the question is whether the Rapture will come before, during, or after the period of time known as the Tribulation.

Pretribulationists usually divide the coming of Christ into two phases. Christ will come for His saints (the Rapture, the parousia, or presence); afterwards He will come to earth with His saints (the revelation, epiphany, or appearing of Christ). (See I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Jude 14.) The church—the believers living at the time immediately preceding the Tribulation along with the dead in Christ who have been resurrected—will be raptured before the Tribulation begins. The following reasons are given to show that the church will not be on earth during the Tribulation period, and this evidence is held to be cumulative rather than dependent on a single point.

- A. The nature of the Christian church forbids its going through the Tribulation.
 1. The church was chosen before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).
 2. The church is not of the world (Philippians 3:20).
 3. The church is foreordained to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).
 4. The church is a heavenly people with a heavenly calling and destiny.
 5. The glorification of the church requires a resurrection prior to the manifestation of the wrath of the Lamb in Revelation 6:16-17.
 6. The church is promised deliverance from wrath (I Thessalonians 5:9). Believers have no part in the day of judgment upon the earth.
 7. There will be some who are “alive and remain” at the time of the Rapture according to I Thessalonians 4:15. Since those who do not wor-

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ship the Antichrist during the Tribulation will be slain (Revelation 13:7-8, 14-15; 20:4), no believers would be alive and would remain if the church should go through the Great Tribulation.

- B. The Tribulation is the judgment of the Christ-rejecting Gentile nations as well as Christ-rejecting Israel.
 - 1. It is the visitation of the wrath of God upon those who have chosen to make this earth their permanent dwelling place (Revelation 3:10). It is also “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7). It does not concern the church.
 - 2. God has always protected His people before judgment fell. By illustration and type, the church too will be delivered before the final judgment.
 - a. Enoch was translated before the judgment of the flood. Enoch is a type of the church.
 - b. Lot was taken out of Sodom before the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot is a type of the church.
 - c. Noah was in the ark before the judgment of the flood. Noah is a type of the nation of Israel, which will not be kept from the Tribulation but will be saved while going through it.

Midtribulationists hold essentially the same position as pretribulationists except that they shorten the interval

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of time between the Lord's coming for His saints and His coming with His saints. Instead of placing the Rapture before the Tribulation begins, they place the Rapture in the middle of the Tribulation. The following reasons are given.

- A. The seals are not direct judgments of God but, according to Matthew 24:3-8, indicate simply the "beginning of sorrows" that precede the Great Tribulation.
- B. The Great Tribulation (the judgment of God) is only the last half of Daniel's seventieth week, or three and a half years (Revelation 11:2-3).
- C. The last trumpet of I Thessalonians 4 and the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11 are identical. It sounds in the middle of the Tribulation (the seventieth week of Daniel). Since it announces a resurrection, the Rapture must be at that time.
- D. To pretribulationists, John's rapture to heaven in his vision is symbolic of the church's rapture (Revelation 4:1-2). To midtribulationists, the resurrection of the two witnesses is symbolic of the catching away of the church (Revelation 11:3-13).
 - 1. The two witnesses are called two olive trees (Revelation 11:4).
 - 2. The olive trees represent Old and New Testament saints (Romans 11:13-25).
 - 3. All witnessing, the distinctive mission of the church, ceases with the rapture of the two witnesses.
 - 4. The day of wrath is mentioned as being at

hand in Revelation 11:18. Therefore, the preceding seals and trumpets are not events of divine wrath.

Posttribulationists believe that the church will go through the entire Tribulation and be raptured simultaneously with the return of Jesus to the earth in the Second Coming. After meeting the Lord in the air, the church will immediately return with Him to the earth. All believers who are caught up to meet the Lord will be instantly transformed into immortal bodies. But since this event occurs in connection with the Second Coming, believers will meet the Lord in the air only to return immediately with Him to earth. The key argument of posttribulationists is that the great prophetic passages relative to the Second Coming, such as Matthew 24, seem to speak of one event, not two phases separated by a time interval.

Of the three views of the Rapture, the pretribulation view appears to be correct. The New Testament church was established by the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It did not have a part in the first sixty-nine weeks of years in Daniel, so it does not seem to have a part in the seventieth week; all seventy weeks relate to God's program for the nation of Israel.

The Tribulation relates to the wrath and judgment of God, but the church is not subject to divine wrath. (See I Thessalonians 5:9-10; Revelation 3:10.) During the Tribulation the world will be subject to the beast (Antichrist) and through him to Satan, but the church is subject only to Christ. In short, it appears that God will take the church out of the world before the Tribulation.

C. The Tribulation and the man of sin

The literal interpretation of prophecy leads to the conclusion that there is a future time of trouble, called the Tribulation, that will be a major feature of the end time. Daniel's prophecy of a period of seven years culminating Israel's history provides the major structure of a period between the Rapture and the second coming of Christ to earth (Daniel 9:27). The Tribulation will consist of terrible trouble and destruction upon the earth, caused first by human sinfulness and then culminating in the judgments of God.

Both testaments speak of a powerful and evil ruler during this time of tribulation, a mysterious and terrible personage who shall be revealed in the last days. This person, whom the Bible calls the man of sin and the beast, will be the embodiment of human evil and wickedness. He is usually called the Antichrist in religious terminology today.

The period related to the coming of this personage will be the time of Satan's greatest miracles. Demonism will be at its height, producing a reign of terror unprecedented in human history. At this time in history the world will be desperate for a leader, someone who will be great enough to gain the allegiance of all nations including Israel. He will become the political, economical, and ecclesiastical autocrat of the world.

He will talk peace and prosperity, appearing to be the savior of the world. His vast empire will be built on the ruins of shattered states and kingdoms. He will be Satan's masterpiece, the beast who will rule the world, the superman for whom the world is waiting. By deception he will succeed in satisfying the world politically, economically,

socially, and religiously. Satan will exercise his final strategy by appealing to the human instincts for piety, prosperity, and power.

The Antichrist will exist in the world and lay his plans before the translation of the church, but he will not be revealed until the church is translated (raptured) first. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition. . . . even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish" (II Thessalonians 2:3, 9-10).

The reign of the Antichrist will begin the seventieth week of Daniel and continue until the end of this period: a duration of seven years. In the beginning of the seventieth week the Antichrist will confirm the Mosaic covenant with the Jews for seven years, allowing them to participate in their Temple worship and the Levitical sacrifices and oblations (Daniel 9:27).

In the middle of the seventieth week, the Antichrist will break his covenant with the Jews and cause their Temple worship to cease (Isaiah 28:18; Daniel 9:27). Under the influence of Satan, he will exercise all of his diabolical activities against Israel and subject them to a time of great tribulation. At the end of the seven-year period, this man of sin shall be "broken without hand," that is, by divine judgment apart from human effort. Both the Antichrist and his false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire.

"And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his

heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand” (Daniel 8:25).

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (II Thessalonians 2:8).

“And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20).

The Antichrist will have a mark of identification. “Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Revelation 13:18).

There is a definite command to count or to look for this number, and those who do so are wise. Numbers have occupied a prominent part in the Bible from the beginning. In some ancient languages the letters of the alphabet were numerals as well as letters. Numbers were denoted by letters. Thus anyone could regard the letters in his name as numbers. He could determine the exact number of his name by adding all the numerals that corresponded to each letter.

The number of the Antichrist seems to be a symbol of his threefold power: political, ecclesiastical, and economical. He will have full temporal power over the entire earth. The number six is one short of the number seven, which is the number of perfection and absoluteness in

Scripture. The Antichrist will rule politically over an earthly kingdom, which falls short of the divine.

The Antichrist's power will also be ecclesiastical. By decree he will unite all religions throughout the world into one common belief or creed. He will be the supreme head and issue a decree demanding that the entire world worship him as a god. Again, his ecclesiastical power is earthly and falls short of the divine seven.

Finally, the Antichrist's power will be economical. Again, his power is material and earthly. He will be in full control of human affairs over the earth.

The combination of these three qualities brings about completeness as far as the power of the earthly is concerned. Distant trusts and combinations of capital will merge into a federation of trusts, headed by the Antichrist. This federation of trusts will extend to the whole world, and the buyer and the seller (the consumer and the merchant) will be powerless in the tenacles of this huge octopus. No one will be able to buy or sell who does not have the mark of the beast (666). This mark will be placed on the forehead or the right hand.

Public officials will monitor business places to see that no one buys or sells unless he has the mark. The penalty of torture followed by death will be imposed on those who refuse. "He shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver" (Daniel 11:43). The world will come face to face with a person whose powers stagger the imagination.

D. The campaign of Armageddon

"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16).

Armageddon will be an unsurpassed holocaust that will break upon the world to give it the greatest bloodbath it has ever seen.

Ever since the nation of Israel came into being, Satan's purpose has been to exterminate the nation so there would be no earthly kingdom for the Messiah. To accomplish this, Satan will move nations against Israel and will bring organized military powers against the people of Israel. Thus John, in his vision, saw the kings of the earth summoned and gathered to a place called Armageddon.

What is going to happen will not merely be a battle in the sense of one isolated meeting of two armies. John described a military campaign that will consummate at Armageddon.

Armageddon means the hill of Megiddo located east of Mount Carmel in the northern part of Canaan. From this hill a great extended plain stretches from the Mediterranean Sea eastward across the northern part of Canaan, encompassing Jezreel and Esdraelon. Napoleon called this plain the world's most natural battlefield. He said there was enough room for the armies of the world to maneuver.

Joel 3:2, 13 describes this campaign: "I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. . . . Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great." The Valley of Jehoshaphat is the portion of Canaan that stretches from Jerusalem over to the east of

Jordan and then northward. It was the trade route from Jerusalem up to ancient Assyria in the north. The campaign will reach from Armageddon on the north to the Valley of Jehoshaphat on the east. The meaning of Armageddon is revealing: "God has sown and God has scattered."

Who will be in this great campaign and what is the reason for this carnage? The purpose of Armageddon is fourfold.

1. To humble the nation of Israel.
2. To set in motion events that will fulfill the Abrahamic covenant for the nation of Israel.
3. To remove the scales of blindness from the eyes of the Jews so that they will accept Jesus as the Messiah and Savior.
4. To bring an end to the "times of the Gentiles."

Ezekiel describes the plot of Gog, against Israel (Ezekiel 38-39). Gog and those allied with him will invade the Middle East and come into the glorious land (Israel) (Daniel 11:16, 41). However, the fatal collapse of Gog is sounded by the prophet: "And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel. . . . And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone" (Ezekiel 38:18-19, 22).

Today we are living under the shadow of Armageddon. And as the hues of this present evil age ominously

darken, approaching the blackness of midnight, the Holy Spirit is striving to arouse the bride of Christ with the insistent cry: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh!" (Matthew 25:6). For some time now the midnight cry has sounded, and it increases in volume and intensity as the hour of the translation of the church draws near.

E. The Second Coming

Immediately following the campaign of Armageddon, the personal return of Jesus to earth as the Messiah will take place. His second coming will be sudden and instantaneous. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27).

The second coming of the Lord will be in bodily form and will be visible to all the world. "Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Revelation 1:7).

The second coming of the Lord will result in judgment and destruction for those who resist Him (Isaiah 34:2; Zechariah 14:2-4; Jeremiah 25:33). At the second coming of the Lord, He will set up His kingdom on earth.

The Scriptures teach that the return of Christ to this earth will occur in the same manner as He went. "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into

heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:10-11).

He went up bodily and visibly, and He shall come back in like manner. He went up in a cloud, and He will return in a cloud. His first advent was in the form of a servant, offering Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of humanity; He will return in His second advent as a king to sit upon the throne of His glory at Jerusalem to rule and reign for a thousand years.

F. The millennial kingdom

The word *millennium* is a Latin compound meaning “thousand years,” and it is often used to denote the thousand-year reign of Christ upon the earth. The belief in the Millennium is also called chiliasm, from the Greek equivalent of the Latin word *millennium*.

Revelation 20:1-7 reveals that our Lord will reign in the future with His saints over the earth for a thousand years. Nearly all the Old Testament prophets foresaw such a golden age for the world, including the physical earth. Frequently this period is called “his days,” which the rabbinical expositors paraphrased as “the days of the Messiah.” The Book of Revelation uses the definite article “the” in the phrase “the thousand years,” indicating that this period was familiar to Christians as well as Jews, as the time of the Messiah’s glorious reign, called by our Lord and His apostles “the world to come” or the coming age.

The character of this coming age is clearly revealed in both testaments. It will consist of universal righteousness, peace, and blessedness. Peace in the animal world will be

as evident as peace among humans. War will be abolished. Idolatry will end. Every false religion will be gone.

According to Scripture, the Millennium will not begin until after the glorious return of Christ to this earth. In His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24), our Lord first showed what will precede His second coming in great power and glory: a world filled with evil and culminating in a great tribulation. Then He showed what will follow His visible and glorious coming: He will sit upon the throne of His glory and judge the nations.

Before the Millennium the following events will take place.

1. The rapture of the church (I Corinthians 15:51-54; I Thessalonians 4:16-18)

2. The great apostasy and the revelation of the man of sin, the son of perdition (II Thessalonians 2:3-10)

3. The Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21)

4. The glorious revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ coming with His saints (Revelation 19:11-15)

5. The restoration and conversion of Israel (Isaiah 59:20; Romans 11:26; Matthew 23:39; Joel 3:11-21)

6. The judgment of the living nations (Matthew 25:31-46)

7. The destruction of the Antichrist and the false prophet (II Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20)

8. The binding of Satan (Revelation 20:1-3)

The view we have described is called premillennialism. That is, the Second Coming will occur before the Millennium. Some theologians teach that the Second Coming will occur after the Millennium (postmillennialism). Others teach that there will be no Millennium in the sense of a literal, personal reign of Christ upon earth;

instead the “thousand years” is a figurative description of the church (amillennialism). These two views allegorize the prophecies of Scripture and attempt to evade the plain meaning of Revelation 20.

At the close of the Millennium, the devil will be loosed for a short time to test the allegiance of the inhabitants of the earth. He will incite a great rebellion against God, which God will crush. Following his defeat will come the second resurrection and the last judgment.

G. The resurrections

Jesus clearly taught a resurrection from the grave. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). He taught the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

The apostle Paul taught the same thing. “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15). That both Jesus and Paul mean physical death and physical resurrection here is clear, for it is the body, and not the spirit, that both discourses speak of. Moreover, these passages clearly teach a resurrection of all the dead.

The Scriptures teach two resurrections. The “first resurrection” is a resurrection of life (Revelation 20:4-6). The second resurrection is a resurrection of damnation. These resurrections do not transpire simultaneously. There is a period of a thousand years from the ending of

the first resurrection to the beginning of the second (Revelation 20:5).

The *first resurrection* has at least three stages. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. . . . The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (I Corinthians 15:20-23, 26).

The first stage was the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, “the firstfruits.”

The second stage is the resurrection of the believers in Christ: “they that are Christ’s” (I Corinthians 15:23), “the dead in Christ” (I Thessalonians 4:16), “them also which sleep in Jesus” (I Thessalonians 4:14). These are designations for the New Testament church, those who make up the body of Christ.

The third stage of the first resurrection takes place after the Great Tribulation according to Daniel 12:1-3. These are the saints saved outside the age of the New Testament church.

There is also the future resurrection of the two witnesses who are sent to prophesy in Jerusalem for the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation. In the middle of this period they will be killed by the Antichrist, but God will resurrect them, and they will ascend to heaven (Revelation 11:3-12).

The *second resurrection* is for all unbelievers of all ages and is the resurrection of damnation. These are the wicked dead who obeyed not the gospel of God (I Peter

4:17). They are the ones who will miss heaven forever. They are composed of both “small” and “great” as they stand before God to be judged (Revelation 20:12). Desperate and doomed, they will weep and plead in vain as they are told of their fate.

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Revelation 20:6).

H. The judgments

The Scriptures speak of four distinct judgments. These differ as to time, subjects, place, basis of judgment, and result.

1. *The judgment seat of Christ.* “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad [worthless]” (II Corinthians 5:10).

The pronoun “we” in this case refers to Christians, the members of the body of Christ. Therefore the judgment here is for believers only. The time of this judgment takes place after the church has been caught up to meet the Lord. The place of the judgment is in the air (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

This will not be a judgment in the sense of a trial to establish guilt or innocence, for it is the judgment of the saved. It is a judgment of works, and the result of this judgment is “reward” or “loss.” All our “dead works” — represented by wood, hay, and stubble—will be consumed, and only good works will remain (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

After the Grecian games were over, all of the winning

contestants assembled before the judge's stand known as the *Bema*. This was an elevated seat on which the judge or umpire sat, and the winners received the victor's crown of laurel leaves. However, those who did not receive any rewards did not receive any punishment. They simply missed out on certain rewards.

The New Testament mentions five crowns, which can be thought of as rewards.

- a. The crown of life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)
- b. The crown of glory (I Peter 5:2-4)
- c. The crown of rejoicing (I Thessalonians 2:19-20; Philippians 4:1)
- d. The crown of righteousness (II Timothy 4:8)
- e. The crown incorruptible (I Corinthians 9:25-27)

2. *The judgment of the nation of Israel* which will take place on the earth during the Great Tribulation. The basis of this judgment is Israel's rejection of God. When the "fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25), the Jews will be gathered back to the land of Israel unconverted and caused to "pass under the rod" (Ezekiel 20:34-38). They will be cast into God's "furnace" (Ezekiel 22:19-22) and subjected to an experience called the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30:4-7; Daniel 12:1). Christ called it "great tribulation" (Matthew 24:21-31).

The result of this judgment will be Israel's conversion and their reception of Jesus as their true Messiah (Zechariah 13:9).

3. *The judgment of the Gentile nations* on the earth at the close of the Tribulation (Matthew 25:31-46). "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations:

and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:31-33).

Those who are judged at this time are called "nations," meaning living nations, nations existing on the earth at the time. The word does not refer to those who have died, and nothing is said about a resurrection having taken place. The sheep are divided from the goats according to the kindness or unkindness shown to a third class of persons called the "brethren" of the judge. This third class apparently means Israel or the Jews, and the actions to be judged apparently will take place primarily during the Tribulation.

At the judgment of nations, the King (Christ) will say to the sheep nations, in essence, "Inasmuch as you have been kind to my brethren, come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This kingdom is the earthly kingdom that these nations will take part in during the Millennium. Christ's sentence upon the goat nations will be, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . These shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:41, 46).

4. *The judgment of the wicked dead.* The account of this final judgment is given in Revelation 20:11-13. It will take place at the close of the Millennium before the Great White Throne.

The wicked or the ungodly will not be judged to see whether they are entitled to eternal life but to ascertain the degree of their punishment. The books will be

opened, in which has been kept a record of every person's life and works. People will be judged according to their works. Their punishment is the second death, which means the lake of fire forever.

The fallen angels who are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness" will be judged at this time, which Jude calls "the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). When this judgment is over, the devil, his angels, and all the wicked will have been consigned to the lake of fire and the universe purged of all evil. Righteousness will reign supreme.

III. ETERNITY

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Revelation 21:1).

Revelation 21 introduces the eternal future planned by God, the ultimate purpose of God for humanity. We know very little about eternity simply because not much space in Scripture is given to it. We may honestly face this fact and not attempt to fill in by imagination what has been denied by inspiration. However, let us try to sum up what is revealed. Revelation 21 and 22 provide more details of this state than can be found anywhere else in the Bible.

Physical changes will take place. The passing of time calls also for the passing away of the first heaven and the first earth. Because it is God's plan and purpose for humanity to inherit the earth forever in fulfillment of His promises, after He does away with this planet as we know it, we will enter into a new dimension that we cannot yet

comprehend. God plans an entirely new order and a new way of life for us. Many changes will take place.

1. There will be a new heaven and a new earth with no sea (Revelation 21:1).

2. The holy city, the New Jerusalem, will come down from God out of heaven (Revelation 21:2).

3. The tabernacle of God will be with people on the new earth (Revelation 21:3).

4. There will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4).

5. There will be a new paradise (Revelation 22:1-5).

6. There will be a new source of light (Revelation 22:5).

Only believers will inhabit the new order. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Revelation 21:7).

The Scriptures contrast the eternal state of the saved to the eternal state of the lost. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murders, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8). The lost are those who have part in the second death. These are the individuals who through unbelief or disobedience rejected God.

God sees only two kinds of people: believers and unbelievers. Either a person is an overcomer who lives with God eternally or an unbeliever who goes to the lake of fire. Each of us should examine ourselves to see which kind of person we represent. If someone has not yet given his heart to God, it is not too late to heed the Savior's call. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that

heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

IV. CONCLUSION

The Lord urged us to be ready for His return. “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:36).

Our blessed hope today is the return of Christ, who shall come for His own who are ready to meet Him and catch them away. After the Rapture will come darkness when Antichrist will rule and lead the world to the campaign of Armageddon. Following this campaign when all resistance is put down, our Lord will come to rule this world for a thousand years of peace.

The time of the Lord’s coming for His saints is drawing near. No one can identify when He will come, but we are to be ready at all times. “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). (See also Matthew 24:36, 42.)

The signs of the second coming of Christ should challenge the Christian to participate in the work of winning the lost before it is too late and to serve God in love. There are so many warnings in the Scriptures that every waiting Christian should be a faithful servant, watchful and ready for our Lord’s return.

What does Christ expect the unconverted to do about the signs of His second coming? He expects the unsaved to prepare. To repent is the first step in preparation. Then they must take the next steps in God’s plan: baptism by

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immersion in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins and the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance (Acts 2:38-39). A sinner must reject his former life and receive Christ as his new life.

With this full and required response on our part, we can read the signs of His return with hopeful expectation. We can live so that with joy we may cry with the apostle John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

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