

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**



**ORGANIZATION  
AND  
PURPOSE**

#### NOTE ABOUT THIS STILL INCOMPLETE FIRST DRAFT

At this time, only five of the over thirty main topics included in the Systematic Theology Project are complete doctrinal expositions (although still preliminary)—Law of God, Sabbath, Annual Holy Days, Tithing and Giving, and Healing. The remainder of the topics are covered by brief overviews in some cases or by "extended" overviews in other cases. All overviews will be upgraded to full expositions of the approximate length and thoroughness of the other five within the next 24 months or so. It should be emphasized that all of the statements—whether overview, extended overview or full exposition—are first drafts and, as such, will be subjected to continual analysis and revision.

#### NOTE ABOUT THE BIBLICAL TRANSLATION

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical scriptures are quoted from either the Revised Standard Version or the King James Version.

## ORGANIZATION AND PURPOSE

This systematic theology is being produced by the Worldwide Church of God to reflect its doctrines, beliefs, practices and traditions. The development of the project is the response to a need sensed by the leadership of the Church. The need was for an up-to-date and accurate statement of our official doctrinal positions and understandings, which would provide a formal record and serve as a communications vehicle both within and without the Church.

Within the Church, the systematic theology will establish a coherent and consistent reference for the ministry and for the lay membership. As such, it will promote unity among the ministry and further understanding among the members. As a formal record of the Church's beliefs and teachings, the systematic theology will provide an official source of public information about the doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God.

The Bible alone is God's written revelation to man. This systematic theology is simply an attempt to explain our comprehension of God's Word as believed, taught, expounded and applied by the Church. It is written by men for men— and is consequently not to be put on a par with God's Holy Word. The systematic theology is not to replace the Bible nor to supersede or overshadow it. The point of view is that of looking up toward, and not down upon, God's Word. Although we are building a superstructure, the Bible will always remain the foundation. The readership of this theology is cautioned not to lose this perspective.

A specific approach is followed in order to make this systematic theology applicable and relevant to ourselves and to others. A document intended to fulfill the goals of being accurate, readable, unifying and informative must, of course, be written in a manner that can accomplish these goals. This Systematic Theology Project is therefore somewhat different from other systematic theologies whose goals are different from ours. ' While other projects may be aimed at scholars or theologians exclusively, this work is to be used as a practical working tool for the field ministry of the Worldwide Church of God. As such, there will be material—for example, on Christian living and Church organization—that is not

ordinarily found in academic systematic theologies. Some of these subjects could be classified as administrative practices or Church traditions rather than doctrines and beliefs. The point is that everything included is given as guidelines for the ministry. Therefore, we are under no illusion that this systematic theology is like any others. It is unique and intentionally so.

While the Worldwide Church of God traces its roots to the New Testament Church, our recent history dates from the calling of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong in the late 1920's and to his commission by God in the early 1930's to preach the gospel to the world as a witness. As the Pastor General of the Church, he has set the example of approaching doctrine as a search for truth so that one might know and obey God. He also has long recognized that it is ultimately through God's Spirit that we can fully comprehend the Bible. For the years since Mr. Armstrong's calling until now, the written record of our beliefs has taken the form of booklets or articles on individual topics written as we grew in knowledge, understanding and insight. But as the Church developed into a substantial institution, Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong, Executive Vice-President of the Church, recognized the need for a more organized, thorough systematic presentation of the Church's doctrines and beliefs, and thus commissioned the present Project.

Now, with the initial establishment of this more formalized systematic theology, certain fundamental difficulties arise as by-products of the process. First is simply the "look" of apparent perfection and permanence. Only the Bible itself claims total inspiration, and any systematic theology must be at least somewhat arbitrary and artificial. The Bible is God's Word, presenting with great literary scope and historical sweep the record of God's instructions to man and man's relationship with God. As such, the reality of biblical truth is coherent and integrated. Biblical "doctrines" are not formally categorized into topics, subtopics and sub-subtopics. But this is what must be done in any systematic theology. We have obviously tried to formulate the overall organization to best represent the current teachings of the Worldwide Church of God. Yet, since this doctrinal organization, as with any doctrinal organization, must divide the truth of God into independent subjects, the full impact of the tight interrelationships and inter-dependencies among all doctrines must of necessity be somewhat sacrificed. Furthermore, we fully recognize the numerous

ways in which this systematic theology could have been organized. We have no illusion that what is hereby presented is perfect or cannot be improved, but we intend to accurately reflect the contemporary teachings of the Church.

The Church recognizes "doctrine" as simply being the basic tenets or teachings of the Bible and the Church. The importance of understanding true doctrine is as vital as understanding God's master plan itself—since doctrine in reality is only this same master plan broken down into its component parts. The challenge of any systematic theology is to take these various parts and organize them in a clear and logical fashion.

The paradox of any systematic theology (as discussed in the section on the Bible) is that no one doctrine can be understood apart from all the other doctrines, and it is impossible to comprehend all the doctrines without understanding each individual one. The interrelationships and interdependencies among all the biblical teachings are extremely strong. The structural associations and interactions among the numerous doctrines are not therefore limited to a simple two-dimensional linear progression. Rather, what we are confronted with is a multi-dimensional structure with the number of dimensions just about equaling the number of doctrines. This means that to explain fully almost any of the biblical doctrines, one would have to explain most of the others.

How then do we start? How can we best begin to systematize biblical theology? Our approach has been first to discern the appropriate doctrinal subjects necessary to most efficiently include the full body of the Church's biblical teachings, and then proceed to organize them into a logical and consistent structure. We developed seven general categories and over thirty major doctrinal topics for this preliminary draft. Categories and topics were chosen and organized to best reflect a logical pattern of biblical order and to emphasize them as taught and practiced by the Worldwide Church of God.

1. PRIMARY DOCTRINES; God, Bible, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Mankind, Angelic Realm;
2. SALVATION; Salvation, Faith, Repentance, Baptisms, Laying on of Hands;

3. KINGDOM OF GOD: Kingdom of God, Gospel, Prophecy, Resurrections, Judgment;

4. LAW OF GOD: Law of God, Biblical Covenants, Ten Commandments, Sabbath, Annual Holy Days, Tithing and Giving, Sin;

5. THE CHRISTIAN: The Christian, The Christian Relationship with God, The Christian Relationship with Fellow Man, The Christian Family, Healing;

6. THE CHURCH OF GOD: The Church of God, Ministry of the Church, Fellowship of the Brethren;

7. TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES: Statements on almost thirty traditional doctrines, such as immortal soul, heaven, hell, trinity, Sunday, Christmas, Easter, Rapture etc., presenting the theological viewpoint of the Worldwide Church of God.

Next, each doctrinal subject was thoroughly explored from both biblical and Church perspectives to determine the scope of subtopics and concepts that should be covered. These were then submitted to dozens of ministers for evaluation. The actual writing of the papers developed from a carefully constructed outline of concept flow and was directed to emphasize a practical product. Each paper was written to be readable and useful as well as biblically accurate and logical. The papers were then submitted to other ministers and scholars of the Church for critique, and each paper passed through many edits. As an explanation rather than as a defense, each doctrinal paper expresses our beliefs honestly (and hopefully clearly) in a straightforward manner. This systematic theology is thereby not intended as a challenge or rebuttal to others' beliefs.

Each particular doctrinal paper contains first a "Doctrinal Statement" (a succinct and direct declaration of the essence of what we believe on the topic) , followed by a "Doctrinal Overview" (an expanded statement summarizing the basic tenets of the doctrine), and finally a "Doctrinal Exposition" (a full, detailed explanation of the subject).

One objective this project strives to fulfill is to project the right perspective by presenting each doctrine in its proper biblical context and appropriate relationship to other doctrines. We try to emphasize what is of clear

biblical importance. It is all too easy to focus on a relatively minor point of doctrine to the apparent exclusion of more fundamental topics. This usually happens because one has questions he feels need immediate resolution; at other times it is because one has a particular interest in the topic. Sometimes points of doctrine generate focus or interest in inverse proportion to how much the Bible discusses them; this is quite understandable, because the obscure points are, by their very nature, more intellectually stimulating and intriguing than the obvious and easily proved fundamentals of the faith. However, no matter what the reasons, the pitfall of doctrinal myopia is to lose the vision of the "big picture" of God's master plan. Once one has lost this overview, he has lost his spiritual way.

The best way to keep our doctrinal focus sharp and clear is to stay finely tuned to the central figure of the entire Bible: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is both the focal point and the "big picture" of the entire Bible—He is the overview of both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of His creation and government (Col. 1:16), His dealings with Israel (1 Cor. 10:4) and His laws; it also records His ancestry and the detailed prophecies of His first and second comings. The New Testament is the story of His life and message, the magnification of His laws, the beginning of His Church and the announcement of His coming Kingdom. If Christ did not exist, there would be no Bible—there would be no point to it. Jesus Christ is the Word of God; and since the Bible is God's written word, it is, in a very real sense, the embodiment of Jesus Christ in verbal representation on the printed page.

In accordance with the focal point and overview of the Bible, this systematic theology stresses Jesus Christ—past, present and future. It tells of His life, His works, His message, His "good news," His teachings, His instructions, His laws, His way of life, His admonitions, His corrections, His rebukes, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His people, His friends, His covenants, His Church, His Kingdom, His promises, and His salvation. The focus is on Jesus Christ, as these statements represent His doctrines which we have attempted to present in an organized and systematic manner. No one keeping close to the trunk of this tree will ever get caught out on a limb. No one following the foundational doctrines of Jesus Christ will ever suffer doctrinal tunnel vision and the resultant spiritual blindness that such tunnel vision can cause.

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong has always emphasized the fundamental "trunk of the tree" doctrines of the Church. These deal with two essential elements: 1) God's purpose for human existence; and 2) the plan by which He will accomplish that purpose. Together they answer the question which has been the title of one of Mr. Armstrong's primary booklets, Why Were You Born?

God's purpose for mankind offers the most incredible possible potential that can be imagined. Indeed, it stretches the imagination beyond its limit, for God states that every human being can eventually be born into God's own Family, with God Himself as his or her real Father. Man was created to actually become God, just as God Himself is God, with the same qualities of existence such as immortality and eternal life. Man was designed to become a full member of the God Family, just as our elder brother, Jesus Christ is God and part of that Family. This is mankind's ineffably awesome potential—a spectacular destiny which will eventually include the entire universe as part of our inheritance.

God's plan for accomplishing this purpose for mankind is equally breath-taking. God will make His truth known to all human beings from all time and every place and give to each of them individually a full opportunity for salvation. God is not willing that any should perish and has structured a plan which will make available to all people the full knowledge of His purpose and way (though what they do with this knowledge will be a product of their independent minds to which God has given free moral agency).

This, then, is the essential foundation of biblical doctrine as believed and taught by the Worldwide Church of God—that all mankind, every human being who has ever lived, will eventually have the opportunity to become born of God into the Family of God, to literally become God. Around this fundamental concept every other biblical doctrine must revolve and relate.

Owing to the obvious interdependence of biblical doctrines, not everything to be said on any particular subject can often be presented in the same place or even in the same paper. The reader is requested to keep this in mind before making hasty evaluations or jumping to quick conclusions. For example, the complex discussion of "law and grace" must be



woven through many of the doctrinal statements. This has been an especially confusing subject for those who have erroneously claimed that the Worldwide Church of God teaches that salvation can be earned through obedience to the law. In order for the reader to grasp the full and proper biblical understanding of the many-faceted interrelationships between law and grace, several of the following doctrinal statements, overviews and expositions need to be read in parallel (beginning with Law of God and Salvation, then including Biblical Covenants, Sabbath, Ten Commandments, "Law or Grace" in Traditional Christian Doctrines, and finally also involving particularly relevant aspects of other papers, such as the historical comparison between the Worldwide Church of God and the early New Testament Church in The Church of God).

All doctrinal statements need to be read in their entirety. By searching through the systematic theology in general or any one statement in particular for the answer to an intriguing or needle some problem one runs the risk of short-circuiting himself. To accurately comprehend the specific subject of one's current interest, the reader is advised to at least read through that whole doctrinal statement to appreciate the full scope of the doctrine under consideration, as well as to skim through any related statements. (For example, many of the more general—but most powerful—reasons how we can know that the early New Testament Church observed God's Feast days are not presented in the statement on Annual Holy Days, but are in Law of God, Biblical Covenants and especially Sabbath.)

The systematic theology project is the product of numerous ministers and scholars of the Worldwide Church of God. It is only through this substantial resource of knowledge and experience that we can hope to attain a reflection of God's understanding and wisdom. Yet the systematic theology must not be cemented in stone. It will need continual revision as God guides the Church in further understanding of His Word.

What is herein presented is therefore still in preliminary form. It must continue to grow in both scope and quality. But it cannot grow without constant constructive input from the ministry. Ministers should consider it their responsibility to help refine the Systematic Theology Project, contributing to it in the same spirit with which it was prepared. Hence, we accept, appreciate and welcome—indeed solicit—all information which serves to enhance and improve this effort.

Such input may take the form of short or long edits, comments, ideas, additions, deletions, critiques, scriptural references, and/or new information and research. The proper procedure for giving input is to present your contribution in as clear a manner as possible and send it to the Systematic Theology Project at Church Headquarters in Pasadena, California, U.S.A., in care of Dr. Robert Kuhn. All information will be read and considered, and if accurate, appropriate and approved, it will be incorporated.

Input from the general membership of the Church is also welcome, but should be submitted through the local pastor. The sheer volume of such material could overwhelm the headquarters staff unless it is deemed by the local pastor to have merit. No doctrinal paper can be considered unless the author's pastor has studied the paper and then submitted it with his appropriate annotations, edits, or comments.

We welcome all input and do plan to begin working on a second edition just as soon as this first edition is finished. Yet the Systematic Theology of the Worldwide Church of God will never be finalized and complete, as we continue to follow Peter's admonition to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

On the other hand, this recognition of need for refinement and the invitation for criticism should not be misinterpreted. It does not mean that the doctrinal statements, overviews and expositions included here can be followed or ignored by ministers and members as they see fit. While these statements of current teachings and practices contain very little that is "new" as such, in some cases they do include additional supportive information and commentary, or contain original analyses, syntheses and approaches, or give fresh insight and understanding—all of which reflect positively in generating refined comprehension of, and continued confidence in, the fundamental doctrinal convictions of the Church. As such, these papers supersede individual opinions; out-of-print publications, articles, and booklets; and past teachings and earlier understandings. As far as the papers themselves make possible, they should be used for doctrinal understanding and exposition.

The process of editing has included approval by the necessary Church leaders and officers. These papers are therefore authoritative in their present form (until upgraded and/or revised) and are to be followed as guides in teaching, preaching, and practice by the ministry and Church membership.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THIOLOGY PROJECT

# GOD

### **Doctrinal Statement**

God is the eternal, omnipresent, all-powerful, supreme Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. God is *one*, composed of spirit and comprising a Family revealed as presently consisting of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. God is a loving, kind, merciful Being who wants to share His magnificent existence by reproducing Himself through man.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The most fundamental need facing mankind is to recognize the existence of God and to understand His character, personality and master plan. Man will continue to flounder without real knowledge of the purpose of life until he gains an accurate and clear picture of his Creator.

The question of whether God's existence can be proved is one that has troubled mankind throughout millennia, stirring heated debate with arguments on both sides. Unfortunately, the form most of these debates have taken is for one person to try to forcibly "prove" God's existence to another by attempting to formulate arguments or logic so airtight as to exclude any other possibility. This approach does not work. No argument, no matter how carefully thought out or logically constructed, can absolutely "prove" God's existence to one who will grasp at virtually any other unlikely explanation or remote possibility. No person can make another person believe in God I

Nevertheless, God's existence can be totally proved to oneself. One who has individually and personally experienced the biblical miracle of conversion, or who has received miraculous answers to his prayers, has truly and irrefutably proved God's existence to himself and cannot be shaken from this proof by any argument, whether theological or philosophical, as long as he stays in this contact with God.

God's existence is also powerfully demonstrated by the creation. The reality of the material universe, the existence of life and the interdependence and sustenance of the laws governing this matter respectively require a Creator, a Life-Giver and a Sustainer. Thus David said: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Likewise, Paul records that "the invisible things of him /God/ from /looking up at/ the creation . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

The Bible reveals that the one God is a Family composed of two members—the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ. John's gospel states that these two have dwelt together from eternity and that they share power, glory and majesty, although Christ is second in authority. From the biblical revelation we infer that God resembles man in certain aspects but is composed of spirit instead of flesh (Jn. 4:24), radiating spiritual energy and power. The few references to God's "appearance" emphasize His incredible brilliance (Rev. 1:14-16; Dan. 7:9-10).

God is the total embodiment of love; He is the originator of law and the giver of every good and perfect gift. His many titles and names (Creator, Counselor, Healer, Self-Existent One, Father, Almighty, etc.) reveal His special qualities of character and personality. Yet it is God's mercy and compassion that are paramount in giving full hope and confidence to fallible human beings who are sinners all.

Perhaps the most outstanding single characteristic of God is His total, unselfish love. This one quality is so much a part of God's entire makeup that He is in actuality its total personification and hence "is<sup>^</sup> love" (1 Jn. 4:8). God has demonstrated His love for us in many ways: through the sacrifice of His son (Jn. 3:16), by forgiving our sins, by strengthening our will and determination in the face of trials and in countless other ways. But perhaps the single greatest expression of God's love is that He has devised a plan to share Himself by reproducing Himself through man.

This master plan is indeed the greatest imaginable truth and the very reason why the entire universe was created. All human beings from all times shall have a full opportunity to become members of God's Family. Mankind has been created in God's image (Gen. 1:26) and put on earth to reject evil and thereby to build character so that each human being can be spiritually born into God's Kingdom and Family. Thus God's Family of two revealed persons shall grow to billions, and God's greatness shall be multiplied by as many times as the incredible number of sons God shall add to His family.

The God of the Bible is both cosmic and personal. He is the Creator of the universe and at the same time is concerned for each human being. He sustains galaxies and controls the full scope of human history at the same time

as he focuses His intense concern on each man, woman and child who seeks Him. God is involved with the whole of mankind: in the rise and fall of governments, in the sweep of generations, in the ultimate direction of human society. Yet this same Being is intimately involved in the personal lives of human beings of every social stratum, race and intellect. God is merciful to sinners; He is compassionate and deeply desires that we attain the greatest possible happiness and success.

For now, God rules the spiritual and material universe from His throne in heaven, although His mind and Spirit reach everywhere. Beside Him sits His Son, Jesus Christ, and the two of them, surrounded and aided by myriads of angels of differing ranks and authority, direct the working out of their master plan. Eventually, God's throne will be moved to the "new earth" of Revelation 21 from where He and His billions of sons will rule His Kingdom and the unfathomable vastness of the infinite universe for all eternity.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## **SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **BIBLE**

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The Bible is the divinely inspired word of God, the repository of His plan of salvation and the record of His participation in history. The Bible is God's revelation of knowledge that man cannot discover for himself. It is the foundation of knowledge and the guidebook to life. The Old and New Testaments comprise God's written Word which forms the basis of Christianity as taught by the Church and as practiced by the individual Christian.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Bible is God's written revelation to mankind. It contains God's instructions to man and the record of God's interaction with mankind. The Bible provides the answers to mankind's fundamental questions of life. It is the revelation of an omniscient, omnipotent and loving God; it reveals who God is, and what His plan and purpose for human beings is.

The Bible exists to provide man with essential knowledge which he could not learn apart from divine revelation. Thus, the Bible includes the fundamental principles of how man should live, how he should govern his own life to generate success and happiness, and how to work with his fellow man to achieve peace and harmony. But at its foundational core, the Bible provides the indispensable knowledge of how man may gain salvation and eternal life, knowledge which he is incapable of discovering for himself (1 Cor. 2:7-11). As the repository of this vital information, the Bible is God's basic handbook for mankind.

The Worldwide Church of God believes the Bible to be divinely inspired (2 Tim. 3:16), the revelation of the missing dimension in man's knowledge by the Supreme Authority of the universe. The Church regards the Holy Bible as the receptacle of God's essential theological knowledge, basic, accurate, and complete in its original form. Of course, there are no original manuscripts extant today. Few are from close to the time of authorship and even age does not always assure accuracy and fidelity. Whatever shortcomings therefore may be present in contemporary biblical manuscripts—because human instruments were writers and copyists, because some translators lacked knowledge of the original languages, or because of the complexities and vagaries implicit in the transmission of the various texts—all together have not substantially concealed the intent nor overshadowed, the direct inspiration of the basic biblical message as we have it today.

What part did God allow human fallibility to play in the transmission of the many original biblical texts? This is a real question considering the fact, for example, that there are three Hebrew versions for parts of the Old Testament,



all of which are pre-Christian in origin and which New Testament writers used and quoted as recent research has shown. Furthermore, the analysis of large numbers of ancient New Testament texts with their numerous textual variations have not yielded obvious or conclusive results for many scriptures, though the most meticulous and highly sophisticated techniques have been employed.

Will future discoveries, investigation and scholarship generate yet new questions or uncertainties about certain passages? It doesn't matter, because the Bible's primary objectives have never been, and can never be, perverted or corrupted. The sum total of all textual variations do not alter the essential communicative function of the Bible. Its fundamental intent is fully maintained: all the basic doctrines of God's Church, to a greater or lesser degree, are discernible from any textual version or translation of the Bible.

The Church accepts the books of the Old Testament as found in the canon of the Hebrew Bible and the books of the New Testament as found in the canon of the Greek New Testament. These have been sometimes called the "Protestant canon." This same context has been accepted for most of Christianity for 1500 years. (The Apocryphal books are thus rejected as non canonical.) The Church has accepted this canon largely on the basis of internal biblical evidence (such as Lk. 24:44, etc.), informed faith and tradition. (Jesus' reference to "the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" [ox writings/ gives credence to ordering the Old Testament to end with II Chronicles ^as in the "Jewish Bible" instead of Malachi /as in the "Christian Bible"

Essential to the teaching of the Church is the fact that the Bible can be proved to be the written Word of God. The foremost proof that God's Word is precisely what it claims to be is that it works in one's life. The proof of obedience is the Bible's best stamp of divine authorship. Adherence to its principles, laws and concepts bring about success and happiness in one's own life, which is ultimately the most critical ratification of its divine inspiration. Only one who sincerely seeks to apply the biblical way to his own life will eventually learn that the practical instructions, timeless wisdom, spiritual depth and living laws come from a supreme Being, and not merely from fallible, mortal men. Once a person has accepted the concept of the Bible containing the inspired word of God" he is able, by appreciating

the intricate yet harmonious interaction of all parts of the Bible, to conclude in faith that the whole Bible, all scripture, is precisely what it claims to be--"inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). The Christian will also conclude that even those parts of the Bible which are by their very nature unable to be "proven" in a mathematical or scientific sense (e.g., as yet unfulfilled prophecies or historical points which are unable to be substantiated by secular references) are indeed part of the Bible, form part of the vehicle of its message, and are accurate in their proper context. In this logical "jump"--this leap across undocumented gaps--one cannot discount the importance of faith.

The Church, of course, acknowledges that the Bible does not claim to be a textbook of comprehensive world history, science and technology, medicine or any other non-theological discipline. Nonetheless, the Bible is the word of God, and as such, is the foundation of all knowledge, as well as being the storehouse of salvation.

Fulfilled prophecy is likewise an important aspect of God's Holy Word. Only God can predict and bring to pass events of the future (Is. 41:21-24). Only the Creator God could predict the name and actions of Cyrus long before his birth (Is. 44-45). Only He could tell the intricate and accurate events outlined in Daniel 11 or foretell in detail about the coming of His Son as Savior of the world (Is. 9:53, and many other scriptures). While faith plays a role in assessing the significance of already fulfilled prophecy in proving the Bible, there can be absolutely no doubt regarding as yet unfulfilled prophecy. When the complex sequence of events culminating in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ to earth occurs, there will be no question whatsoever that the God who foretold it all in biblical prophecy far ahead of time is the same Being who inspired the entirety of the Bible.

The Bible alone claims absolute preeminence over all other books esteemed by mankind and challenges all mankind by its claims of purity (Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5), scope and completeness (Rev. 22:18-19). The challenges of the God of the Bible (Is. 41:21-23) are powerful and direct. Its prophecies for the future return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the world-ruling Kingdom of God are straightforward and unmistakable.

In addition to being the written record of the essential theological knowledge for mankind, the Bible is also great literature, with many literary forms and devices—poetry, prose, allegory, epic, parable, history, even humor. It is often open and frank, and yet at other times it is discreet and obscure. The Bible exposes the weaknesses of its heroes, but calls them the friends of God. It shows the glory and power of the Creator through His many miracles but it shows Him to be intimately concerned with the smallest details of human lives. It holds out the answers to the riddles of life, yet hides enough of God's nature and the universe to tantalize us and draw us further along in a profound growth process.

We see through the pages of the Bible the lessons of human experience. We read of men and women like us, those who share problems common to all—with the same pulls and passions, hopes and dreams, fears and frustrations. The Bible not only shows the common heritage of human nature, but enables us to understand the process whereby we may overcome the destructive elements within us and attain our God-given potential.

The Bible is many books yet one, a superlative example of *e pluribus unum* ("one composed of many"). This remarkable unity of design is one of the unique characteristics of the Bible. Another is its internal consistency in its diversity, combining to form a coherent composite. The mark of one Author, for those who have eyes to see, is startlingly apparent.

The authors of the various biblical books came from differing backgrounds, lived in disparate environments and were diverse in their personalities, education and professions. They wrote in different styles, from different standpoints, to different audiences and at different times. Yet the continuing themes God inspired are the same. God used all their various and contrasting perspectives to shape and to emphasize the same basic truth. From Genesis to Revelation we read of the same God, the same massive plan being unfolded and developed, with each book augmenting, supporting and complementing that which has gone before. This unitary focus is due to the God who initiated, organized and inspired the entire Holy Scriptures. Although many different men played their part as they were moved by His Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20), the Bible is in reality God's Word and not man's.

This is the only factor which could explain the uniqueness and remarkable coherence of the Bible. Dozens of writers spanning a period of over 1500 years from Moses to John of such dissimilar traits and characteristics could never have achieved that unity as a result of human effort alone. Yet the unity is there, not as the product of numerous human minds, but of one Mind—the Mind of God—interacting with, and directing, the grand sweep of biblical authors in many unlikely forms, but always in such a way that their own personal emotions, feelings, personality and individual writing styles were employed. God inspired the message, but it was conveyed through language and vocabulary that was peculiar and natural to each man. The Bible is thus a human vehicle through which God has chosen to convey His revelation to mankind.

The Bible and the physical universe were designed in a similar fashion: they both work as the products of enormously complex interactions resulting in a wondrously purposeful product. The similarity between the Bible and the universe is, of course, to be expected since the same Creator designed them both. The Bible is thus not a simplistic, deterministic catechism of childish declarative statements. Rather it is a living record of complex interactions, actions and reactions, stimuli and responses, mistakes and miracles, successes and failures.

There is a paradox in true biblical understanding. In order to properly understand any specific biblical doctrine, it is first necessary to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines; and, of course, it is impossible to comprehend the entirety of all biblical doctrines until one understands all the specific biblical doctrines separately. Seldom can one biblical teaching be fully understood in isolation. There is an essential interdependence between nearly all biblical doctrines. Each must be understood in light of all the others. The reason for this is the inherent unity of the biblical focus and the coherent thread of its message. Proper biblical understanding must be achieved by visualizing and comprehending the full sweeping scope of its message that only the whole Bible can project.

In this regard, the Bible functions more like a living brain than a computer. In a computer, each "bit" of data is stored in only one location, while in a brain, the same "bit" is usually stored in numerous different locations, though in slightly differing forms and associations. In the Bible (like the brain), all teachings on any individual subject—for example, honesty, marital fidelity, salvation,

the Sabbath, the millennium—are not limited to just one location and not discussed in any other location. Just the opposite is in fact true: the Bible discusses many subjects within the same chapters and even within the same verses, while each subject may be discussed throughout numerous books and dozens of verses. So here again is the paradox: How can we comprehend the Bible if we must understand all the doctrines before we can understand any one, and we cannot understand all the doctrines until we understand the sum total of each individual one? The only solution to the paradox is through the leading of God's Holy Spirit and by diligent, dedicated Bible study. The Bible is indeed the full expression of God's mind and purpose for humanity.

One of the ways to begin to comprehend the unifying flow of the whole Bible is to follow its primary themes all the way through. Of all these, surely the most consistent, decisive and relevant is Jesus Christ. He, in essence, is the focal point of the entire Bible. He is the personality around whom everything revolves. Jesus Christ was the Creator of all things (Col. 1:16); the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the Rock of Israel as Messiah (.Is. 9:53) and Lawgiver (Isa. 33:22), and exemplified throughout the New Testament as Savior and King. He is the Redeemer of all mankind, the supreme Lawgiver and consummate Teacher. He was the firstborn from the dead and is the captain of our salvation, our constant Intercessor and merciful High Priest. Jesus Christ is now the active head of God's Church and is prophesied throughout the entire Bible to return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords to set up, the Kingdom of God for all eternity.

Perhaps one of the most basic statements of how God has revealed Himself to man is found in Hebrews 1:1<sup>-2</sup>; "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son."

This passage evinces several important things about God's communication to man. First, God's message comes in many various forms. Second, that message is also mediated by human beings. This means that the divine Word comes to us in a human vehicle. Even Jesus Christ, the divine Son, was Himself in the flesh when He gave many of His teachings; furthermore, those teachings were not written down by Him but by His human followers.

Some further points are important to understand in setting the stage for proper biblical understanding. Third, no human vehicle is fully adequate to convey the fullness of God's message. Human language is inadequate to express what can be discerned in its complete spiritual sense only by means of the Holy Spirit. There is also the problem of transmission of the text; this is done by human beings and subject to human error. The problem of understanding ancient languages which have changed structure and meaning through the ages or have even ceased to be used as a living form of communication adds a further difficulty.

Fourth, the message of the Bible must speak to all people in every age. Yet society changes, culture modifies, and each Christian finds himself living in a particular situation which does not exactly fit that of the original writers of the Bible. Christians do not live in the Old Testament theocracy of ancient Israel with autonomous control of a particular territory. Nor do they live in the New Testament world of Greco-Roman culture. Rather, Christians have lived in radically different environments down through the centuries, from Cologne in the Middle Ages to London in the 17th century to Los Angeles in the nuclear age. Therefore, there is always a certain "communication or generation gap" between the written word and the later reader.

Fifth, God has deliberately hidden much of His important truth from mankind so that the full progression, and eventually resolution, of human history would proceed according to God's timetable. As a result it is not man's fault that he doesn't understand the Bible. Even the prophets of old didn't always grasp the meaning of their own biblical statements (e.g. Dan. 12:8); and they surely didn't comprehend the fullness of the mystery of the purpose of human life (Matt. 13:17; Eph. 3:4-5). Jesus Himself spoke in parables so that the common people would not understand what He was saying (Matt. 13:10-11); He was teaching His disciples not the masses (v. 10-17), since God's plan did not yet call for the vast majority of people to be called and converted.

Once these five points are recognized, a specific progression of biblical logic must be followed and accepted unless one is to falsely assume that God has left man in the dark about His basic purpose for mankind and plan of salvation. This progression can be summarized as follows:

1. The essential truths God wishes to convey will be intelligible to any normal person with even below average intelligence and education (if God has chosen to open his mind.) They can be discerned from any basic version or translation of the Bible which the reader understands. This must be true regardless of textual revision and/or incidental corruption and/or poor translation.

2. God must open a person's mind in order for him or her to understand the fullness of His truth. It is, of course, possible for human beings to learn many aspects of the Bible on their own, utilizing the mechanisms of intellect and the tools of scholarship. Yet God has so designed the Bible and the human mind that even with the most intense effort men cannot fully grasp the profound spiritual depth of the scriptures without the active involvement of the Spirit of God. The mind of man cannot understand the things of God—the mysteries of God—without the supernatural help from the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:7-11). Since human language is always inadequate to break through the boundaries of spiritual reality and truth, a perceptive spiritual understanding of the Bible requires the direct intervention and action of the Holy Spirit "bearing witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16), thereby effecting a change in the mind of the individual. Only God can make this decision to open our minds through His Spirit. It makes no difference how vehemently a human being desires to understand the Bible, nor how hard he studies it. Though such study will produce much knowledge, this knowledge will remain physically oriented and bound, forever missing the vital key of spiritual enlightenment Paul wrote, "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16); so it is with true biblical understanding. Faith, as well, is a critical factor in achieving the spiritual comprehension necessary to understand the Bible. One must be convinced beyond the scope of the experimentally controlled and repeatable data demanded by scientists as verified "proof," that God exists and that the Bible is His inspired Word. The faith for such an absolute belief can come only through God's Holy Spirit.

3. The message of the Bible is theological. The Bible is not a history or science text. Its purpose is not to dictate on matters of art, technology, personal taste or the vast world of knowledge which man is capable of discovering for himself via the precious gift of man's God-given mental capacities. The Bible rather gives those essential theological and religious truths which man could not find out for himself through the academic disciplines.

4. The Bible contains various types of literature, each of which must be understood on its own terms. It contains history, poetry, parable metaphor and symbolic revelation. It is often a record of those things which it elsewhere condemns, such as false opinions, lies, misunderstandings, deceptions and heinous sins of every type. This leads to the next point.

5. The biblical message is gained from the Bible as a whole, not from reading a verse or two in isolation or otherwise "proof-texting." What may seem to be a blanket statement in one passage can be greatly qualified elsewhere. The picture given by one book may be somewhat altered in the light of the teachings in another. One must perceive and comprehend the full spectrum of biblical doctrine in general in order to properly understand almost any specific element in particular.

6. The resources of modern scholarship, properly handled, can add insight, detail and historical color to the basic biblical message. God has designed the Bible so that the essential message of God must be clear to any spirit-led person seeking humbly to learn the plan of salvation as expressed in His word. Indeed an uneducated Christian reading an inadequate translation will be able to understand the fundamental doctrines necessary for salvation. Nonetheless, a technical understanding of ancient languages, literature, history, society and other information put at our disposal by contemporary scholarship will enhance a person's total understanding of the Bible. The various books of the Bible were not written in a vacuum. To achieve a deeper understanding of their teachings, one must strive to grow in the knowledge of the history and background of the Bible, and the cultures in which they arose. Thus a Christian may add scholarly knowledge and understanding to the revealed spiritual knowledge which can come only from God. This physical data will in turn embellish and enhance his spiritual understanding.

7. Because of changed situations and society, there has to be some institution to clarify the meaning of the Bible for the Christian in the particular age in which he lives (Acts 8:31). Recognizing this need, Jesus Christ established and sustains His Church, to which He has given the responsibility to determine how to apply the Bible in particular situations in which the various individual Christians would not necessarily be unified. Even though the Bible always stands at the foundation of Christian belief, the Church can still come to decisions under the



guidance of the Holy Spirit which were not specified in the pages of the Bible itself. For example, just as Moses modified the statutes and judgments of Israel for use in an agrarian society, and just as Paul made decisions that he did not learn from the Lord (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:12), so the Church today must render judgments based on biblical laws and principles in order to keep itself relevant and vital in our modern age.

The essential element here is unity of the believers and coherence of the Church. Members of the Church must have a common body of beliefs, traditions, customs, practices and procedures in order to remain united. And this unity is vital if a collective work is to be done. A Christian in isolation will have to render his own judgments, and two such Christians will not always agree. But if we must have fellowship together (which God says we need for our spiritual development), if we must be in the same Church together (which God states is critical for our spiritual sustenance), and if we must accomplish a major work together (which is our collective, God-given commission), then God's government must be authorized to finalize doctrine, discern interpretations, administrate decisions, etc. And God's government can be established only by and through God's Church.

In summary, Christians should study the Bible diligently, respect it as the Word of God and seek its guidance through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26; 16:13) and the teachings of the Church. In order to become like God, we must seek to understand the Bible, which is the clearest expression of the mind of God. This we can only hope to achieve through profound and regular Bible study, and through the internalized implementation of its precepts and values.

Thus, God's word is a totally unique collection of writings absolutely profound in every sense, making commonly available to all mankind the words of life—the hope for today and the promise of tomorrow. It is man's responsibility and privilege to seek out the incredible depths and riches of God's mind as revealed in His Word.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

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# **JESUS CHRIST**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the son of God and the son of man. He was the prophesied Messiah of the Old Testament and is described throughout the New Testament as being both fully human and fully divine. As the second member of the God Family, He has existed from eternity as the "Word." He divested Himself of His power and majesty and became a human being to die for the sins of all mankind as our loving and merciful Savior. He was then resurrected and ascended to heaven to become our high priest. Jesus Christ shall return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth and rule as King of kings with His saints  
forever.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone and foundation of Christianity, the focal point of both Old and New Testaments and of biblical prophecy. He is the One around whom God's plan of redemption and salvation revolves.

Christ as the "Word of God" (Jn. 1:1) has existed with the Father from eternity. He and the Father together devised a plan to reproduce themselves and to expand their Family by means of the human creation. This creation was accomplished by the One who became Christ through the agency and power of the Holy Spirit. "For by him /Christ/ were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). John adds that "a things were made by him? and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn. 1:3). Thus the "Word of God"—Christ—was also the Creator God, who fashioned the universe and breathed the breath of life into Adam.

The Being who later became Jesus Christ was likewise the God of the Old Testament and hence the One who walked with Noah and talked with Abraham and with Moses (Jn.8:58; cf. Ex. 3:14) . He was the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who gave His law to Moses at Sinai. He was the One who led Israel with a cloud by day and protected them by a pillar of fire at night. He was Israel's Protector, their Guide and their "Rock"— ("and that Rock was Christ," 1 Cor. 10:4). He likewise was the God of David and was the One who dwelled in Solomon's Temple. He spoke through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all the prophets and inspired the entirety of the Old Testament.

In order to fulfill the divine master plan of salvation, this great Being divested Himself of all His power, might and majesty and took upon Himself "the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7), As envisioned, however darkly, by Abraham and Moses, and as prophesied by Isaiah and others, God's "Word" was now incarnate, the son of God and the son of man. As a human being, Jesus led a sinless, perfect life although He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He overcame Satan's temptations and qualified to replace

him as the ruler of this world. He was our example who learned obedience through suffering; He became our Savior whose atoning death paid the death penalty for all the sins of mankind.

This great personal sacrifice of Christ's crucifixion is a perfect illustration of Jesus' love and mercy toward us. In Christ's own words the greatest love a man can have is to "lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). And Jesus' sacrifice for us is even more powerfully poignant in that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), "when we were still/ enemies" (v.10) and not yet friends, Jesus laid down His life for us. Certainly the giving of His life on the cross for all humanity was the greatest example of the greatest love which can be shown.

Christ's resurrection from the dead was the focal point of universal history—an event of ultimate importance without equal in the unfolding of God's master plan. His burial for three days and three nights and His subsequent resurrection was the very sign and proof of His Messiahship (Mt. 12:40). His resurrection proved that man could also be resurrected; it showed the viability of God's plan and was the means by which human beings could eventually be resurrected to eternal life.

The death of Christ—the Creator of everything—was designed "from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13:8) and was able to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity because His life was worth far more than the sum total of all the lives of all human beings who have ever lived or ever will live. Upon repentance and baptism, we have the opportunity to take advantage of Christ's sacrifice to pay the penalty for our own personal sins, and through God's grace to receive the gift of eternal life—which Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection made possible.

Christ has now ascended and is exalted at the right hand of God the Father at the throne of heaven. He is once again actually God, all-powerful and shining in the spirit realm like the sun (Rev. 1:13-16), yet with the same mercy and compassion He exemplified during His physical life. Jesus is the first fruits of salvation, the first mortal to be made immortal, the first human being to become a member of the God Family. He is the Christian's elder brother and the forerunner of our salvation, the consummate High Priest and Advocate, Intercessor and Mediator before God's throne of mercy.

Although Christ is under the Father in authority, it is through Christ that we learn of the Father. Christ is the "express image" of the Father (Heb. 1:3), and "he that hath seen j/Christ/ hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). Thus we learn of the Father, of His plan, His ways, His character, His laws and His love, through His first begotten and His "firstborn" son, Jesus Christ,

Jesus Christ, today, is the living Head of His Church, actively, intelligently and personally guiding and directing it through the Holy Spirit of God. He is simultaneously fully involved in the relentless sweep of mankind's historical events as He prepares to intervene in the end time of world history, returning to earth in full power and authority to take over the governments of this earth and to set up His divine Kingdom of God as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Christ, who began the creation, will also finish it. After the completion of His 1,000-year rule, Jesus Christ will turn everything over to His Father, and God Himself will join His billions of spirit-composed sons as the new heaven and new earth are created (Rev. 21). God and His Family will then rule the universe forever, and of "the increase of his government . . . there shall be no end" (Is. 9:7).

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# **HOLY SPIRIT**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The Holy Spirit is the essence, power, mind and spiritual extension of God. God begets Christians as His sons through this Spirit. It strengthens a Christian spiritually, converts his mind and serves as an earnest or guarantee of eternal life.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as "the Spirit of God," "the Spirit of the Lord," "the Spirit of Jesus Christ," "the Spirit of truth," and "Comforter" or "Advocate." It is the power of God, the mind of God and the extended means by which God accomplishes His Work throughout the universe. As such, the Holy Spirit is not a separate being; it has no independent existence as an individual entity or person within the Godhead.

It was through His Spirit that God created the earth (Gen. 1:2). It was through this Spirit that David received his moral strength (Ps. 51:10-13), and by it Elijah and Elisha—men with normal physical proclivities and weaknesses—were made into powerful prophets of God (2 Kings 2:9,15). Even though these men and others had access to God's Spirit, it is also clear that they were among the relative few who in the Old Testament era were blessed with the privilege of actually having the mind and power of God work with or dwell within them.

God uses His Spirit to accomplish all His work. Whether causing prophets to prophesy, kings to reign, craftsmen to create (Ex. 31:3), bodies to be moved (Ezek. 3:12,14) or people to keep His laws (Ezek. 36:26-27), everything God does is through the power of His Spirit.

God is spirit (Jn. 4:24); both members of the Godhead ("Elohim") , Father and Son, are literally composed of spirit; they are wholly made of spiritual essence, in the same fashion as we are made of physical particles. Yet God the Father and Jesus Christ are separate beings: each maintains His own distinct identity and independent existence; and each, therefore, utilizes His own "Spirit," though both the Father's Spirit and Christ's Spirit are an integral part of the common Holy Spirit. The Being who later became Jesus Christ was the God who revealed Himself to the patriarchs and prophets and worked with them. When He utilized His mind, His nature and His power, He was doing so through His Holy Spirit which was the projection of His own unique, perfect spiritual power. God the Father was unknown in the Old Testament; Jesus Christ came to reveal Him in the New. God the Father was the One who begot Jesus Christ; He did so

through His Spirit, which is the same Spirit He begets spiritual children through today. Indeed, God the Father has retained to Himself the unique capacity to beget new spiritual beings.

Under the New Covenant the Spirit of the Father has been made available in a universal way, as was explained by Peter on the day of Pentecost when the Church began (Acts 2:17-18). Before His death, Christ promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit, which then worked with them should be given to them and should actually be in them (Jn. 14:17). This "Comforter" should teach the disciples all things and remind them of all that Christ had said to them (Jn. 14:26).

This same Spirit which was given to the disciples on the day of Pentecost is available to all whom God calls. Upon true repentance granted by God and upon true belief in Jesus Christ, one may be baptized and then receive God's Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony performed by God's ministers (Acts 2:38; 8:12-17). God further states that He gives His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). God's Holy Spirit is efficacious—it creates deep changes within the individual, actually converting or changing the type of mind that the person possesses. The Holy Spirit generates within Christians its very fruit, which "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). It encourages us through trials and empowers us to do the Work of God.

Once a person receives the precious gift of the Holy Spirit, he must use it in order to grow in the knowledge and grace of God. God's Spirit gives Christians the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) to enable them to view life from a godly perspective instead of from a selfish one. It is this power that gives us the capacity to obey God. The deep mystery of the plan of God for mankind cannot be completely and totally understood without the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:7-10).

Of even greater significance is the fact that through this Spirit we are actually "begotten" as sons of God and become members of the body of Christ—the Church (1 Cor. 12). The seed of this Holy Spirit, planted by God after baptism, grows and develops spiritually within us as we grow in obedience and submission to God's law. The Holy Spirit is dynamic: it flows from God to and through the Christian and is expressed in his attitudes and actions. The more we use God's Spirit the stronger our new spiritual life



becomes. Finally, at the resurrection, this spiritual part of us becomes the totality of our composition and essence and overtakes the physical, so "that mortality /our physical essence/ might be swallowed up of /spiritual/ life" (2 Cor. 5:4) .

God's word reveals that the Holy Spirit is an "earnest"—a formal pledge or assurance—of eternal life which God has implanted within us making us sons. As long as this Spirit is living within us, we are actually sons of God and brothers of Christ. "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). Indeed, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the best criterion to define the true Christian: it is his only real ratification, for one cannot be a true Christian without it. As long as we nurture the Holy Spirit, and continue to renew it daily within us (2 Cor. 4:16) through prayer and diligent study of God's Word, then this earnest of God's Spirit is the absolute guarantee that we will be resurrected to spiritual life at Christ's return (cf. Eph. 1:14).

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# **MANKIND**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The greatest truth of the Bible is that God is reproducing Himself through mankind. Hence, humanity's goal and purpose for existence is, ultimately, to enter God's Family and to become literal sons of God. Human beings are physical beings with no inherent immortality, but they can receive eternal life as a free gift from God. Man was created by God to be wholly flesh and blood, yet in God's image and with a spiritual component added to his brain to create the human mind.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

To understand that God is reproducing Himself through mankind is absolutely essential for understanding the nature of man. The fact that human beings were made with the potential and the destiny of entering God's Family as His literal children and thereby actually sharing His God-level plane of existence is fundamental to our knowledge of who and what we are.

Man was created as a physical being, a "living soul" (Gen. 2:7). The English word "soul" is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh* and simply means a "living, breathing creature." The same word is used in reference to all "breath-bearing life" (which is a good working definition of *nephesh*)—animal as well as human life. *Nephesh* refers to animals in Genesis 1:20,21,24; 2:19; 9:10,12,15 (where it is translated "creature") and also Genesis 1:30; 9:4; Leviticus 11:10; 17:11, etc. (Note a legitimate, literal translation of Genesis 1:20: "let the waters swarm with a swarm of living souls.")

The Greek equivalent of *nephesh* is *psuche*, which also literally means "breath," animal as well as human (Rev. 8:9; 16:3). Thus the biblical "soul" is just the physical life of man and beast--man and beast alike. Solomon makes the point clear: "For man's fate is a beast's fate, one fate befalls them both; as the one dies so the other dies, the same breath is in them all" (Eccles. 3:19, Moffatt).

Interestingly enough, *nephesh* is also used to represent "dead bodies"--"dead *nepheshes*" or "dead souls" (Lev. 21:1,11; Num. 6:6,11, etc.). The biblical "soul" then can simply become the "body," and when it dies it dies all over. Thus man is a living soul which lives and dies as does any animal soul; therefore, man neither has nor is an "immortal soul."

Ezekiel twice states that "the soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4,20). Jesus proclaimed that both the body and the soul can be destroyed in hell (Mt. 10:28). John agreed: "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15)/ and Paul concurred: "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

In Psalm 146:4 we read that when man's "breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Solomon wrote that "the dead know not any thing" (Eccles. 9:5). Clearly then, when a human being dies, he is indeed mentally as well as physically dead—wholly unconscious, unaware, unknowing. The example of David confirms this. Here was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), the eternal King of Israel (Ezek. 37:24); yet Peter stated that "David ... is both dead and buried/ and ... is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29,34).

Although man and animals have identically mortal "souls," man has been created superior to animals in a number of important respects. First, God shows that man was made in His own "image" and "likeness" (Gen. 1:26)—and therefore carries the general appearance of God, unlike the animals who are simply made "after their kind." In addition, God has given "the spirit of man" to humans. This "spirit in man," a nonphysical component which God designed to combine with the human brain to form the human mind, is the primary factor which distinguishes man from animals, elevating man's mental capacity from the wholly physical to the spiritual. The spirit in man imparts godlike abilities and capacities. Man is thus able to experience a likeness to God in his mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions; however, man is presently limited to the physical dimension while God lives and moves in the spiritual dimension. Man is physical and mortal, but through the spirit in man has the potential of moving into the God-plane level of existence and of becoming spiritual and immortal.

The spirit in man, then, is that essence which imparts human mind power to physical brain tissue. It is the means by which man exercises his promised "dominion" over all other creatures (Gen. 1:26).

The spirit in man is not an "immortal soul"; it has absolutely no consciousness apart from the brain. Job speaks of such a spirit: "it is a spirit in man . . . that giveth them understanding" (Job 32:8, Jewish Pub. Soc.). Paul asks, "What human being can understand the thoughts of a man except /by means of/ the spirit of man which is in him" (1 Cor. 2:11, Moffatt; cf. KJV). This simply states that self-consciousness—the awareness of thoughts, not just the thoughts themselves<sup>1</sup>—is generated by the spirit in man. The spirit of man is not the man, but rather a spiritual essence

which provides man with his utterly unique characteristics of self-awareness and mind, and thus lifts him far above the level of mere animal intelligence.

Zechariah shows that the Eternal God of Israel "formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1). No immortal soul here—the "spirit of man" and the "him" are separate entities, with the former located "within" the latter. Paul confirms that this "spirit of man" is "in him" (1 Cor. 2:11). This does not say that man is a spirit, but rather that this "spirit" is located in the man. (If a man swallows a marble, that marble would be 'in him, but does that then make the man a marble? The man may have "lost his marbles," but he is surely not a marble himself.)

If we are not careful, we can very quickly begin to think that the spirit in man possesses conscious sensation, thought and awareness independent of the brain. This is wholly wrong. The spirit in man, of itself, cannot sense, cannot think, cannot reason, cannot know. The brain performs these tasks. But to engender the exquisite qualities which constitute the human mind, the spirit in man must be added.

We can liken the spirit in man to a blank recording tape and the human brain to a tape recorder—neither one able to generate the human mind without the other. The tape recorder houses all the machinery and wirings required for its particular operation, that of sound reproduction. Likewise, the human brain contains all the necessary structures and circuits for its manifold responsibilities—which are sensation, memory, emotion, creativity, etc. Just as the tape recorder produces nothing without the recording tape running through it, so the human brain is severely limited without the spirit in man joined to it. The recording tape imparts the capacity of auditory reproduction to the tape recorder; this same tape also records and stores the magnetic impress from the tape recorder. Analogously, the spirit in man imparts the capacity of creative intellect and self-conscious personality to the brain, while at the same time recording and storing the stamp impress from the brain.

At death, the spirit in man "tape" is complete—it contains, at that time, the incredibly detailed, indelible record of every nuance of life, thought, personality, attitude and character which made one exactly the singular individual he was. The "tape" can then be "filed"—until needed again for reactivation, an event called the "resurrection" in

biblical terminology. Solomon alludes to this "filing" of the spirit in man as well as to the mortality of the man in Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then /at death/ shall the dust /the human being/ return to the earth as it was: and the spirit /the spirit-in-man tape/ shall return unto God who gave it."

Again, we can easily make the mistake of attributing consciousness to this filed-away "tape" which is no more the former living individual than a boxed piece of magnetic recording tape is the peaceful third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. In order to reconstitute those serene musical vibrations from the magnetic recording tape, the tape must be reinserted into a tape recorder. Similarly, in order to reconstitute the specific person's conscious awareness from the "spirit-in-man tape," the spirit in man must be reinserted into a brain. Therefore, a reorganized brain and body (whether spiritual or physical) are necessary adjuncts to the spirit-in-man tape in order to reactivate— or resurrect—the original individual.

Man was created physical, mortal and limited so that God could work with and prepare him for his ultimate destiny. God's moral character is self-determined by His own free choice. If man is to be like Him and share eternity on His level, he must also be free to make his own decisions and thus to build his own character. Physical life provides the arena for man to learn the object lessons necessary to become like God in character. This kind of character can be developed only through time and experience.

Freedom of choice requires the possibility of rejecting God's character and way of life. If a man, given every conceivable opportunity over a protracted period of time, becomes set in the kind of moral character which would poison him and his environment, God in His infinite mercy and wisdom would not endow that man with His eternal life and unlimited potential.

The Bible states that when God created man, He "saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Man was thus not created with an evil nature. This is confirmed in Ecclesiastes 7:29: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright." On the other hand, man was not created with the righteous, holy character of God, which it is impossible to create instantaneously. One might say man was created morally neutral so that he could develop moral character through experiencing life.

Although a free moral agent, with the full capacity to make his own decisions, man is subject to influences. As a part of the human learning and growing process, God has allowed Satan, the ultimate source of evil, to influence man for the period of human history. Much of what can be called the natural mind—the mind in opposition to God's mind—is a result of Satan's influence as well as man's own wrong choices as he lives and experiences life without God's guidance. It is important to understand that God did not create man with an intrinsically evil nature but rather with free choice, and subject to the influences of both good and evil.

All humans are born morally neutral, as was Adam when he was first created. Unfortunately, Adam chose to follow Satan the Devil and thus sinned, with the result that his frame and direction of mind became evil and perverted. Likewise, as we sin, our minds become perverted from their moral neutrality and become instead self-oriented, filled with vanity, jealousy, lust and greed—becoming oriented as Satan's mind is oriented, in opposition to the orientation of God's mind. The Bible states that "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7), and that man's "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9)—reflecting clearly in both scriptures what is the attitude of Satan.

How does this happen? How does man reflect Satan's nature? Ephesians 2:2 reveals some critical, indeed startling, information. Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air," projecting a form of "spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." This seems to indicate that Satan the Devil has the capacity to influence individual human beings by having his negative, evil "spirit" affect their neutral spirit in man, much as a radio broadcast will affect thousands of neutral radio receivers to "play its tune."

The only antidote to Satan's broadcast—the remedy required to change the heart of man—is God's Holy Spirit. It is impossible for man to obey God in the full spirit of the law without it. And this is precisely what God wants us to learn: that we desperately need God's Holy Spirit in order to have our minds and hearts converted, to have our whole direction of life changed to follow God's way.

The spirit in man is, of itself, incomplete. It indeed elevates man's mental capacity to the spiritual plane, but all this does is cause spiritual problems without any spiritual

solutions. The existence of the spirit in man clearly demonstrates our burning need of the missing dimension of the Spirit of God. Thus the reality of the spirit in man becomes the focal point of all human life. And it is in the arena of human survival that the spirit in man takes on monumental significance because the mere existence of a spiritual component in the human mind unveils the fundamental cause underlying all mankind's troubles.

Consider what the spirit in man signifies; the human mind operates with a spiritual dimension, and that means spiritual problems. The spirit in man adds spiritual problems to the physical human brain. (The human mind and its resultant spiritual problems are as directly related together as are animal brain and its resultant instinctive behavioral patterns. Thus, while the animal brain maintains perfect harmony in nature, the human mind is about to utterly destroy the earth I)

That is the crux of the matter—that is why mankind is planning its own extinction; human beings have spiritual problems but only physical solutions--and physical solutions just cannot solve spiritual problems. This is why the spirit in man must become the focal point of all human knowledge, because it enables us to understand—for the first time—that all man's physical difficulties are caused by deep-seated spiritual complications. No amount of physical measures—no matter how intricate or expensive—will ever improve the overall welfare and happiness of the human race. If we ever hope to solve our physical problems and have an abundantly happy world, our spiritual problems must be solved first.

The spirit in man is the key to man. The knowledge of it suddenly reorients us. It points us in the proper direction. It tells us where we must look if we are ever to have a peaceful planet.

Spiritual solutions are needed to solve spiritual problems. If this one fundamental point were understood, man should be forced to realize that the structure of his entire society—from the government of nations to the behavior of children—needs radical revision before people can at last be joyfully busy with peace and progress.

This is where God's plan of salvation comes in. God first calls us by opening our minds to His truth, leading us to recognize our wretched, sinful state, cut off from



God. Then upon our heartfelt repentance and sincere acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Savior, God enables us through baptism and the laying on of hands to receive His Spirit. Conversion by God's Holy Spirit means a renewing of one's mind (Rom. 12:2), a complete changing of one's attitude and heart; it is the creation of a new man, walking in newness of life (Rom. 6:4) and obeying God from the heart as a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). Through God's Spirit man can have the fellowship and communion with God that is so important to growth in God's mind and character.

It is not fully revealed how God's Spirit actually works. We know that it alters our whole mental outlook and direction in life from evil to good, from satanic to godly--yet how does it do this? Romans 8:16 states that God's Holy Spirit "itself beareth witness with our spirit /in man/ that we are the children of God," This begins to show that God's Holy Spirit functions by working through the spirit in man which is the intrinsic spiritual component of every human mind. If to this we add the biblical analogies of conversion to begetting and of spiritual conception to physical conception, we arrive at the working model of God's Holy Spirit impregnating and energizing man's spirit much as a male sperm impregnates and energizes a female ovum. (There are many spiritually instructive understandings and extrapolations to be derived from this analogy.) Thus the spirit in man becomes the focal point of human existence; it is the one essential element differentiating us from animals; and it is, at the same time, both the vehicle through which Satan can influence us and our link with the divine, giving us the full potential for spiritual conception through God's Holy Spirit.

Although the negative or evil side of man must be dealt with, the Worldwide Church of God chooses to focus on the positive and awesome potential of mankind. This is the heart and core of the message Jesus brought to man. Through God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ man can be forgiven of his wrong choices and sins. God in His infinite love and wisdom has provided a plan by which man can, as a free moral agent, gain the experience and character necessary to receive eternal life. If the spiritual essence God gives us at baptism continues to grow within us, we will personally be born into God's Family at the resurrection. Conversely, God shall destroy in the lake of fire any who absolutely refuse to repent and obey Him, that is, those who have been spiritually aborted. From

this we draw the conclusion that there is no "second chance" for those who totally reject God and His way after having been enlightened—their end is to be burned (Heb. 6:8). But not having a "second chance" presupposes that every person must really have a full first chance for salvation. This means that God can only condemn unrepentant, deliberate sinners "who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:4-5). To have a real opportunity for salvation, to be judged by God, human beings must really know the truth (Heb. 10:26).

Since it is God's will and purpose for all men to reach their full potential as sons of God, all men shall have a full opportunity to actualize that potential. Thus mankind will become God (as its family name), and God's Family will grow into the multiple billions. The lengthy history of man's mostly negative experience is only one phase of God's plan, not the final chapter.

The ultimate destiny of man is truly beyond our limited comprehension now, although God does give us certain hints. God's purpose is to put "all things"—everything—including the whole universe, under man (Heb. 2:8). Not only are human beings promised eternal life but also the sharing of all that it means to be in the Family of God. God's greatest desire is to share everything with us. His only concern is that His sons be prepared in character, attitude and experience for that fabulous destiny.

Thus we see that God did not conclude His spiritual creation in the first seven days recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. Rather, those chapters record the physical creation of man. God is now working with man spiritually and creating His own character in man so that in time he might be born into God's Kingdom to share God's greatness as a veritable son of God for eternity. Earth is thus the proving ground where we physical human beings can gain the character necessary to rule with God for all time.

Although the ultimate purpose of human life is to be fulfilled at the resurrection, God does not neglect the present physical life. Indeed the fulfillment, abundance, happiness and success of this human life are an integral part of God's plan. The entirety of the book of Proverbs is filled with instructions and exhortations explaining

how men, women and children should act in order to achieve the maximum success in their lives. God truly wants all mankind to prosper, with everyone achieving his and her own fullest individual potential in all areas of living: social, economic, intellectual, family and personal. Jesus Christ stated that "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10) . And the apostle John gives it the proper perspective: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health" (3 Jn. 2). In line with God's most magnificent truth of man's destiny, the Worldwide Church of God upholds and seeks to promote the dignity of man in every facet of human life.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD  
**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **ANGELIC REALM**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

God has created powerful spirit beings as His aids, agents, and messengers. Since man's creation, these spirit beings, called *angels* in the English Bible, function as ministering spirits to help mankind attain salvation. Like man, angels have free moral agency. Although created to help God, some of them—led by Satan the Devil—rebelled against God's government transforming themselves into demons.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Before the time of man, God created powerful spirit beings (Job 38:7) in vast numbers (Rev. 5:11). Although created before and on a higher plane than man, these beings will eventually be under man in authority when humanity has entered God's Family (Heb. 2:7-8).

The Bible gives relatively few specifics about the numerous types and responsibilities of these spirit beings, mentioning them in context but not dwelling on them in point. Apparently, all of these created spirit beings of whatever variety or power are generally labeled as "angels," although the Bible nowhere directly makes that statement. The English word "angel" comes from the Greek word *angelos* which means "messenger" or "agent." The Hebrew word *malak* has the same meaning.

A number of specific types of angels are generally described. Cherubim are explained in Ezekiel 1 and 10 as having four wings and four faces (of a lion, ox, eagle and man) and covering (or carrying) God's throne. Seraphim are "full of eyes before and behind," having six wings and appearing either like a lion, a calf, an eagle or with the face of a man (Is. 6:2-3; Rev. 4:6-8)-. "Twenty-four elders" who apparently serve as counselors for God Himself are described in Revelation 4:4, 10-11. Angels have at times appeared on earth as men (Gen. 19:1-2), although it is not revealed whether this indeed can be their actual form or whether they had assumed the appearance of humans for their visit. (Some have wondered that since the physical world reflects the spiritual world—Rom. 1:20—could some of the animals of this earth be, at least, in some fashion, physical counterparts of angelic beings?—cf. Rev. 19:11.)

Although the above scriptures make plain that God has assigned angels various responsibilities, Hebrews 1:14 states they are also to help man attain salvation. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" The exact way or manner in which angels minister to men in this capacity is not comprehensively described in the Bible, but there are some allusions and references. Cherubim were sent to guard the way to the tree of life after Adam and Eve had been cast from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). Parts of the law were given by the angels (Acts 7:35;

Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). In Genesis 18, angelic beings came to tell Abraham that he would have a son and in Genesis 19, they helped rescue Lot from the city of Sodom before it burned. Angels ministered to Jesus Christ after he withstood Satan for forty days and nights (Mat. 4:11). Matthew 18:10 suggests that God's angels watch over God's converted sons. Likewise we are told "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Lk. 15:10). The angels even desire to "look into" the specifics of salvation (1 Pet. 1:12). One angel seems to be assigned to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 (Rev. 1:20); and different angels will be intimately involved in God's future intervention in world affairs (Rev. 7:1-2; Ez. 9; Rev. 8:3-5; 10:1, etc.), specifically in the final seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6 ff) and the seven final plagues (Rev. 15:1 ff). Further verses can be cited to show other specifically revealed times when angels have served man physically or spiritually. The thrust of all these passages is that the angels play an important role in God's salvation plan for man, and that their relationship with man is one of interest and personal concern.

Long before man one of the cherubim—his name in Latin is the familiar word Lucifer—had the honor of covering the very throne of God (Ezek. 28:14), indicating a position of very high authority and power in God's government. However, he was lifted up in his own vanity, became resentful and jealous of God, and finally rebelled against God's government. He drew with him as cohorts a third of the angels. These became evil angels or demons with Lucifer, now Satan the Devil, as their leader.

Satan is called the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4) and the accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10). As "the prince of the power of the air" he "broadcasts" his perverted and evil attitudes of hatred, jealousy, envy, lust and greed to man. The mechanism for this influence is surely the evil environment of this present world, but seems also to involve some form of Satanic "spirit" that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). These attitudes enter into the mind of man through the spirit in man (see MAN), perverting it to the twisted thinking of Satan. By this means, Satan and his demonic allies hope to destroy all human beings and ruin their chance for entering the family of God. These wicked spirits try to separate Christians from the love of God (cf. Rom. 8:38-39). A primary battle of a Christian is "against wicked spirits in high places"

(Eph. 6:12), It is a battle to resist the influences of Satan and his demons against a person's mind, God has given us the means to fight this spiritual battle. We must "put on the whole armor of God ...to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11); this spiritual armor includes truth, righteousness (v. 14), peace (v. 15), faith (v. 16), salvation, the word of God (v. 17), prayer and supplication (v. 18). Satan our adversary "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8); but he will flee from us if we resist him and draw near to God (James 4:7-8).

While angels are now above man in authority, they are not to be worshipped or prayed to, nor regarded as mediators between God and man (Col, 2:17). Nonetheless, we must, of course, acknowledge and respect their authority as powerful spiritual helpers of God and His created "sons" (Job 38:7). Even the archangel Michael dared not revile Satan the Devil, but appealed to God's authority when confronting him rather than his own (Jude 9). The biblical record shows that angels' authority over man is temporary (Heb, 1:13-14), and explains that man will eventually be in the position of judging the angels (I Cor. 6:3).

God is in supreme command and is only temporarily allowing Satan to influence man within certain confines (Job 1). This process actually enables man to build greater character by resisting Satan and by learning how to rely more on God. During the millennial rule of Christ, Satan is to be removed from the world scene along with his demons. Jesus Christ will replace Satan as the ruler of this world (cf. II Cor. 4:4 and Rev. 20:4-5). Following the millennium, Satan is to be released for a short span of time and then finally to be removed to a place of restraint for all eternity where he and his demons can no longer affect men or angels. But the faithful angels who have followed God throughout these countless eons of time will continue as servants of the greatly expanded Family of God for all eternity.

It is understandable how some have an extremely simplistic impression of the angelic/spiritual realm. From the brief glimpses the Bible gives of God's throne (Rev. 4), one can get the naive idea that angelic beings bow before God all the time as though in a beatific trance, repetitively incanting "holy, holy, holy..." constantly, without ever stopping or thinking. Likewise, one can easily think that the entire spiritual realm is very ethereal and rather dull when compared with the reality and tremendous variety of the physical realm as we know it.

In point of fact, this must be a total misconception. The spiritual realm is the true reality while the physical realm maintains an ethereal existence; the spiritual world is the true "substance," while the physical world is the "shadow." We can only begin to apprehend the invisible things of the spiritual realm by observing the visible things of the physical realm (Rom. 1:20). Indeed, the incredible variety and abundance of the physical universe must be paled into insignificance by the unimaginable majesty, beauty, complexity, and diversity of the spiritual universe. The few hints seen show an abundance of, for lack of a better term, spiritual "things" (which comprise just a portion of spiritual reality) that extends incredibly far beyond even angelic beings. The symbolism of spiritual cities, gates, rivers, trees, fruits in Revelation 21-22; horses, armies, and swords in Revelation 19; thrones and wheels in Ezekiel 1 and 10; thrones, clothes, crowns, gold, lightning, thunders, voices, lamps in Revelation 4 testify to an existence so incomprehensible that even the profuse utilization of physical analogies can scarcely do more than whet our appetite. Going farther/ there are spiritual books, seals, incense, vials, songs, hair, etc., with no indication of any limit to the scope of spiritual "things." Indeed, there is every reason to conclude that our present physical realm is drab, plain, and dull when compared with the unfathomable variety and ineffable splendor of the spiritual realm.



WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# SALVATION

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Salvation is the means by which God, through Christ, saves man from the penalty of sin and gives him eternal life. This process includes one's calling, repentance, baptism, justification, receiving of the Holy Spirit, a life of faith and obedience and final birth into God's kingdom as a spirit being. Salvation is a freely given gift from God through grace, with our ultimate reward being according to our works.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The goal of every Christian is to be saved from the death penalty of sin through the sacrifice of Christ and to receive the gift of eternal life in God's Family and Kingdom. This goal and the process by which it is attained is called salvation. It is the ultimate purpose of life and the explicit reason why mankind was created.

God created man in His image and after His likeness. But the creation process will not be complete until mankind is perfected spiritually—has perfect godly character created in him—and actually enters the God Family. God initiates this process by "calling" a person—opening his mind to understand, grasp and be convicted by the truth of the Bible. It is impossible for anyone to come to Christ unless the Father calls him (Jn. 6:44) , and God's calling "depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

If one responds to the realization of God's truth by believing it, committing oneself to it and by acting upon it, God will then grant him the miracle of true repentance (Rom. 2:4). Repentance is the state of mind which an individual attains through seeing and acknowledging his past sinful way of life, and by recognizing that he has broken God's laws (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 3:4) and resolving to do so no longer. Repentance includes both a deep ("godly") sorrow over past wrongs (2 Cor. 7:10) and a steadfast determination to change the whole direction of one's life from disobedience to obedience of God. It is accompanied by a profound realization of the need for forgiveness and the help and strength of God to change.

Once a person has repented and professed a sincere faith in the person, message and sacrifice of Christ, he may be baptized by immersion for the forgiveness of sins. This baptism is a type of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, which is our means of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10) since He paid the death penalty for our sins. Baptism symbolizes the death and burial of one's old sinful way of life and the beginning of a totally new spirit-led life of obedience and submission to God. After baptism the new convert receives the Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-

hands ceremony performed in accordance with the commands and examples of the apostles (Acts 8:12-17; 19:5-6).

God's Spirit is an absolute necessity for the spiritual creation process of salvation as it serves many functions. It begets one as the son of God; it strengthens him to face trials and tests, to overcome problems and to build godly character; and it converts and changes the person's whole direction of mind from being carnal to being spiritual (Rom. 8). As such, the Holy Spirit is the seed of eternal life within us which at the resurrection will overtake our mortality with immortality and clothe us with eternal life (Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:1-5). It is the guarantee to a Christian of eternal life which can only be negated by willful neglect or deliberate rejection.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is clearly the focal point of the salvation process. He was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). We "were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:10) and are thereby justified through faith in that reality (Rom. 5:1). Yet salvation must go beyond justifying the past, it must continue into the future throughout one's life. The true Christian is admonished to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Indeed, the active participation of Jesus Christ in one's life through His Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for ultimate salvation. As Romans 5:10 concludes "much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

This whole salvation process is by "grace" (Greek "favor"—Eph. 2:8)—it is unmerited and freely given by God and cannot in any way be earned. The Christian totally depends upon God's grace, initially for the forgiveness of sins at the time of baptism, and throughout his life for any sins he may commit subsequent to baptism. Nevertheless, the individual must meet certain criteria in order to be given this free gift.

First, the person must live by and grow in faith—a total and real conviction. One must have faith that God exists; faith that He will perform all of His biblical promises including that of granting him salvation (Rom. 4); faith that the death of Jesus Christ will pay the penalty for one's sins and reconcile him to God; and faith that the resurrection of the living Jesus Christ will enable him to attain eternal life.

Furthermore, a Christian must not be disobedient, since continual sin that is not repented of disqualifies one from God's Kingdom (I Cor. 6:9-11). Salvation is surely not earned by obedience, because salvation can in no way be earned (cf. Rom. 4:4). Nevertheless, Christ's response to one who asked Him what must be done in order to be saved was that the Commandments must be kept (Mt. 19:17). Furthermore, Christ told His disciples that at the resurrection He shall "reward every man according to his works" (Mt. 16:27; Rev. 22:12).

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 also illustrates why obedience and good works are necessary. Although salvation itself is a totally freely given gift (and hence is "by grace"), our individual responsibilities within God's Family and Kingdom shall vary according to the way we have lived our lives since baptism. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25 shows plainly that we will receive responsibilities in direct proportion to the way we have conducted our lives.

Today, God is calling a relative few, but now is not the only day of salvation. Every human being who has ever lived shall have an opportunity for the greatest free gift that could ever be imagined. God wants all mankind to receive the opportunity for salvation (1 Tim. 2:4) and is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). To this end God is infinitely patient and has apportioned a time for all human beings from all times to be called to Him and to the ultimate gift of eternal life in the Family of God.

In summary, salvation is by grace, through faith, not earned by obedience but dependent upon obedience, with the degree of our ultimate reward being according to our works. This salvation process is thus one which entails our continuance in God's way and necessitates our endurance to the end (Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Only when that process is complete and we have been born as spirit beings into the Family of God shall salvation have been completely and totally achieved.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# FAITH

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Faith is the sure knowledge that God exists and that He will accomplish those things He has promised. Faith in God—trust in His promises and belief that He is in overall control—is a major element in the Christian life and is absolutely necessary for salvation.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

"... the just shall live by his faith." These words were first uttered by the prophet Habakkuk and quoted three times by the apostle Paul. Living faith is at the heart of true Christianity. It is absolutely essential for salvation (I Pet. 1:5.9). Christ described faith as a weightier matter of the law (Mt. 23:23). Paul listed it among the three greatest Christian virtues (along with hope and love). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Far from being simply a feeling in his heart, the Christian's faith motivates his entire pattern of living. Faith functions as the fulcrum of true Christian thought and behavior.

The two distinct meanings of the word "faith" are found in the English translation. When preceded by the definite article ("the faith") it means the overall system of doctrine and belief accepted by the Church, and by extension, the Church itself (Acts 6:7; 13:8, 14:22). When used without the article it means "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) which is perhaps the clearest biblical definition of faith. Faith is thus an absolute belief that God exists and a total trust in His statements (Heb. 11:6).

Ultimately, faith deals with God's promises--with the future. It is the trust in "things not seen." Of course, belief cannot be blind. It must be built on genuine conviction. It has to come from perceiving God's hand in creation, His work in history and the experience of His fulfilled promises in one's own life. This is the foundation of faith. But one does not need faith in what has already been accomplished. Faith, therefore, is the willingness to believe God will not fail even though He has not actually brought about what is promised (Heb. 11:1).

True faith must come from God and has many facets, though the primary ones relate directly to Jesus Christ. Faith in its simplest but most profound manifestation is a deep personal belief in Jesus Christ; in the fact that He is our Savior; in the truth that His death paid the individual penalty of our personal sins. Faith is the full confidence in the message Jesus brought. This faith in Christ is the

belief that leads us to baptism. (Baptism is merely an outward symbolic testimony that we have inward faith in Christ.) Paul speaks of this faith in Galatians 2:16 when he remarks we "have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ."

After baptism, one receives God's Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. At this point Christ, through the Spirit, lives in us and empowers us with a growing and internalized godly faith. Since faith is not self-generated, but is rather the faith of Christ's Spirit in us, it is termed the "faith of Christ" (subjective genitive). It is this faith of Christ that we must express and live by in every facet of life.

But faith is not an end in itself. It is rather the vehicle by which we may obtain salvation. Of course, salvation can in no way be earned—either by obedience or faith—for nothing man can do would obligate God to grant salvation had He not decided to give man this gift of His own volition (according to certain terms). But God nevertheless has obligated Himself to grant salvation if one has living faith. God says the presence of this faith is counted in His eyes as righteousness and indeed justifies us before God (Rom. 4:1-7).

Faith is the motivator which causes us to live a godly life. From this it follows that one who has real belief in God and hopes in His promises will demonstrate this fidelity by his actions--by his obedience. Indeed, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

The true Christian will obey God and do good works, for "faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:20). Our good works do not save us, but they do demonstrate faith. James wrote, "I will show you my faith by my works" (Jas. 2:18), directly contradicting the notion that faith can maintain an exclusively mental/spiritual existence devoid of any physical action and behavior. One who does not obey God is said to possess "dead" faith, a trait no better than that of the demons who themselves believe God exists but refuse to obey Him (Jas. 2:19).

To have real faith, does not mean that one will never doubt. Doubt is a normal human characteristic and emotion, and even the truly begotten Christian is not immune from it. Yet one must contest doubt, not by deluding oneself but by rehearsing reality. One should return to the fundamentals of biblical belief, to one's first love, by thinking the thoughts and doing the works he did when he was first being

converted. Doubt need not undermine faith, but true faith can surmount doubt.

God commands that "the just shall live by faith" in every facet and area of his life. One must fully live by faith, because God has made promises which affect virtually every part of man's existence. He has promised to help us in trials if we are faithful and to answer every prayer that is prayed according to His will and in faith. These expressions of faith are again not ends in themselves. In fact they are secondary as compared to a Christian's main thrust of faith which is belief in God's promise of the resurrection from the dead and in salvation. Other areas of faith are important only as they contribute to our faith in the resurrection. Paul says one who does not earnestly hope for the resurrection has "faith in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14), because one who has no hope of being resurrected from the dead has no hope at all! It is a Christian's faith in the resurrection from the dead which lies behind all his earthly actions. It is this faith and hope which encourages him to press onward toward salvation in spite of trials and disappointments.

God's ultimate design is to bring every human being from the human level to the divine level—from flesh to spirit—from a temporary physical existence to an eternal spiritual existence. This is the foremost frontier of faith. It involves development of character, which include the trials and experiences of human life. God's promises for the "good life" on the physical level are subordinated to His ultimate purpose of fulfilling His main promise on the spiritual level. A Christian who is living by faith realizes physical promises may be delayed for his spiritual benefit, but he knows that his life is absolutely in God's hands no matter what. Some by their faith have been delivered, while others by the same faith have been martyred (Heb. 11) or allowed to die without seeing the ultimate fruit of their endeavors in this life.

The faith of Christ in us is one of the fruits of God's Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. As such it cannot be "worked up" and is in no other way self-generated. It should never be static but must be constantly growing and expanding in every aspect and area of life. This faith may be built and grow in different ways—through experience, through trials (Rom. 5:1-5), by reading the inspired word of God (Rom. 10:17), through the interaction with the faith of others, etc. Faith must be constant, unfeigned, based upon true promises, without time limit and always growing.



The Bible illustrates the faith of the patriarchs and men of God throughout history as an example and encouragement to us. We are told of Abraham, the father of the faithful. We are reminded of Enoch, Elijah, - Samson, Jephthah, David and the prophets. We see the awesome example of Jesus Christ Himself, who gave up His exalted position as God, emptied Himself into human form and was sacrificed in faith, so that He could become the Savior of mankind after the Father would resurrect Him. Likewise, we look at the examples of the apostles and of fellow brethren who were martyred for the sake of Christ. Finally, we learn that God will grant these faithful men salvation and eternal life in God's Kingdom, because they believed they would receive it, and because they had real faith. They will receive the reward they hoped for, because they believed that God existed and that He was the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). Our task is to follow their example and receive this same reward.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# REPENTANCE

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Repentance is the act of acknowledging one's sins and resolving to fully obey God. To repent means to change one's overall attitude from wanting to go his own way to wanting to go God's way. It begins when God opens one's mind to see himself in comparison with God and His law. true repentance is the first step toward reconciliation with God, and thereby toward ultimate salvation.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Repentance signals the start of a changed and godly life. It involves a fully conscious recognition of one's sinful, lawless way of life, a way of life that is antagonistic toward God and His law, accompanied by a firm conviction to make a total change and to begin to live in full accord with God's way of life as described in the Bible.

True repentance can occur only when God Himself opens one's eyes to see his past sinfulness by granting repentance (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). But repentance is much more than a recognition of personal sins. Repentance, rather is the process through which God leads us so that we can become progressively more like Him, thereby proceeding toward salvation as sons and daughters in His Divine Family which is God's ultimate desire for all humanity. As such, repentance should include the positive, joyful realization of the fact that it is God who grants repentance, that this repentance is "unto life" (Acts 11:18), and that all who are so called shall "come to know the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25).

True repentance is a complex and deeply personal phenomenon that can only be understood, in the final analysis, by experiencing it. The first component is the realization that there is a vast difference, a great gulf, between God and oneself (e.g. Job 42). The next aspect is an all-consuming desire to close that gap, to become more like God in character, thought and behavior, though the capacity to accomplish this is far beyond human power alone and requires the active involvement of God's Holy Spirit.

One who is coming to repentance must first understand that sin is the transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4), the penalty for which is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Added to this theoretical definition of sin must be the deep personal realization that one has indeed sinned and that his whole frame of mind and attitude of approach is oriented against God's law (Rom. 8:7). But the deceitfulness of sin blinds one to seeing his sinfulness unless God opens his mind to reality—to recognize that one indeed is a sinner. Genuine repentance, therefore, must come from

God Himself, and man cannot claim credit for it, though he has a part in it. His part is to acknowledge the truth about himself which God has shown him and then to act upon it.

In the process of seeing himself, a person comes to realize that the human "heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Since sin is ultimately of the mind, he also begins to understand that even his own righteousness—which in an unconverted person is invariably motivated by selfishness—is only a "dirty rag," as it were, in God's sight (Is. 64:6). When an individual repents, he must compare his righteousness to God's righteousness and not to that of other human beings. When man compares himself to God—and with God's help sees himself as he really is—he is astonished at his own sinfulness and inadequacy.

Confronted with this reality, the person nearing repentance comes to appreciate that man is incapable of leading a godly life without God's direct help and intervention through His Spirit. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). While man's intentions are often the best—he may want to do good—he nevertheless finds himself caught in a struggle between them and his natural inclination toward evil. Romans 7 describes this struggle: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I . . . . For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (vv. 15-18). A person in an attitude of repentance feels a strong need for help in this spiritual dilemma and reaches out to God for aid through His Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul admitted that the only relief from this eternal conflict between the good of God and the evil of our own nature is "through Jesus Christ" (v. 25).

In his natural state without God's Spirit, man is cut off from God and indeed at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7; Is. 59:1-2). The story of Adam and Eve is an example of how this spiritual enmity has occurred in man (Rom. 5:12). The Genesis account indicates that Adam and Eve were born morally neutral—with the ability to do good or evil, right or wrong, but without an actual inclination toward either—God nonetheless instructed them in His law and

explained to them right from wrong. They had no reason to doubt God or to disobey until Satan, symbolized (and/or materialized) in Genesis 2 as a serpent, tempted them by saying God was both holding back knowledge from them and lying about death as the penalty for disobedience. Adam and Eve chose to obey Satan rather than God and so ate of the forbidden fruit. The effects of this sin cut them off from God as is evidenced by His thrusting them from the garden. It also caused a rationalization of, or a blinding to, the sin, as shown by Adam's attempt at justifying himself. Likewise, their act of stepping from the realm of moral neutrality to that of sinfulness through the initiation of this one sin caused deep and profound mental changes in Adam and Eve. They were no longer morally neutral but became evilly oriented in much the same way as was—and is—Satan, since Satan's attitude of mind had now influenced their own.

All human beings are, like Adam and Eve, born morally neutral. Yet living in Satan's world, surrounded by an ungodly environment, all persons soon sin, as did Adam and Eve. (To ask at what age or to try to discern the demarcation line between moral neutrality and sin is not practical.) Thus, sin has the same consequences in us as it did in Adam and Eve. It cuts us off from God, it blinds us to our own sinfulness and it changes our minds from neutrality to enmity against God (Rom. 8:7).

Viewed in this context, repentance is the bridge between a carnal mind, one that is at enmity against God, and a spiritual mind, one that has God's Spirit and is obedient and pleasing to the Creator. When one repents, he sees for the first time in his life the ungodly, debilitating, wicked orientation of his natural mind; he asks God for forgiveness and is baptized. He then receives the Holy Spirit which, working in and through his mind, actually changes or "transforms" it from carnal to spiritual (Rom. 12:2). This transformation is called "conversion." And repentance is the bridge—the first step—in this process of transformation.

Although repentance involves seeing the sinful side of oneself, thus generating negative personal feelings, it nevertheless has extremely positive aspects. Upon true repentance and baptism, one is forgiven of sin. The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man to whom sin is not imputed" (Ps. 32:2). The sheer joy of having one's sins forgiven is the sure knowledge of being right and clean before God. King David bore testimony to the positive, uplifting nature

of repentance when he prayed, "make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken /as a result of my sin<sup>7</sup> may rejoice" (Ps. 51:8). One who has repented can rejoice at the impending forgiveness of his sins, joy indeed.

The most profound evocation of real repentance in the Bible must truly be this heartfelt prayer of David in Psalm 51. The occasion was Nathan the prophet's coming to him about his sin with Bathsheba. The prayer shows the important basic components of godly repentance: an attitude of abject wretchedness and contrite humility before God; a deep recognition of all one's sins, which are "ever before me"; the conviction that God can and will forgive all one's iniquities and cleanse him from all his sins; and the sure knowledge that God can and will create in a truly repentant individual "a clean heart" and put "a new and right spirit" in him, restoring "the joy of your salvation. "

Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy steadfast love; according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment. (Ps. 51:1-4)

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Ps. 51:9-12)

Godly repentance must, of course, be accompanied by "godly sorrow." Godly sorrow reflects a profound awareness that one has sinned against God. It is a sorrow that is felt because sin hurts others and works against God's master plan of salvation. It is this "godly sorrow" that "produces a repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

On the other hand, God also speaks of "worldly sorrow." Worldly sorrow is not sorrow that one has committed sin, but just a momentary feeling brought on by adverse consequences such as results after one has been caught and is being punished. It is temporary self-pity, in no way involving

permanent change from sinning to obedience, and its end is death.

True repentance, conversely, is a deep-seated desire to change one's whole being. It is a desire to reform and redirect one's motivational approach to life. It is coming to abhor sin as God does. This type of repentance can come only from God. As we have seen, it is God who must give and lead one to repentance (Rom. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25).

In a more detailed way, repentance includes many things. It involves a profound sense of utter helplessness, realizing that to do what must be done is impossible by one's own willpower. It requires the conscious awareness that God must take an active part in redirecting and re-shaping one's life, for only God knows the way to life and only He can solve the problems of mankind. We must come to realize this fact and accept the process by which we can become acceptable to God. We have to change from doing things our own way to acknowledging God, His will and His laws in our lives. This means a desire to change our very hearts and minds. We have to turn from our way of lust, greed, selfishness and self-centeredness to God's way of mercy, generosity, love and outgoing concern for others (Eph. 4:22-24). We can view this as a spiritual "mind transplant." We have to adopt new ways of thinking, new feelings and attitudes (2 Cor. 5:17). Repentance, however, is not designed to create total uniformity of personality, tastes, interests, life styles, etc. among Christians. Such would be an anathema to God, who is creating true sons in His Family, not the proverbial "rows of yellow pencils." Repentance, in fact, is the means by which human beings can grow to have the same overall attitudes and character of God. This is the overwhelmingly uplifting result of godly sorrow.

Paul lists seven attributes of this godly sorrow. "For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment." At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter" (2 Cor. 7:11). This type of sorrow generates real repentance which in turn will lead to salvation.

Real repentance is a spiritual gift, and only God can give it. Human remorsefulness, even accompanied by great emotion, is not the repentance that the Bible says is a

prerequisite for baptism and salvation. Consequently, an individual desiring to be converted must ask God for a repentant attitude of mind as well as for forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. This conscious act of asking God is an essential part\*of the process.

As is commonly known, true repentance must be followed by water baptism, which results in the forgiveness of one's sins by God and the consequent reception of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands of the ministry.

Although one's initial act of repentance occurs prior to baptism, repentance is not a one-time event—it must be a continuous lifelong process. The more one learns about God and His ways, the more one becomes aware of how far he must go to be like God. As a converted individual seeks God's way and reads God's Word to receive personal correction, so his inner sinful attitudes and motivations are perceived. This continuous process of growth and change is the very essence of the Christian life. As God opens his mind to see more clearly (even more than before baptism) his sinful nature, the Christian repents more and more deeply. His post-conversion repentance is a continuous reaffirmation of his commitment to live God's way as well as being contrite and remorseful for any errors made.

Repentance is not synonymous with perfection. A repentant person is not guaranteed a sinless life for ever after. Even a converted person will sin out of weakness from time to time, but he need only repent of that sin and confess it before God, acknowledging Christ's atoning sacrifice once again, in order to restore contact with God and to obtain God's full forgiveness which re-establishes the joy of righteousness. Such a repentant person knows that God shall completely forgive all his sins upon repentance. He knows that God has willed to actually forget all our iniquities once they have been repented of and put under Christ's blood. God can no longer even remember our sins.' "... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103: 12). This is the incredible promise of real repentance—real freedom: freedom from guilt and fear, freedom from anxiety and depression, freedom from sins, freedom from eternal death. It is the reason why true repentance is the most encouraging, beneficial gift God can give us. It is with this confidence that the Christian continues to suppress and overcome his human nature with God's help. He asks God to replace his ungodly thoughts with the godly



approach of the Holy Spirit; he seeks to diligently understand God's law more and more through the practical experience of obedience.

God does warn—and it should not be taken lightly—that "it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they then commit apostasy, since they crucify the Son of God on their own account and hold him up to contempt" (Heb. 6:4-6). This shows that any who willfully reject God by adamantly refusing to follow His way cannot be coerced into repentance and cannot be forced to receive eternal life. Yet, diametrically contradicting the alien concept of a harsh, vengeful God is the astounding, thrilling, clarion-call truth of the Bible that all who want to repent can repent—at any time, for any sin, with the full assurance of God's total and immediate forgiveness through Jesus Christ our Savior. God does not want any human being to perish "but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9)..

In summary, repentance involves a change of one's whole way of life and frame of mind from disobedience and antagonism toward God to obedience and love toward God. It is the bridge that takes one from worldliness to godliness, from wickedness to uprightness, from the way of "get" (selfishness, self-concern, vanity) to the way of "give" (selflessness, outgoing concern, service). All this is only possible through God's Holy Spirit. Already working in the lives of thousands, God's gift of repentance is a great miracle that shall eventually work in the lives of billions.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# BAPTISMS

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The ceremony of water baptism is performed by immersion for the forgiveness of sins upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. After this ceremony, and as a result, one receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Baptism symbolizes the renunciation of the past sinful way of life, the burial of the "old man" in a watery grave, and the emergence of a new spirit-led man living with Christ's mind and following in His footsteps.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The New Testament places great stress upon the ceremony and symbolism of water baptism. It is a deeply meaningful initiatory rite referred to in Hebrews 6:1 as one of the foundational doctrines of Christian belief. John the Baptist is the one who introduced water baptism as a ceremony through which one outwardly demonstrates his inward attitude of repentance and his desire to submit to God.\*

Christ placed His stamp Of approval upon John's baptism and set the example for us by Himself undergoing the ritual (Mt. 3:13-17). The Father likewise expressed His favor with Jesus' baptism by saying through an angel immediately afterwards that Jesus was his beloved son in whom he was "well pleased" (v. 17). Jesus' disciples continued to baptize in a similar manner to John until the death and resurrection of their master, when the practice took on newer and deeper significance. (John's baptism did not make available the Holy Spirit. Later we have an example which shows the necessity of rebaptism in the name of Jesus for some who had undergone only the baptism of John—Acts 19:1-6.)

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commanded that the apostles go into all nations preaching the gospel and baptizing the disciples. They followed Christ's command and themselves both stressed the importance Of baptism and carefully explained its meaning in their preaching and teachings. Acts 2:38 is a fundamental scriptures in this regard: "Then Peter said unto them, 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." This

\*We know that at a later time baptism accompanied circumcision as a means of entry into Judaism for the proselyte. This rite was possibly but not certainly pre-Christian, so that its relationship to Christian baptism is debatable.

clearly explains one must be baptized in order to have his sins forgiven so that he may consequently receive God's Holy Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands ceremony (Acts 8:12-17).

The main prerequisites for water baptism are repentance and belief (i.e., faith) in the person and message of Jesus Christ. Repentance includes godly sorrow over one's past sins and wrong way of life and a deep conviction to obey God. To believe in the person of Jesus Christ means that one believes Christ was indeed the son of God, Savior and Messiah. Hence, in Acts 8:37 it is noted that Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch upon his certifying the conviction, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

But this general belief about the person of Jesus Christ must be more specific before baptism. One must come to acknowledge, accept and desire Christ as his personal Savior-- he must fully and deeply believe that Jesus' death on the cross was to pay for his (the sinner's) own, individual sins. Thus, the faith in Christ required for baptism is far more personal than merely a general belief in God or a theoretical understanding (however accurate) of New Testament theology. One who has this faith in Christ and His sacrifice will demonstrate his true conviction and belief by his actions. He will begin to obey Christ, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21). Peter said that God will give His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him, (Acts 5:32). The apostle James also makes abundantly plain that faith and works go hand in hand (Jas. 2:16ff).

In addition to belief or faith in the person of Christ, one needs belief or faith in the message of Jesus Christ which is the gospel. It would not make sense to believe that Christ was the Savior yet disregard His message. Christ Himself commanded that all repent and believe the gospel (Mk. 1:15). Thus, one who wants to be baptized must not only be convinced of the reality of Christ as Savior of the world and Savior of the person's own life, but he must also believe the gospel. In every way this faith is "toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

Before baptism one must be deeply aware of the significance the act of baptism has in his own life. He must understand that baptism symbolizes a break with the old way of

life and demonstrates a full commitment and determination to begin a new way of life obeying God. One who is baptized can never go back to the old way, or else he stands in jeopardy of losing out on eternal life and consequently being consumed in the lake of fire. One who will be baptized should thus carefully consider that he has the depth of conviction and the fortitude to put Christ first in his life, even before family and friends (Lk. 14:25-33).

Upon such true repentance and faith, a person is baptized by a representative of Jesus Christ. The baptism is by complete immersion under water in accordance with the many New Testament examples of baptism and with the very meaning of baptism itself.

There is only one proper method of baptism described in the Bible. The word "baptize" comes from the Greek word baptizo, which means "immerse," "plunge into" or "put into." Many churches today practice baptism by sprinkling and pouring, even though the Greek words which normally indicate these actions are not used in the New Testament in reference to baptism. Usage of the time indicates the word has its classical meaning of "immerse." Complete submersion in water is the proper way to picture death and burial which Romans 6 shows is a major symbolic meaning of baptism (see below).

In addition, the mode used by John the Baptist and Christ's disciples showed there must have been a great physical similarity in their general baptismal procedures. The scriptural descriptions of certain baptisms reinforce that the method was total immersion. Christ was baptized in the Jordan, and upon baptism, came out of the water (Mt. 3:13-17); John baptized in Aenon because there was "much water" there (Jn. 3:23); Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch traveled in the chariot until they came to waters in general, and they both went down into the water (Acts 8:36-39). Finally, proof is found in the biblical meaning of baptism, analogous to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ\* One must be totally immersed in water to symbolize having been buried with Christ in a watery grave (Rom. 6).

Peter drew the analogy between baptism and the Flood in which only a few people were saved through water (1 Pet. 3:20). "And I cannot help pointing out what a perfect illustration this is of the way you have been admitted to

the Christian 'ark' by baptism, which means, of course, far more than the mere washing of a dirty body: it means the ability to face God with a clear conscience." (Phillips) Baptism, then, does far more than removing figurative dirt from the body, meaning the removing of sin from our spiritual record—it actively gives one the ability to face our Creator with a clear conscience.

The RSV translates this verse slightly different, amplifying the intrinsically rich meaning: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (v. 21). Baptism in fact does both: it gives the repentant sinner both "the ability to face God" and is "an appeal to God." But this ability or appeal for a clear conscience can only be through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; "For there is in every true baptism the virtue of Christ rising from the dead" (verse 21, Phillips)

Water baptism is the most important (of the very few) New Testament ceremonies or rituals commanded by Christ and followed by the apostles and early New Testament Church. It is, in a sense, the formal initiatory rite to Christianity and is replete with profound spiritual significance and rich personal meaning for every true Christian and prospective member of God's kingdom. The biblical injunction of water baptism is an outward sign showing an inward attitude of repentance and faith toward Jesus Christ, and is the only way by which an individual can receive God's Holy Spirit which makes him part of the body of Christ. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body /the Church/, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:13).

Baptism pictures and symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:2-6; Col. 2:12-13). Baptism is also symbolic of the repentant believer's own death, burial and resurrection from a watery grave, as already noted. In Romans 6 Paul explains that just as Christ died for mankind's sins and was buried, baptism—being plunged into a watery grave, as it were—is symbolic of the death and burial of one's old sinful life. And as Christ was resurrected in newness of life, when a person comes up out of the waters of baptism it is symbolic of his rising up out of his past "grave" to live a new life free from

the guilt of past sins and the death penalty those sins incurred.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." (Rom. 6:2-8)

Paul explains again in slightly different terms the same principle in Colossians 2:12-13. "...and you were buried with him /Christ/ in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith and the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God hath made alive together with him ...." Paul adds in Colossians 3:1 that since we have symbolically risen from the grave with Christ, we should set our orientation of mind on spiritual things instead of carnal, physical things. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above ...."

Of all the symbolic and deep spiritual meaning associated with baptism, there remain but two fundamental reasons why a person should be baptized: to have one's sins forgiven and to receive the Holy Spirit. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter clearly stated that one is baptized to have his sins forgiven. He clearly explained Christ was the Messiah and that in killing Christ the people had killed their Savior. "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and unto the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter's response was that they should "Repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (verse 38). Thus one is baptized because he wants to have his sins forgiven and covered by the shed blood of Christ.

In addition to his own baptism "with water unto repentance," John the Baptist made a brief reference to two further uses of the concept of baptism; referring to Jesus Christ, he said, "he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt. 3:11). To be baptized with the Holy Spirit shows that a Christian must be "immersed" in it. The baptism of fire refers to the lake of fire which will totally "immerse" and burn up unrepentant sinners at the end of this age. John the Baptist compared those who will not obey God to "chaff" (v. 12) which would be burned up by Jesus Christ instead of being gathered to Himself as will the "wheat" (referring to Christians who obey God).



WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# LAYING ON OF HANDS

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The laying on of hands is a ceremony performed by the ministry on special occasions such as for the receiving of God's Holy Spirit after baptism, at ordination and for other special purposes. It symbolizes one's submission to God and to the Church which is God's instrument on earth. Such a ceremony is the occasion of God conferring a spiritual gift, blessing or service to the person.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Hebrews 6:2 calls the laying-on-of-hands ceremony one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church. It is an old and important religious ceremony with both the Old and New Testaments being replete with examples of its use.

The "laying on of hands" is the act of one person in religious authority putting his hands upon the head of one on whom a blessing, a special religious office or some other spiritual gift is conferred. It is usually accompanied by a prayer that delineates the nature of the spiritual blessing and asks God to grant it to the individual.

The significance of this act is to show that the individual person is being set apart for a spiritually-related reason. It shows that he is being acknowledged as qualified for a particular task or being given a blessing out of the ordinary. As such the laying on of hands is often a public ceremony in front of members of the congregation.

The act of laying on of hands itself has special symbolic meaning. It shows that God works through fallible human beings in administering church government. When a minister lays his hands upon a person to confer the spiritual blessing or gift, he does so as an agent or representative of God fulfilling a position of spiritual authority within the Church. Likewise, one who submits to this ceremony during ordination, after baptism, during anointing for healing or under any other special circumstances is acknowledging the authority God has placed in the Church and ministry and shows submission to this authority. The minister, of course, is not an agent of God on his own, but only through the Church. He does not administer his own authority but only that of the Church as empowered by God. The minister does not confer anything of his own by the laying on of hands, but only symbolizes what God confers.

The earliest examples of the use of the ceremony are to be found in the Old Testament. Jacob laid his hands upon the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh to pass along his birthright and the promises God made to his grandfather, Abraham. When God chose a physical priesthood, they were set apart for their holy duty by the laying on of hands. Only a tribe specially consecrated by this special ceremony could officiate

in God's Temple (Num. 8:9-11,14-15). Likewise, Joshua also had hands laid upon him to show God had set him apart to become the new ruler of Israel (Num. 27:18-19).

The New Testament shows through command and example various times when the laying on of hands should be used by the Church. It is most often used by the ministry for the conferring of the Holy Spirit upon a person after baptism in accordance with Acts 8:15-17 and other scriptures. At this time the minister places his hands upon the head of the newly baptized individual and prays to God, asking Him to give the new convert His Holy Spirit. Thus, through this ceremony, a person is set apart as a chosen, begotten son of God.

James 5:14, Mark 16:18 and other scriptures show that God's ministers should lay hands upon and anoint with oil those who come to them to request God's divine healing for their sicknesses. Again the act symbolizes that God will set aside the person for special consideration or attention and illustrates God's government through His Church and ministry.

Another application of the laying on of hands ceremony is during the ordination of elders, deacons and deaconesses. All these offices are positions of authority and responsibility within the Church. Ordination by the laying on of hands is God's way of setting apart and conferring upon a human instrument God's Church government. (This implies that the individual has learned how to serve faithfully under this authority himself—Acts 6:6; 13:3.)

The Church also uses this ceremony as a tradition of the Church in the blessing of little children in accordance with the example set by Jesus in Matthew 19:13-15. God's ministers on special occasions place their hands upon, and ask God's blessing for, small children who have never before undergone this blessing ceremony. It symbolizes the child's sanctification by God for special physical protection and spiritual blessings.

During the marriage ceremony, the officiating minister of the Worldwide Church of God places his hands upon the joined hands of a couple while they kneel with him in prayer. The symbolism of this act is that the couple call on God to enter this marriage and set them apart as special to Him as well as to each other. They are also making a covenant with God to follow His laws.

The laying on of hands is a simple but deeply symbolic ceremony which has special application in special circumstances as explained above. It is of critical importance to Christianity, because it shows that God works and deals with mankind through other human beings whom He chooses and sets apart for His purpose, though they are fallible and imperfect.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# GOSPEL

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The gospel is the message preached by Christ and by His Church about God's coming Kingdom, the restoration of His government on earth, and how mankind can enter that Kingdom and government. It includes the message of what Jesus has done, is doing and shall do—and ultimately is the message of the entire Old and New Testaments. The primary purpose and commission of the Church is to proclaim this gospel in all the world as a witness to all nations, and to baptize and teach those who respond.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The word "gospel" means simply "good news." The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that He is coming again to establish His Kingdom on this earth in place of man's governments, and the good news of how we can become part of that government as sons of God. Hence, the gospel is called "the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mk. 1:14), and it is this gospel which Christ came preaching (same verse). As Jesus went on to say, repentance and belief in the gospel go hand in hand (Mk. 1:15).

In its broadest sense, the gospel includes the whole story of the Bible—the whole panorama of what God is doing with mankind, especially God's plan of salvation and forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, the focal point of the gospel is announcing and predicting the coming Kingdom of God to be set up here on earth.

The true gospel is a message of hope given to a world in danger of destroying itself in multitudinous ways. Christ's return is the essential component of the biblical message. The reason for His return is the establishment of His Father's Kingdom on earth, putting an end to man's unhappy and unsuccessful rule. Hence, Christ's return and coming Kingdom is the subject of the message that Christ brought at His first coming. It is this message that He commissioned His disciples and Church to preach to all nations until His return.

In John 18:33 Pilate asked Christ, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." That is the true gospel. Christ, destined to rule this earth as the King of God's Kingdom, was to preach this message—the good news to the world. He came to bear witness to the truth—to tell the world that God's Kingdom is going to rule this earth whether mankind believes it or not.

The disciples of Christ had no doubts about the message Christ was preaching. They understood He was coming again to put an end to this present evil age and to replace it with the glorious Kingdom of God that Daniel described

(Dan. 2:7). The fact that the apostles asked Christ when His Kingdom would be set up proves that they knew about that coming Kingdom and had great expectation of it. Christ's answer to their question was that His Kingdom would not be set up until the gospel of that Kingdom should be preached to all the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14) .

The message of the coming Kingdom of God includes, as an integral part, the preaching of spiritual salvation for all through Jesus Christ--that He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-3) and that He was resurrected (v. 14). The only person who has already been saved is Jesus Christ, who was resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is the pioneer of our salvation, the One who has gone on ahead and shown the way (Heb. 2:10). When He returns, at the end of this age, those who have died in Christ in previous years shall be raised from the dead and given eternal life to rule with Him. Previous to His return, salvation shall have been offered only to a minority; at His return, it shall be made available to all.

Thus, the true gospel is God's message to man through Christ about His coming Kingdom and how humans may enter it. It includes the ultimate purpose of human life and the plan devised by God to bring it about. This is the true destiny of man--to become God. This potential of being born of God as His children in His Family is universally applicable to all mankind--it is the potential of men and women, Jews and Gentiles, all races and peoples, for we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).

This gospel was understood in part by the Old Testament patriarchs and the prophets. It has been preached "since the world began" (Lk. 1:70). Hebrews 11 states that these men died in faith--not yet having received the "promises" (i.e. of the Kingdom of God and eternal life, v. 13)-- "but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" waiting for God's Kingdom. Those who acknowledge the temporary physical existence of this life "declare plainly that they seek a country" (i.e. the goal of God's kingdom, v.14).

Likewise, many Old Testament verses show plainly that those with whom God was ' dealing then knew of His coming Kingdom.

For unto us a child is born, and unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders... Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth and even forever (Is. 9:6-7).

Only God's government and Kingdom could be eternal'-the Kingdom referred to in these verses (see also Dan. 2; Mic. 4; Zech. 14; etc.).

The gospel of the Kingdom of God can be traced from the patriarchs and Old Testament prophets, through the ministry of John the Baptist, and finally to Jesus Christ who greatly expanded our understanding of His coming Kingdom and showed how men might enter it as members of the God Family. Christ commissioned the disciples to preach it in all its important aspects. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20). And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt. 24:14).

The early disciples followed Christ's command to preach this gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations. The Worldwide Church of God also follows this command and views as the primary reason for its existence the commission to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to all nations in accordance with Jesus Christ's instructions. The Church today strives to continue fulfilling that commission with ever-increasing effectiveness, following in the tradition of Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist (Mai. 4:5-6), by preparing the way for Christ's return through the announcement of that gospel message.



WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# PROPHECY

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Biblical prophecy is a historical and contemporary vehicle by which God demonstrates His power over the events of human history. The primary function of predictive prophecy is to show the sequence of events culminating in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The process by which this comes about is outlined in many passages of the Old and New Testaments.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Central to the understanding of biblical prophecy is the recognition that God is Governor and Supreme Ruler, not only of the nations on earth, but of the times and seasons as well. God portrays Himself as the real Author of human experience, the one who has formulated a master plan that shall culminate in the establishment of His government on earth and with the vast majority of mankind qualifying to participate in it as spirit-born sons of God.

One aspect of prophecy is that it proves God's existence. No man or other mortal could predict the future and then bring, it to pass (Is. 41:22ff). But one need not wait until the future to prove God's existence through prophecy. He can look as well to the many Old Testament prophecies telling of Christ's first coming— prophecies that have already been completely fulfilled in their letter and intent. Looking further, the numerous biblical prophecies pointing toward Jesus Christ's return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords are so powerful and so specific that they shall forever eliminate agnosticism and skepticism, once they have been fulfilled.

Prophecy is history written in advance. It is in keeping with the principle, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Thus God has not left man totally in the dark about the general course of future world events.

The term "prophecy" is most often used today to mean "prediction of the future." The original prophets of ancient Israel had a role somewhat different from this. They did predict what would happen in the future, but this was usually in the context of the sins of the nation and the penalties their country would reap if their people did not turn from their evil ways. Sometimes fairly specific sequences of future events were laid down. Normally, however, prophecy was rather general, outlining where the people had gone wrong and what would happen if they did not repent. At various times prophecies or oracles were pronounced against some of Israel's neighbors such as Assyria and Babylon.

Prophecy and its spokesmen (prophets) have played a significant role from virtually the beginning of man's existence (Lk. 1:70; Acts 3:21). This role has not been solely to declare futuristic developments but to affect the behavior of individuals and nations in respect to divine laws and God's master plan.

This relationship between prophecy and morality is clearly and consistently interwoven throughout the Old and New Testaments. As a matter of biblical fact, Jeremiah records this relationship as affecting the future of every nation on earth (Jer. 18;7-10).

The vast spectrum of biblical prophecy is varied in form. Some prophecies were written down as a result of dreams or visions, others by direct communication with heavenly beings. The prophetic words are at times clear and to the point; in other instances the statements are vague and ambiguous.

There are several principles and keys (such as symbolism and duality) that govern the right understanding of prophecy. These must be used consistently with the right methods and proper understanding of the background to arrive at the sought-for answers.

A symbol is something used to represent something else. An example of symbolism in the Bible is the use of the word "mountain" to mean a large nation (Mic. 4:1-4). The Bible in general interprets its own symbols--although many times in verses somewhat removed from the symbolic statement. Duality is the term used when a prophecy has more than one fulfillment. An example of a dual prophecy would be Matthew 24:12-20, which describes both the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and events to occur just before the return of Jesus Christ. (The terms "type" and "antitype" can also be used to describe the original reality and the later understanding of biblical events, ceremonies, persons, or the like.)

The breadth and scope of prophecy has ranged from individuals to nations to the entire earth and beyond. In some cases it is evident that prophecies were announced and fulfilled and no longer have relevance in our day except as examples and lessons. But most major prophecies are yet to be fulfilled. And there is no doubt that this major part is focused on the return of Jesus Christ. It is the one major thread that binds Old and New Testament prophecy together.

In the same way that the prophetic Kingdom of God is the focal point of the gospel, so also is Christ Himself the focal point of all prophecy throughout the Bible in both testaments. The Old Testament is the story of Christ's genealogy, and the prophecies of His first and second comings. Indeed the whole thrust of the Old Testament—including the Levitical sacrificial system which included many symbolic acts typifying Christ as our Savior—is one of looking forward to Christ and His sacrifice to pay the penalty for humanity's sins. The New Testament is the story of His life and teachings and the detailed prophecies of His coming Kz-iiy^om.

No prophecy is an end to itself. Any prophecy only has lasting importance in the final analysis, because it adds to our knowledge of Christ, His Family, His Way of life, His return, His coming Kingdom, and the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the setting up of that Kingdom. If one forgets this simple truth, he may find himself wandering from obscure prophecy to obscure prophecy, restricted to learning about relatively unimportant technicalities while missing the overall thrust and importance of the basic prophecies of Christ's second coming.

It is paradoxical that often the more uncertain points of prophecy tend to receive the most attention. It sometimes seems that these hard-to-decipher prophecies attract interest in direct proportion to how little about them is overtly stated in the Bible. There is nothing wrong with the study of obscure prophecies—indeed, it is quite understandable—so long as the relative importance of prophecies is kept clear, and the prophecies about Jesus Christ are kept clearest. God designed the human mind to enjoy the intellectual "high" which the probing of prophetic secrets affords. "It is the glory of God to conceal things: but the glory of kings to search things out" (Prov. 25:2).

But there is a definite reason why God inspired the clear and obvious prophecies of the Bible to be clear and obvious. He wanted no one to miss the primary point of all prophecy: that Jesus Christ is to return and set up His Kingdom on earth. For one properly to understand prophecy, he must realize that all future prophecies must relate to Christ and His Kingdom, and that for any specific prophecy to be properly understood, it must be seen against the context of Christ's second coming.

Most of the prophecies of the Bible focus on the "end time" (either primarily or dualistically), a time period of colossal, momentous worldwide problems culminating in total human destruction if Christ would not intervene to stop it. This present age is the best candidate for the "time of the end" that history has ever seen. No other previous time has paralleled the present capacity for man to wipe all human life from the earth. The multiple possible methods of human self-annihilation now extant—whether quickly through nuclear, chemical or biological warfare, or more slowly through famine, pollution or disease—fit the biblical pattern. Certainly, the key scripture of Matthew 24:22—"no human being would be saved" (RSV); "not a mortal could survive" (Berkeley); "not a soul would be saved alive" (Moffatt)—could only be literally possible in the age of thermonuclear overkill and global mega-problems.

The commission of Christians as understood by the Worldwide Church of God is to preach the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all nations (Mt. 24:14). It is both a warning and a witness—a warning about mankind's plunge toward annihilation and a witness about what God will do to stop it. This message is basically a prophetic announcement of Christ's second coming and the government He will set up at His return, and it is indeed the primary reason for the Church's existence at this time.

As stated, the focal point of all but a few specific historical prophecies is the "end time," culminating in the return of Jesus Christ. In a number of instances the end time is specifically tied into historical prophecies which have already been fulfilled in a certain degree or type. For example, the long and intricate prophecy of Daniel 11 and 12 leaves known past history at a certain point and definitely envisions the resurrection and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, Matthew 24 describes the fall of Jerusalem in a way which did not differ from its fall in A.D. 70, yet these scriptures also project forward to the "consummation of the age."

Thus there is often a duality in prophecy. Events of past history will be paralleled by events immediately preceding the time of the end. Yet the general outline of end-time events is repeated from prophecy to prophecy with little deviation in basic structure. These may be summarized as follows:

Immediately preceding the intervention of Jesus Christ is a time of unprecedented worldwide trouble. This is expressed in various ways by language which is both literal and metaphorical. However, a consistent theme is "a time such as never has been nor ever shall be," a time when "no flesh shall be saved" from destruction if God did not put a stop to the calamitous course of human events.

A specific sequence of tumultuous geopolitical developments shall focus on the Middle East, and Jerusalem shall be the central spot in and around which these major prophetic events shall take place. The major and minor prophetic books are replete with descriptions about, and admonitions to, Jerusalem in the end time. Great international contention is seen brewing over Jerusalem, which shall move the city even further onto the center stage, as world events rush toward their climax. Indeed two of the key signs that Christ gave to His disciples was that the fulfillment of all biblical prophecy and the subsequent establishment of the Kingdom of God would be at hand "when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" (Lk. 21:20) and when you "shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). Furthermore, the two witnesses of Revelation 11, who shall preach and prophesy against the entire earth, shall apparently center their activities near the site of the Temple in Jerusalem.

God said He would make Jerusalem "a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it" (Zech. 12:3). Though treacherous times are yet ahead for Jerusalem (e.g. Zech. 14:2), God states that He shall go forth into battle against, and shall utterly destroy, all those nations that shall have gathered against Jerusalem (Ch. 14:3,12; 12:9), "and the Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first" (Zech. 12:7) when Jesus Christ returns. In these incredible (and forthcoming) days, God shall greatly strengthen the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:8); He shall pour out His Spirit of grace and supplication on them (v. 10); He shall change the geography of the city when Christ's feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), and when living waters shall flow forth from Jerusalem nourishing the whole earth (Zech. 14:8). "In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'" (Zech. 8:23). "Strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and pray before the Lord" (Zech. 8:22), "and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and

the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain" (Zech 8:3). (Much uncertainty remains, however, even about that which seems sure, as there is difficulty determining the precise time frame of many verses. Zephaniah 2:7, for example, has been applied to both the modern state of Israel in the Middle East and to the future millennial state: "And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: . . . for the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.")

A pivotal set of verses regarding the crucial geopolitical sequence of events in the Middle East is Daniel 11:40-44. These verses describe a "king of the north" who—in response to being "pushed at" by the "king of the south"—shall come against the king of the south "like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over" Verse 41 goes on to add that "He /the king of the north/shall enter also into the glorious land /holy land/, and many countries shall be overthrown." The specific delineation of nations—the Holy Land, Egypt, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Libya, Ethiopia—leads to fascinating speculations as one watches the international scene.

Daniel 2, together with Revelation 13 and 17, expands our understanding of this "king of the north." This kingdom shall be a composite or union of "ten kings" (states or groups of states), which shall constitute a resurrection of the Roman Empire in an economic, political, military and religious confederation that shall figure prominently in the various end-time prophetic geopolitical encounters.

It is clear that the political union of Revelation 13 and 17 is described in terms which people of the first century Mediterranean world would have recognized. Readers would have seen a scantily veiled representation of the Roman Empire with its military might, its political intrigues and its rule over much of the known world. Indeed, the harlot of chapter 17 is called "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth" (v.18), a reference which many would have immediately taken as meaning Rome itself.

This illustrates that prophecy is often given in symbols which would have been directly meaningful to the time and situation in which the prophecy was originally given. This makes the interpretation of prophecy that much more easy and difficult at the same time. The end-time "Babylon" or "Roman Empire" will certainly have characteristics in common with its ancient counterpart,. On the other hand, it will also have differences which prevent an exact correspondence with the historical "type" or symbol. Thus, while one may look at the contemporary scene and make identifications which seem plausible, there is no guarantee that one's speculations are perfectly on target. After all, many of the "prophecy charts," time schemes, reconstructions and the like of the past two millennia have been internally consistent and externally cogent. There was only one real flaw; they were wrong. So, the only worthwhile test of any prophetic presentation is ultimately quite obvious—will it, or will it not, actually occur in reality?

Whatever the prophetic specifics in fact turn out to be, the outlines are now surely clear: There shall be swirling currents of international alliances and confederations vying for world power through economic, political, military and religious control; and the focus of their attention shall be the Middle East in general and Jerusalem in particular.

As the intertwined tangle of world events hurtle toward their awesome conclusion, a complex series of seals, woes, trumpet blasts and plagues are unveiled with ever-increasing regularity, tension and fury. (The book of Revelation describes these futuristic 20th century events in first century language.) At the climax of everything, with mankind literally on the brink of total self-annihilation., Jesus Christ shall return to the earth, accompanied by a spectacular series of heavenly signs (Joel 2:31; Mt. 24:29-31; Rev. 6:12-17). At His return, the dead in Christ shall be resurrected, and the elect still living shall be changed to spirit to rule with Christ.

For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in



Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

This shall be the most majestic moment in universal history, the focal point of the Bible, the time to which prophecy has primarily projected.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

Christ and the saints shall be opposed initially by a system called "Babylon," and leaders referred to as "the Beast" and the "anti-Christ." These shall all have characteristics of persons and institutions of past history, even though they shall have a unique existence at the end time. They shall be destroyed and Satan, who has incited the rebellion against Christ, shall be cast into a place of spiritual restraint (Rev. 20:1-3).

Then begins the millennial rule of Christ and the saints over the earth. After some continuing confrontations and battles (described in Ezek. 38 and 39), God's Kingdom shall be set up over all peoples; and Jesus Christ shall teach them God's laws, the way of happiness and eventually of eternal salvation. This 1,000-year period shall be followed by the Great White Throne Judgment and finally the new heaven and the new earth, both of which are descriptively hazy, as the Bible does not reveal much information about either.

Whenever God has chosen to intervene in human history, major current events were always involved: the course of nations, the role of governments, the fate of kings, and the destinies of peoples. God's direct interaction with, and control over, the kings and governments of Babylon and Persia (Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus) are two prominent Old Testament cases where the nations so involved were the world rulers at the time. The prophecies against Egypt and Assyria are two other examples.

We know of at least one biblical prophecy that "failed"—not because God erred, but because the people fully responded en masse to God's warning and unitedly repented. Jonah was sent to Nineveh to predict its fall in forty days. This was a prophecy of God; it did not take place. This example illustrates the fact that much specific prophecy is contingent upon the actions of the parties involved (Ezek. 33:7-16). The implications for today are obvious; the responsibilities of God's "watchmen" are enormous.

Bible prophecy has a continuing and critical relevance to the course of modern nations and to the destinies of contemporary peoples. The identity of certain 20th century nations in terms of their ancient names is important in the understanding of current and future events. Some nations such as Egypt retain their exact original names. Other names, though somewhat changed, are easily traceable; for example, Judah (or the House of Judah) represents the Jewish people in the modern state of Israel, and Moab and Ammon would seem to represent the Arab peoples in the modern area of Jordan.

The modern identification of the "House of Israel" as the United States and British Commonwealth is an important part of the Church's prophetic understanding. While the United States is said to be specifically represented as "Manasseh" and the British Commonwealth as "Ephraim," the identity of the remainder of the original Israelite tribes is uncertain (though some evaluations have been made, such as equating France with Reuben.)

The identification of the United States and British Commonwealth as the House of Israel leads to serious and momentous prophetic implications for the future. The time of the end is also called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7), because the modern descendants of the House of Israel shall be taken captive by "strangers" and severely oppressed. It shall take the return of Jesus Christ to free modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob's from national humiliation and restore them to the knowledge of their God. This event shall be of such enormous magnitude that Israel's original exodus from Egypt shall be forgotten by comparison (Jer. 23:7-8).

God has given us a general overview of the Church itself in prophecy, with its main commission being to prepare the way for Christ's return by preaching the gospel of the Kingdom

of God to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14) . The admonition to the "watchman" of Ezekiel 33 applies as well:

. . . if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes, and takes any one of them; that man is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand (Ezek. 33:6).

Some in the Church shall eventually be brought before kings in a capacity of either preaching the gospel or perhaps even in confrontation (as were some of the prophets and apostles—Mk. 13:9). Although some true believers shall be killed, the majority shall be protected during the great tribulation (Rev. 7:3; 11:6). Apparently while a significant part of the Church is in safety, God shall anoint two special witnesses to preach to the whole world as explained in Revelation 11. This special commission of theirs shall continue until the return of Christ, when the saints (those converted Christians now about to obtain salvation) shall be resurrected to rule with Jesus in His Kingdom (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Although enormous numbers of incredibly detailed prophetic schemes have been deduced from the Bible, the success record of correctly predicting future events and dates has been rather meager. Hindsight has always been more successful than foresight in determining the reality of prophecy. Certainly the injunction to "watch at all times" (Lk. 21:36) must be heeded, but the Bible does not give any major examples of people acquiring specific predictive knowledge of the future from the written prophecies alone. Yet, as mankind's history approaches "the time of the end," a generation when "many shall run to an fro, and knowledge shall be increased," prophecy in general and the book of Daniel in particular shall become progressively more understandable (Dan. 12:4).

Shall there come a time when God will directly inspire some of His servants to literally prophesy about imminent world events? Biblical indications and precedents would suggest so. Joel 2:28—"I will pour out my spirit Upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions"—was applied by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But

the context of Joel 2 is clearly just "before the great and terrible day of the Lord" (v.30-31), indicating that the primary fulfillment of Joel 2:28 is yet ahead.

What is abundantly clear from the Bible is that the absolute fact of the return of Jesus Christ to this earth to set up the world-ruling government of God shall be in a time of great human turmoil and disaster. Also emphasized in the Bible is the sequence of events immediately surrounding Christ's return (primarily before, but after as well), not the long history of centuries between New Testament times and the end time.

But nowhere does the Bible encourage speculation to the point of predicting specific dates when a prophecy is to be fulfilled, and then predicating one's life around what is supposed to happen on or by such a date. To the contrary, we are told, "But of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt. 24:36). We are admonished that "the faithful and wise servant" shall be aggressively and persistently doing God's Work at the return of Christ, and shall not have shrunk back from life's responsibilities because of his (real or imagined) interpretations of prophecy (Mt. 24:36 ff).

Though prophecy has always been intriguing and exciting to human beings who have constantly sought to know the future, Paul's strong admonition is that "if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2). Love, then, is the essential characteristic of the Christian—it is the clearest stamp of God's Spirit in action. Interestingly enough, Paul continues his contrast of love and prophecy in this chapter. "Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away /fail, KJV/ . . . . For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

The study of prophecy can be an interesting and rewarding experience. It is indeed placed in scripture to be analyzed and appreciated in a Christian's relationship to God. However, it is yet unfolding and we must be careful to let events in the real world guide our understanding of the times and seasons, rather than leaping ahead with speculations not grounded on events. As we draw nearer to the climax of mankind's civilization, we will see the convergence of major prophetic developments. They shall no doubt take sharper focus and point us more precisely to the surest and most important prophecy of all—the return of Jesus Christ.

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **RESURRECTIONS**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The hope of all mankind and the promise to the Christian is the resurrection from the dead. There are references to four resurrections in the Bible: 1) the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the pioneer of our salvation; 2) the resurrection of the saints at the return of Christ when the true believers shall become spirit-composed members of God's Family; 3) the resurrection back to physical life of all who have ever died without having understood God's way, for their first opportunity for salvation; 4) the resurrection of all those who have refused to repent and have rejected God's way, to be consumed in the lake of fire (called the second death).

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The resurrection from the dead is the only real hope of man, whether he believes it or even knows about it. It gives him final, ultimate victory over death which is the common enemy of every human being (1 Cor. 15:26). Paul referred to the "hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago" (Tit. 1:2). When Paul was brought before Felix, he admitted that "according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God which these themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:14-15).

The resurrection was the central theme of the apostles' message which they preached powerfully. It was often controversial. Paul was called a "babbler" by certain Greek philosophers "because he preached Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18); the resurrection from the dead was subjected to ridicule by some, and it intrigued others. "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, 'We will hear you again about this'" (Acts 17:32).

And hear again they shall; not only those ancient Greeks, but every man, woman and child who ever drew breath on this earth. None who have ever died—in whatever place at whatever time—are forgotten by God. Numerous scriptures make plain that a resurrection from the dead is an integral part of God's plan for all mankind (Job 19:2 5-27; Jn. 5: 21-29; Jn. 11:23-25; etc.).

Jesus Christ was the first to be resurrected from physical death to eternal life. He was in fact "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). His resurrection is extremely important to the Christian because it proves the viability of God's plan. We have "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable" (1 Pet. 1:3); but "if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). Christ's resurrection demonstrates positively that God can and shall resurrect a person who has God's Spirit dwelling within him. It is the

faith and belief that God shall resurrect the Christian as Christ was resurrected that encourages one to continue along the path of salvation. "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom. 6:5).

Jesus Christ is called the "first fruits" of the dead, because he was the first of many who shall follow Him in the resurrection, but "each in his own order." 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 explains further:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

The scriptures record three resurrections for three different classifications of persons. The first is prophesied to occur at the return of Jesus Christ. A comparison of the pertinent verses indicates that this first resurrection shall include all saints that have lived and died from Adam's time until Christ's second coming, including those still alive when He comes (although technically, they shall be "changed" rather than resurrected-- (1 Cor. 15:51). This resurrection is from the nothingness of physical death to the incredible majesty of spiritual life as members of God's Family. "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

Another resurrection is prophesied for the multiple billions of human beings who have lived and died never having had a chance for salvation. This resurrection is from physical death to a second physical life during which a person shall be given God's Spirit and the knowledge of salvation. The truth of God shall be opened to their understanding at this time and their lives shall be lived according to the biblical precepts. Ezekiel 37:1-14

paints a breathtaking picture of this resurrection to physical life, "Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves" (verse 12). Though only Israel is discussed, this is because it shall be the example—the nation that shall show how God's plan works; thus, all nations and peoples of the earth are included in Ezekiel 37 by implication. This is confirmed by Revelation 20:11-12:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.

The scriptures record one final resurrection. It is mentioned in various passages (e.g. Dan. 12:2-3; Jn. 5:21-29; etc.), but is explained most precisely in Revelation 20:14-15. Here John explains that the unrepentant—those who have had a chance for salvation but have adamantly rejected it—shall be resurrected to physical life and cast into the lake of fire where they shall be consumed. The death they suffer is called in Revelation 20 "the second death" (v. 14), which occurs only for those whose names are not found written in the book of life—that is, those who have not obtained salvation (v. 15). This final resurrection is in a sense a mercy killing for those to whom eternal life in their state of rebellion would eventually mean extreme agony and misery.

The first resurrection of saints to eternal life and the subsequent resurrection of the innumerable multitudes to physical life will be moments of unimaginable emotion when loved ones who thought they were separated forever—parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives—shall be suddenly reunited. To all of them it will be as though no time had passed, like awakening in the morning after a solid night's sleep without dreams; it will be the next instant of their consciousness from the instant of their death no matter how they might have died or how long ago it might have been.



Immediately it is to be expected that numerous questions about these awesome events will be raised. Paul asked and answered the most obvious one himself. "But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'" (1 Cor. 15:35). He then explains that, just as different animals have different types of bodies, so the body of the resurrection is different from all others. It is celestial, imperishable, glorious and spiritual.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo.<sup>1</sup> I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:42-57)

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **JUDGMENT**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The time of one's judgment is the time of his opportunity for salvation, extending from one's calling by God until his death (or the resurrection). During this judgment period a person's mind is opened to understand God's way, and his actions and attitudes are being evaluated by God in the light of His way of life and His law. All human beings from all time shall have a full opportunity for salvation either now (for the Church), or during the one-thousand year reign of Christ on earth, or in the Great White Throne Judgment. Those who shall qualify for God's Kingdom— the overwhelming majority—shall inherit eternal life, and those who deliberately reject God's way shall be consumed in the lake of fire.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

One of the most awesome truths of God is that all mankind from all time shall have an opportunity for salvation—the attainment of eternal life in the Family of God. No human being is doomed forever simply because he has never heard of Christ's name or never really understood God's purpose and plan. God makes it adequately plain that He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). He intends to give everyone a chance to know and understand His truth and to have the opportunity to be with Him in His glorious Kingdom (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

Combined with this thrilling truth that all men shall have an opportunity for salvation is the fact that all men will not receive this opportunity at the same time. The time during which each individual is receiving his chance is the time of his "judgment." The term "judgment," as used in this context, is not restricted to passing sentence. It rather implies a process, a period of time during which a person's mind is opened to understand God's plan, and during which his actions are under daily scrutiny by God in the light of that understanding. God is intimately concerned with His children, and works in their lives to produce the best ultimate results. The parable of the tares of the field shows that Christians start out as seeds and must grow until the harvest (Mt. 13:36-43). Of course, this judgment process shall in most people's lives cover a period of many years. It is only at the end of this period that God shall make the decision of whether or not that person shall enter His Kingdom at the resurrection.

But judgment involves more than just making a "yes" or "no" decision, more than the simple determination of whether a person shall be granted salvation; for, indeed, the overwhelming majority shall make it. Judgment also involves the reward that God shall give to each person who qualifies. There are different positions and responsibilities in God's Family. As Jesus related in the parable of the pounds (Lk. 19:12-27), the servants who used their pounds profitably were all given positions of rulership, but the level or degree of their position was directly proportional to

how much they had accomplished. The parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30) shows that God rewards each person according to what he has accomplished in relationship to what he had to start with. The servant who started with two talents and made two received the same reward as the servant who started with five and made five.

God has divided His plan into three great judgment periods, each of which deals specifically with a different classification of persons. The first period of judgment began at the creation of man and shall continue until the return of Jesus Christ. During this era, God has not chosen to call the vast majority of persons, but rather a small group—"the elect" (Rom. 8:28ff). These "elect" have had their minds opened to understand God's truth and have been given God's Holy Spirit in this age. For these persons—who compose the Church or "house of God"—the period of judgment is now. "For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). Those whom God has called now are not called because of their own goodness or even because of an inner desire to serve God, but by virtue of God's mercy (Rom. 9:15-16).

God has not called the masses now because He wants man to learn by experience that his way apart from God is the way of death (Prov. 14:12). Those whom He does call now are called for the express purpose of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14; 28:19-20) and to prepare to become rulers in God's millennial Kingdom (Rev. 5:10). All those who have qualified for God's Kingdom from Adam's time to the return of Christ shall be resurrected at Jesus' return. The end of this first judgment period is thus marked by the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6).

During His thousand-year reign, Christ and the saints shall re-establish God's government on earth (Mic. 4:1-4) and shall reconstruct society so that in every way it conforms to God's holy laws. God shall also pour out His Spirit upon all those who will be alive during this time, and shall open their minds to understand the gospel and give them a chance for salvation. The millennium thus marks the second great judgment period of God—the time when the human beings who live on into the new age (from the present age) and those subsequently born as their offspring shall have their opportunity for salvation.

After the thousand-year period, there is the "Great White Throne" judgment. This spectacular event epitomizes the time when all who have ever lived and died without having had a chance for salvation—never having heard about Jesus Christ and the plan of God, or never having had their eyes opened to truly understand the gospel—shall be resurrected from the dead to physical life (Rev. 20:11ff). This time their minds shall be opened to a full understanding of God's laws and His truth.

Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves . . . And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I have done it, says the Lord. (Ezek. 37: 12-14)

This third judgment period is the greatest of the three because it includes the innumerable multitudes of all humanity who have lived and died in ignorance of God's way.

Although God wants all to come to the knowledge of His truth and earnestly desires that all obtain salvation, it is nevertheless true that some few shall totally reject God and lose out on eternal life. Those who have adamantly rejected this truth—those who have committed the unpardonable sin by not asking God to pardon their sins--shall be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). These individuals are those who would never repent of their sins and shall therefore be put out of their misery by a merciful God. It would be cruel punishment for God to make a rebellious person live forever under His government when that individual has permanently rejected God's government in his life by his actions and attitudes.

God's fairness, concern and love for mankind is exemplified by the three judgment periods outlined above. His plan for salvation includes ample opportunity for all those who have ever lived and died to live a full physical life under God's laws, and then to qualify to enter His Kingdom, and, ultimately, to gain eternal life as full members of His Divine Family.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# LAW OF GOD

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The law of God as revealed in the Bible is a good, right and perfect system of eternal directives and principles which reflects God's character and serves as a means of expressing His love toward man. God's law teaches man how to properly worship God, how to love his fellowman, how to live life abundantly, and, at the same time, how to prepare for an eternal spiritual life in the Family of God. The law of God is represented in both the Old and the New Testaments and is expressed by both physical actions and spiritual motivations.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Worldwide Church of God looks to the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments, as its fundamental source of doctrine and teachings. We accept Christ's statement that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). Jesus plainly accepted the authenticity and inspiration of the entire Old Testament with its three major divisions—the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (Lk. 24:44)—as being relevant for the New Testament ministry of the Church of God. In support of this, the apostle Paul wrote: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore, the character, personality and specific teachings of Jesus Christ—both as the Rock that went with Israel in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 10:4; Deut. 32:15, 18) and as the son of man and the son of God in the New Testament—are the foundations of our biblical understanding of man's relationship to the law of God.

God's law in its fullest, most complete sense is spiritual and could not be discovered or discerned by man without direct revelation from God. The fullness of God's law involves every facet of personal and collective human existence. Though its expression may change as the circumstances change, the eternal spiritual law of God is unchanging and is always the ultimate object of any biblical law code or instruction expressed in human language. God's laws are all designed to lead to a consummate knowledge and understanding of God and of the ultimate purpose of life, and to supreme godly love and character.

Divine law is the totality of the means whereby God instructs man how to live most abundantly in this present physical life, and how to most effectively prepare for the future spiritual life in the Kingdom of God.

The New Testament writers clearly express a positive attitude towards God's law as magnified and given spiritual impact and import by Jesus Christ. Jesus stated that "all the law and the prophets"—the entire Old Testament—were based on the overall principles of love toward God and love toward one's fellow man (Mt. 22:36-40). Furthermore, Christ made it very clear that He did not come to destroy the law or the prophets (Mt. 5:17). John tells us that sin is the transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4); and Paul says that the law is holy and just and good (Rom. 7:12).

The overall approach to God's law in the New Testament is summed up in the statement, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:4). However, in fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of magnifying the law and making it honorable (Is. 42:21), Christ instituted certain changes. Christ Himself specifically abrogated certain statements in the law, in relation to swearing and to marriage, for example, to bring the laws given at Sinai more into conformity with the original intent of the commandments upon which they were based. Moreover, Acts 15 makes clear that the law in regard to circumcision—which had antedated the Covenant at Sinai—was not binding upon Gentile Christians. Therefore, based upon this example of God's Church using the power entrusted to it by Christ to make binding decisions (Mt. 16:19), the Worldwide Church of God recognizes the same administrative responsibilities—based upon New Testament principles and examples—to determine the application of Old Testament laws upon its members today.

#### DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The term "law" is intrinsic to any systematic study of theology. Yet the English word "law" carries a narrow, legal connotation which may cause a misunderstanding of the biblical terms. A number of words in both the Old and the New Testaments are commonly translated "law" in the major English versions. These words, however, often admit of broader meaning than the normal English usage and do not necessarily have the legalistic overtones of their English counterparts (or are otherwise unequivalent).

A thorough study of the Hebrew and Greek terminology in the Bible would be out of place here because of length and technicality, though some of the major terms are briefly discussed later on in this paper. But it might be helpful to illustrate why "law" may not always be a suitable equivalent of the original. An important term in the Old Testament and later Judaism is the well-known Hebrew word torah. It may refer to law as a legal system; it may refer to specific regulations and statutes. Yet torah is often used in the broad sense of anything considered traditional, customary and authoritative. Perhaps the best English equivalent is "teachings" though even that may not be broad enough in meaning.



One needs to be careful that he does not assume laws are necessarily categorized by the Hebrew (or English) terms used. There is no consistent terminology for the various types of laws. For example, one might assume a distinction between "statute" and "ordinance" as found in certain translations. However, neither term consistently translates the same Hebrew word. Thus, the Hebrew word is variously translated as "law," "statute," "ordinance," and "commandment" in the major English versions. The Ten Commandments are never called by the Hebrew term usually translated "commandment" (miswah)—they are simply referred to as the ten "words" (devarim). As mentioned above, the word torah means much more than just the English word "law."

It is also important to note that the term "law of Moses" is itself used interchangeably with the term "law of God." Thus, in Nehemiah 8, the expression alternates between "law of Moses" in verse 1 and "law of God" in verses 8 and 18. The term "law of Moses" is generally used as a designation for the Pentateuch or "Torah." The term "law of Moses" would thus apply to anything in those five books, whether it be the Ten Commandments or the sacrificial laws or circumcision. Such usage is confirmed in the New Testament as, for example, in Luke 24:44.

Thus, the occurrence of "law" in an English translation may imply—depending on the original Hebrew or Greek and the context—"legal system," "regulation," "sacrificial ritual," "Ten Commandments," "principle," "natural law," "the Pentateuch," "customary tradition," "belief," etc. It is therefore impossible to give a simple definition of "law." The concept of "law" in the Bible is complex and cannot be defined or summarized in any brief way without danger of oversimplification. The very complexity of the subject requires that the many aspects of the biblical concept of law be discussed. No adequate understanding of the teaching of God's Church on law can be gained without a thorough and careful reading of the entire overview given here. Seldom is an "either/or" position taken. The Church believes in freedom and law, faith and works, love and law, forgiveness and justice, reward and selfless service, grace and law, to name only a few of the traditional dichotomies found in treatments of the subject.

The Bible itself sets the tone for the use of the term "law." Sometimes law is viewed as the only important thing, sometimes as a good thing; at other times it is considered something obsolete, inadequate or incomplete. Perhaps the epitome of biblical discussion on the subject is found in Paul's writings, yet it is obvious that Paul has been frequently misunderstood.

Love is the Fulfillment of the Law

God is love. That is His nature and essence (1 Jn. 4:8). It is only from God that we can learn what real and perfect love is. A great deal depends on the guidance of His Holy Spirit, but God's love is essentially expressed and taught through His law (Rom. 13:10; 1 Jn. 5:3). It is the major vehicle by which His love has been made known to mankind.

If we human beings had the love that God has--perfect, complete and limitless love--we would have no need of an external moral law (though we should still need God to reveal to us His Sabbath, holy days, spiritual meanings, ceremonial laws, etc.). If human beings had the full knowledge of love plus the full power to express that love that God has, there should be no need of external guidelines or codified statements or definitions or examples of any kind: we would always express love to its full extent. But we are not God, and we do not have the perfect love which is exemplified in Him. Human beings must learn love. Christians must grow toward that absolute embodiment of love of which all fall so short. This is the purpose of God's law.

How can one know love unless he is taught what it is and how it works? Ultimately, it is learned by practice. Yet before one can practice it, there must be some sort of beginning. The various aspects of God's law in the Bible are designed to give a start to the individual. These aspects then lead him to greater and greater understanding of this concept until he learns to live by internalized spiritual motivations which, while no longer adequately expressible in human words, impel him to continue to fulfill the objective of God's law which is love at the highest plane.

The concept of love can be epitomized, albeit inadequately, in the following statement: Love is both whole-hearted worship toward God and outgoing concern for one's fellow man equal to the natural concern for self. This is seen in Matthew 22, where Jesus says that the great commandment in the law is to:

. . . love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,  
and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is  
the first and great commandment. And the second is  
like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.  
On these two commandments hang all the law and the  
prophets. (Vv.36-40)

Here, Jesus states that our love must be first toward God with full fervency, and then toward our neighbor in a manner equal to our love for ourselves. In fact, these two great command-

ments of God are the very foundation of God's law on which all the law and all the prophets hang. All the biblical books on the law and the prophets teach one, by example as well as by command, how to show love toward his neighbor. Many of the basic principles of loving one's fellow man are well-known; the basic principles of love of neighbor have appeared in almost every culture, age and religion (cf. Rom. 2:14-15).

Yet love of God is a point about which there is considerable difference of opinion. For that reason God gave four basic commands or principles that are the first four of the great Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-11). The last six proceed to give basic principles of love of fellow human beings (Ex. 20:12-17). Thus, the two "great commandments" of love of God and love of man are made more specific in the broad precepts of the Ten Commandments (cf. Deut. 5:7-21).

Limited as they are, however, human beings find it difficult to translate broad principles into practical application. Therefore, when God gave the Ten Commandments to ancient Israel—though it is clear they had already been known for thousands of years—He did not stop there. He went on to give them more detailed instructions, some of them rather broad, others very minute and detailed, applicable only to a specific situation in a specific time or culture. (These will be discussed later at length.)

It is in the detailed physical regulations that man first finds himself able to grasp what God's law is all about (cf. Jas. 1:22-25). Almost everyone understands the need today for a speed limit or a no-parking sign. Likewise, in ancient Israel, there was little chance for dispute about the need for a parapet surrounding one's roof (Deut. 22:8). These are very tangible regulations which anyone can come to grips with. It is these detailed instructions—often time or culturally bound—which begin to lead one toward the higher concepts of God's law and hence "love." This is assuming that one obeys them and reflects on their purpose: to teach one how to love God and how to love his fellow man.

The command to build a guard rail around one's roof has variable application in societies today. It would only serve as a bird perch in some areas of the world. Yet in the society of ancient Israel, as also in certain modern forms of architecture, it was, and is, common to use the roof as living quarters or for other similar purposes. One who did not protect the users of his roof with a guarding parapet was guilty of negligence and, consequently, of not loving his neighbor. One cannot love his neighbor, after all, if he does not correct a potential hazard to life and limb.

As the individual regulates his life by these more narrow ordinances, he starts to perceive what it means to think of others. He begins to grasp the meaning of living a life which shows concern for others and is not just purely egocentric. Suddenly, the minor regulations have significance greater than their specific object or immediate concern. The man who would never think of killing a neighbor in cold blood might accomplish the same act—through unthinking carelessness—by not penning up his berserk bull. The one who caused an innocent person to be condemned by his false testimony would be as guilty of his blood as if he had struck him with a meat cleaver.

The detailed regulations, whether statute, ordinance or judgment (the terminology is of little significance, as already discussed, since the Hebrew terms do not correspond exactly with the English ones) lead to more general precepts. As the individual attempts to apply the more minute instructions and in so doing considers their purpose, he comes to see how they relate to one another and how they incorporate broader concepts. These broader concepts themselves cohere to form the basic structure of love embodied in the Ten Commandments. Through these two major facets unfold love of God and love of man—neither of which can be omitted from the total meaning of love.

At this point, the artificial dilemma regarding the spirit of the law and the letter of the law takes on a different perspective. Ultimately, the love of God can be discerned only through His Spirit. It cannot be expressed in human language in other than inadequate form. This is why knowledge of God's love is conveyed through legal, ethical and moral regulations. These instructions are not ends in themselves. They point to the true end and provide a means of reaching it. They were not, in their deepest significance, set up as a code by which a person could be adjudged innocent or guilty. They were designed to show the way to love of God and love of man.

Naturally, in any human society which does not understand God's perfect love, some sort of administrative system of reward and punishment is necessary. In the same way, the concept of sin as the breaking of God's law is a New Testament concept, and sin plays an important part in New Testament theology. Yet it is due to the failings of human nature, not because God is simply interested in the law as a means of judging sin. Ultimately, the law points beyond the level of sin, transgression and living by the letter to the love of God. To fulfill the law to its

greatest extent is to have perfect love. Conversely, to have perfect love means to fulfill the law in its most spiritual manifestation.

### Law in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a collection of diverse types of literature. The first five books, which compose the Pentateuch, are often called the "Torah" or "Law." However, the Hebrew term torah, as mentioned earlier, means "teachings" rather than just "law" in the legal, codified sense. Further, even though detailed regulations tend to be centered in the Pentateuch, they are not limited to that section of the Old Testament, nor is the Pentateuch simply a law code in the strictest sense.

Some laws in the Old Testament clearly encompass broad principles while others are quite specific, minute regulations. The biblical text does not itself always clearly distinguish between the more important and the less important. That is why one finds many admonitions to meditate on the law (e.g. Ps. 119:97,99). Thus, even though these were all laws originating with God, some are more permanent and spiritual in nature than are others. (For example, the whole sacrificial system of the Tabernacle and Temple were important—even vital—for a certain period of time, but the New Testament shows that these regulations are not for all men at all times. They served a specific function for a certain time and in a particular place while always symbolically pointing to deeper spiritual truths.)

Old Testament laws can be broken down into various categories:

- 1) Broad spiritual principles which cover various lesser laws and regulations. The Ten Commandments are the primary example, as is clearly recognized by Old Testament scholars. For example, the seventh commandment—specifically against adultery—is a broad principle regulating human sexual relations. Detailed instructions concerning the types of sexual practices to be avoided are found in Leviticus 18. These latter fall under the category of "civil regulations" (category no. 2 below) but are summarized by the broad principle of the seventh commandment.

2) Civil regulations for the Israelite theocracy. These cover a number of different types of regulations. The laws about building a parapet around one's roof, cutting down fruit trees while besieging a city, taking the mother bird with her young, inheritance, cities of refuge, covering an open pit, penning up a dangerous bull, leaving the corners and the forgotten sheaf for the poor, and many other instructions had to do with the proper conduct of a physical society within a national state. Since Israel was a theocracy, many of these regulations had religious overtones, even while being primarily civil in function, and often pointed toward the broad principle of the law. To these were added the various decisions made by the judges.

3) Laws of cleanliness and ritual purity. These are hard to separate since both are often included under the same instructions. For example, one who touched a dead body had to wash himself. This is the cleanliness part of the instructions. Yet he also remained "unclean" (Hebrew tame) for a certain length of time (Lev. 11:39-40). Thus, both physical cleanliness and ritual cleanliness are included in the same instructions.

4) Laws relating to the sacrificial system and other regulations having to do with the religious liturgy or serving a symbolic or disciplinary function. For example, individuals were to sew blue fringes on their garments as a physical ritual to remind them of God's commandments (Num. 15:37-40). Circumcision was also a religious ceremony of great importance. Whole sections of the Pentateuch (e.g. Lev. 1-10) give detailed instructions about the conduct of the sacrificial system. The sacrifices were, of course, religious in purpose since they had to do with worship and expiation of sin (Lev. 4:26,35; 5:16).

One can use the analogy of a modern free country to better understand the various levels of Old Testament law. All instructions were part of that law. None were to be slighted or ignored. The breaking of any law brought some sort of penalty on the violator, though the penalties varied in severity. The same is true with the laws within, for example, the United States. The Constitution says nothing about speed limits, property taxes, zoning, or sexual conduct. Rather, laws are broadly laid out and worded to serve as an overall guide for all generations. All other laws—whether national, regional or local—must conform to the principles laid down in the Constitution. These laws themselves vary in importance. Some cover

only a certain state or region or city. They may need to be changed according to the time and circumstances. In addition, a certain body of common law has grown up through individual court decisions (cf. the "judgments" of the Old Testament).

Category no. 1 might correspond to a national constitution—such as that of the United States—and cover all men at all times. Category no. 2 might be analogous to national laws passed by national legislators. That is, they may incorporate regulations which have permanent value for various human societies. On the other hand, some of the regulations may be culturally bound and require modification or replacement to remain relevant in a changing society. For example, the laws of inheritance were very important for ancient Israel but are less useful today. The seventh-year land Sabbath could be applied in a nation under God's government but is difficult for all Christians everywhere to apply in today's society. Thus, the specific law sometimes does not fit the changed situation brought about by the vicissitudes of time and circumstance.

Yet, one should not allow the concept of broad principles to devalue minute and detailed regulations. It would be impossible to run a country only on the broad principles of a constitution. Other laws, statutes and ordinances are also required. Speed limits and obedience to traffic lights may not be the most spiritual or "moral" of laws, but they are nonetheless essential for man in a mechanized society. Such ordinances are the result of applying moral and ethical principles (not running into another automobile does, after all, have ethical consequences); chaos would ensue if they were suddenly stricken from the books. To say that a law is of lesser value or more narrow in application than another is not to say that it is of no concern or that it can be ignored. The same applies to the detailed laws of the Old Testament.

No survey, even a lengthy one, can begin to cover all the examples or details of law in the Old Testament. The basic types of law and their function have been outlined above. Following is a brief historical survey, given to illustrate that outline and to show that law was by no means static during Old Testament times, even during the history of Israel.

The Old Testament, especially the book of Genesis, records the existence of extensive legal principles and

legal codes long before the foundation of the nation of Israel. The last hundred years of archaeological discoveries have seen the discovery of legal codes and regulations from various parts of the ancient Near East. Thus, the particular codification given under the Sinai covenant was hardly the giving of law where none had previously existed. In fact, many of the regulations found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers were only a reaffirmation of accepted regulations which had been known for centuries.

The account of the Garden of Eden is the first reference on instructions to human beings. Adam and Eve were instructed in the proper use and enjoyment of their idyllic physical surroundings; the one thing expressly forbidden was partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This first simple instruction was given for the good of Adam and Eve, yet they disobeyed and reaped the consequences.

Their sons, Cain and Abel, knew of God and worshipped Him by means of a burnt offering. For a reason not fully specified in the Genesis account, Cain's offering was not acceptable. His jealousy of Abel, whose sacrifice was accepted, produced the first murder. This brief episode shows several important points: worship was permitted through certain ritualistic ceremonies; this worship was regulated by some sort of unwritten code which Cain violated; Cain knew he was wrong to slay his brother and tried to cover it up; two sins--violations of law--are pointed out: murder and lying. It is therefore impossible to refer to the period before Sinai as a time of no law.

Similarly, the Flood of Noah came because "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Wickedness and evil are capable of existence only when there is a standard against which they can be judged. That standard does not have to be written down or externally codified; it can be a common understanding to which the term "natural law" or perhaps even "common law" could be applied. The point is that law had to exist before actions could be pronounced good or evil.

Throughout the patriarchal period, various statements are made which evidence at least an implicit code or system of law with grave results for violation and great blessings for obedience. Perhaps the classic capsule statement of



the situation is contained in Genesis 26 in a reference to Abraham: "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; . . . and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. . . . because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (vv. 3-5).

Abraham, Isaac and their descendants were blessed for obedience to well-known laws and commandments. The fact that these are not specifically enumerated does not mean that they did not exist. On the contrary, many of them can be known by the specific examples which presuppose them. The following are examples of implicit laws in Genesis. Adultery being punishable: "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us" (26:10); homosexuality being drastically punished (chapter 19); circumcision being a requirement for descendants of Abraham as a sign of God's covenant with him (chapter 17); private property being respected (chapter 23); standard weights being used in business dealings (23:16); theft being wrong (31:19,30,32). Many other examples could be cited.

Therefore, when God brought Israel out of Egypt, it was no new thing for Him to lay down regulations for them. The first command concerned the institution of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. Between Rameses and Sinai, a number of different commands were given to the Israelites. On Mount Sinai God spoke the Ten Commandments Himself and wrote them on two tables of stone. These two symbolic acts showed that the Ten Commandments were to be considered more fundamental than the other laws. (The Sinaitic covenant included a number of laws besides the Decalogue, Ex. 20-24).

Later, other regulations were added. A significant number of these centered on the sacrificial system at the altar. Sacrifices were not new; they had been offered at least since the time of Cain and Abel. What were new were many of the specific laws about the conduct of the ritual worship. Yet we find that, with the introduction of the Temple at Jerusalem centuries later, many of these rules were modified. In fact the rules about building altars in Exodus 20:24-26 were soon changed and no altars except the one associated with the Tabernacle were allowed (Deut. 12). Deuteronomy covers many of the same basic regulations found in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers but often modifies

them or adapts them to new situations. So it is that in the Pentateuch itself we see a development of the legal code. A change in the administration or the environment often changes the interpretation and application of the law without altering the underlying principle. Rules given at one time for one situation were already being modified because of new situations (such as the change from nomadic desert-dwelling, in Exodus, to agricultural living in the land of Canaan, in Deuteronomy). Thus, God's Word establishes from its beginning, the responsibility of God's people, to apply His laws to their changing contemporary situations.

Some of the laws arising with Israel were already known in the same or a similar form elsewhere in the ancient Near East, as the book of Genesis and the literature of other ancient peoples show. A code of law was accepted as in any functioning national state today. Even where the word of the monarch was law, a common system of conduct for the average citizen was still very much in evidence. After all, the king could not judge every single case or decide every little matter in the day-to-day life of even a small city-state, much less a huge empire.

It is true that a number of the laws of the Old Testament can seem somewhat less than ideal from our modern viewpoint. They sound strange, indeed "primitive," to our modern ears. For example, slavery is only regulated, polygamy is allowed and women have a decidedly inferior position. However, when the instructions dealing with these subjects are viewed against their background in the ancient Near East, many of them are remarkably progressive. That is, they would have been considered extremely liberal, even radical, for that time. These laws appear to have been instituted for the regulation and mollification of previously existing customs. Whether the customs themselves were good or bad was not the point. Rather, since eradication of the bad was impossible, God gave laws to ameliorate the existing situation.

Such accepted institutions as slavery were regulated to help protect the indentured servant and the bond slave. Polygamy was normal for the time, yet the laws of the Pentateuch saw to it that at least inheritance should be conducted fairly. A rapist normally had to marry his victim, if unmarried, to protect her since she would have had a hard time finding a husband. Of course, if the character of the rapist was clearly depraved—that is, if

his crime was not an isolated example of lust getting the better of him but evidence of a basic flaw of character—the father of the victim could still disallow it. From our modern point of view, the law may look peculiar. For the society at the time, it was a means designed to make the best of a bad situation. Similarly, just because God gave specific laws regarding divorce, it did not mean that He approved the practice (cf. Mt. 19:8). God was simply eliminating the possibility of continuous wife-swapping (Deut. 24:1-4).

These examples are again evidence of a progression in the revelation and the understanding of God's ultimate spiritual law. Even in the New Testament the institution of slavery is nowhere condemned outright. Yet the Church today, from its perspective of two thousand more years of history and guided by God's Spirit clearly recognizes that slavery is contrary to God's purpose for man.

A look at law in the Old Testament would not be complete without examining certain prophetic Old Testament passages which indicate the reinstatement of a temple and regular sacrificial system during the Messiah's—Christ's— reign in the Millennium (Is. 66:20-23; Ezek. 40-48; Zech. 14:20-21; Mai. 3:1-4; etc.) Why should such physical rituals have a place when Christ Himself is ruling?

There seem to be three interdependent reasons for a temple and sacrificial system. First is because, in addition to allowing Jerusalem to serve as a religious center, such a system shall enable a restored Israel to serve as an example to the world. The priesthood, which in times past did not consistently execute its duties with the proper care and willingness, shall now show the world how those duties should be carried out (Ezek. 44:5ff). Israel as a model physical nation shall also have an important part in setting the social, ethical and religious examples.

The second reason is somewhat similar. Christ shall have established His rule over physical, unconverted nations. They must be led gradually to the place of repenting, being converted and receiving the Holy Spirit. Just as the temple ritual was important to the ancient Israelites without God's Spirit, so the re-established ritual of sacrifices shall give them a physical means of growing towards a spiritual understanding of God. The necessary

education shall take a good deal of time. The temple shall serve as an important part--the center--of religious education.

Thirdly and finally, just as the sacrifices of ancient Israel pointed forward to a coming Savior who was to pay the supreme sacrifice for the sins of the world, so in the Millennium the sacrifices will point back to that sacrifice and give people a greater understanding of Christ our Savior (in much the same way as the Passover service does today), the consequences of sin, and the meaning of salvation.

### Law in the New Testament

The importance of law in the Old Testament is easily accepted even though its exact implications may be debated. It is the subject of God's law in the New Testament that has been much misunderstood. The question affects not only the totality of the Christian life, but also how the New Testament--and its relationship with the Old Testament--is understood. It would be out of place in this section to attempt to take up the entire New Testament teachings on conversion, salvation, morality, conduct and so on. (Many of these points are discussed in detail under other major headings.) Here we will therefore concentrate on the background situation in New Testament times, the reason why certain new approaches to law are emphasized, and why some contrasts are made with the Old Testament position.

The New Testament is very much rooted in the Judaism of its time. The picture of Judaism in the first century is only now becoming clear as a result of recent scholarship, while many old assumptions (unfortunately widespread in many of the major reference works) are no longer tenable. The reconstruction of early first-century Judaism that emerges from new methods and documents is quite different from that of Judaism after the period 70-135 A.D.

The Judaism of New Testament times was rooted in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible was the major traditional literature (even if read only in Greek translation as it was by many in the Diaspora). The religious center was the Temple and its sacrificial system. There were also many different popular preachers and religious sects of diverse persuasions. However, actual membership in the sects was quite small. The vast majority of Jews were not members of any sect and were not overly scrupulous or religious in

conduct. That is, despite a general piety which undoubtedly characterized most of them, they were too busy making a living to devote their time to sectarian taboos, religious harangues or denominational disputes.

This does not mean that certain of the sectarian leaders and teachers were not looked upon with a certain respect or that the temple worship was neglected. But the picture of a populace dominated by strictly-observed Pharisaic rules of purity and Halakah is not accurate. This is not to say that the Pharisees did not have considerable prestige or that they were without influence. On the other hand, there were only a few thousand Pharisees, and their rules and opinions were not dutifully followed by the people and were emphatically not followed by most of the temple priests.

Yet we must also keep in mind the previous centuries of Jewish history. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile in 587 B.C. were very traumatic experiences. With the return of the exiles, there was a determination not to repeat the original causes of that Exile. One of the major causes was considered to be Sabbath-breaking (Neh. 13:16-18; Ezek. 20:24). In the centuries that followed, the Jewish faith had its ups and downs. The one episode which threatened to submerge Judaism entirely came in the middle of the second century B.C. The Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, waged war against Judea, allying with the renegade Jews, defiling the Temple and stopping the temple service.

At this time the Jews waged a long war to preserve their religion and autonomy. Although Jerusalem was retaken and the temple services restored after three years, the Maccabean state continued to fight with the Syrians for decades. The priesthood was combined with the political leadership in the Hasmonean (Maccabean) dynasty which ruled Judea for the next century. This autonomy came to an end in 63 B.C. when Rome intervened in civil strife resulting from rival claims to the high priesthood.

Nevertheless, under Roman rule, with the Herodian family as the major figure of political control, the Jewish state still maintained a considerable amount of freedom. Not only was worship not restricted but Herod the Great even began a lengthy process of beautification and restoration of the Temple. Objections to Rome were primarily of a political and not of a religious nature.

The Jewish religion was a thriving concern. The main thing to remember is that Judaism was a pluralistic phenomenon of many differing aspects with the Temple as its focus; it was not a Pharisaic or rabbinic monopoly.

It was onto this stage that Jesus stepped--the stage on which He began His teachings. It was on this same stage that the early Church began. The apostle Paul concentrated his efforts in the Diaspora. The Jews in the Diaspora, despite some differences, seemed to cover the same basic religious spectrum as the Jews in Palestine. As a people and as a religion, the Jews and Judaism were very well-known in the first century throughout the Roman Empire. This is borne out by many historians of the period. Preaching the gospel in the Gentile world meant building upon a Jewish--and hence Old Testament--foundation.

The New Testament teachings presume the Old Testament and the Judaism of that time. This is clear to anyone who studies the historical and cultural background as well as the New Testament itself. Thus, what sometimes appears to be a radical statement about Judaism or the law or the Old Testament, is really either a spiritual modification or an amplification or both, rather than a rejection or repudiation of it. In other words, the New Testament writers--including Paul--did not reject the Old Testament or the law or even their Jewish background. They rejected a few things, they modified or changed the emphasis of many things, and they especially taught the newly-revealed spiritual meanings involved. It is critical for a full understanding of God's law in the New Testament to realize that the apostles assumed a great deal as intuitively and publicly obvious without seeing any need to discuss it specifically.

To take one example--perhaps the heart of the New Testament--we can look at the "Sermon on the Mount." Much within this vital section is not new; that is, it can be paralleled with sections in the Old Testament. The Old Testament law is presupposed: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them . . . . Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great" (Mt. 5:17-20).

What is revolutionary about the "Sermon on the Mount" is its complete emphasis on matters of the heart rather than just on external practice. Here is the ultimate in the complete rejection of egotism--the highest form of absolute concern for others and for God. Many Old Testament commands are made stricter by becoming matters of the spirit: sexual desire, divorce, repayment for wrongs, swearing, murder and hate, to name some of the major ones. Jesus was making things harder, not easier. As the disciples said about the subject of divorce in another context, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." Jesus' answer was that "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given" (Mt. 19:10-11).

Jesus was not doing away with the law; He was, rather, radically transforming it to a spiritual plane, revealing its full spiritual intent. He was making it a matter of the spirit rather than only of the letter. He was showing the law's intent and purpose as opposed to its bare physical statement. The basic overall result was the introduction of a system of law which could be kept only by means of the Holy Spirit. Old Testament law could be kept in the letter by any ordinary physical individual with character and self-discipline. New Testament law in its spiritual form could in no way be kept without divine help.

In the Old Testament, righteousness was primarily judged by what one did, by external conformity to the laws. This does not mean that there are not many statements about the attitude and intent of the heart and its importance--there are. But the emphasis is nonetheless on adherence to the letter of the law, something that was possible for the ordinary person. The New Testament goes much further, stating that external obedience is not enough. Despite all one's attempts, full service to the spiritual demands of the law is unattainable in the flesh. No one can be completely righteous without perfect obedience. Since this is impossible, no one is, by himself, righteous.

This view was, of course, quite contrary to the then current view of things. To persons such as the Pharisees who put great emphasis on their scrupulous observance of their own ritual laws of purity, it was rather galling to be told that their faithful practice was so much dung (cf. Phil. 3:8). Paul is not castigating obedience; he is not denigrating the Old Testament law. Rather, he

is showing that the real source of forgiveness and salvation is Jesus Christ—that His sacrifice for our sins and His resurrection are the really important things as opposed to the less important do's and don'ts of the law.

Paul is often misunderstood in this regard simply because his teachings are not understood against their background. He himself strictly conformed even to what were considered ritual observances (Acts 16:3; 18:18; 21:17-26). On the other hand, some things which are often relegated to the level of ritual were not ritual but essential parts of worship which Paul observed and taught. (For examples, see Sabbath and Annual Holy Days.)

Furthermore, Paul was teaching not just Jews but Gentiles. The Old Testament promises were purely physical, made to a physical Israel that did not understand the spiritual intent of circumcision, even though Old Testament writings speak of an inward circumcision not of the flesh (Jer. 4:4; Deut. 30:6; Joel 2:13). The requirement of physical circumcision for males was a major problem in the early Church, with the decision being made that such circumcision was not necessary for the Gentiles. The message Paul took to the Gentiles was that they no longer needed to become Jews outwardly, in the flesh through circumcision, to gain salvation. Membership in the Israel of God was a matter of the heart.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is replete with vigorous statements in full support of the law. The law is not void by faith, but fully established (Rom. 3:31). Christians are admonished not to continue in sin (Rom. 6:1-2), but to become "servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). The law is not sin (Rom. 7:7); it is spiritual (Rom. 7:14) and "holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). The carnal mind that leads to death (Rom. 6:23; 8:6) is defined as being "enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God" (Rom. 8:7).

Paul's statements in Romans 2:25-27, while often quoted, have been somewhat neglected as a powerful affirmation of the fact that Gentiles need to be law keepers. In this passage Paul is showing that the issue of circumcision is irrelevant for the Christian, in contradistinction to the issue of keeping "the righteousness of the law" which is extremely relevant. If the uncircumcised Gentiles fulfill the law, they are immeasurably superior to circumcised Jews who transgress the law. So a Gentile in the Church who keeps the law becomes a true Jew inwardly, because he is fulfilling what God wanted all along. The



condition is to keep God's law. Paul's use of the term "law" cannot mean the entire Sinaitic covenant, since circumcision itself was a part of that covenant and therefore it would be logically impossible for an uncircumcised person to keep the "whole" law. Paul must be referring to the moral law, the Ten Commandments, in Romans 2:25-27.

Paul knew that some would conclude that, because he continually stressed that salvation cannot be earned by law-keeping, the law was annulled or worthless. "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). This is important because, if the law were done away or became invalid, then sin would be dead (Rom. 7:8), no transgression would exist (Rom. 4:15), and God could not impute sin to make the sacrifice of Christ meaningful. "The strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56): the law is the standard of what sin and what righteousness are. If that standard is removed, there is no need for Christ. So by accepting Jesus, the true Christian is indeed establishing the law, by admitting its full empowerment in condemning him (Rom. 6:23). As a result, the true Christian, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can fulfill the righteousness of the law (Rom. 8:4) and with Paul shall "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22).

The book of Galatians is often used as support in an attempt to do away with God's law. This is not the issue dealt with in the epistle at all. The focal point of Paul's letter to the Galatians does not deal with the abrogation of the law but rather with the question of how one is justified. Justification means forgiveness for past sins—being counted as just and pure through Jesus' blood. That is what Paul is dealing with. In other words, there are two systems. One began with the covenant at Sinai. The other is the system of faith in Christ. The one system, of relying on the fact that you are circumcised, etc. for justification does not lead to eternal life. Paul shows that this only condemns—brings bondage—because no provision exists for real forgiveness and pardon for sin. So the system of the first covenant will not save anyone. Some were denying that to the Galatian Church. They were looking to their physical adherence to the way of life of the Sinaitic covenant, especially to circumcision, to earn them salvation.

But the question was not whether Gentiles could covet, or kill, or steal, or break the Sabbath. Rather, the question was whether a Gentile had to be physically circum-

cised (Gal. 2:3-4). Paul categorically denied this. Galatians 2:14 portrays the problem further: the Jews were even practicing racial discrimination for religious reasons. They felt superior to their Gentile brethren because they were physically a part of the heritage of Israel. But Paul showed in Romans that this should only have made them see their sins more, since they knew God's law so well. So the question has to do with circumcision and the manner or customs that one follows. Why, then, is Paul so upset over this? Because carried to their logical conclusion these requirements would mean that Jesus' death was not necessary. If being a Jew could save a man, if being physically circumcised could bring favor with God, then Christ died in vain. It would mean that just having the law would be enough. But having the law—having the whole system of the Sinaitic covenant—was not enough to attain eternal life; in fact, it only pointed out sin more and more. To rely fully on the law, one would have to keep all of it perfectly, which is impossible. So when Paul uses "law" in Galatians he means all that is involved in being a Jew--the whole system of the Sinaitic covenant, especially the ceremonies and rituals which were "added because of transgressions" until Christ should come (Gal. 3:19)--and he specifically singles out circumcision as an issue.

Justification must be by faith (Gal. 3:11) and the law of the Sinaitic covenant was given not to save us, but as a schoolmaster or "pedagogue," to teach us the meaning of obedience, to bring us to Christ.

This, then, is the core of Galatians. Much of Paul's reasoning is the same in Romans as in Galatians. But in Romans, Paul is dealing with moral law—sin and grace--whereas in Galatians, the problem is circumcision and understanding the place of the Sinaitic covenant, the whole system called "law." But the same conclusions are arrived at by complementary arguments.

In Romans, Paul uses as an example the law of God concerning coveting (Rom. 7:7ff). Why cannot that law save us? Because it only emphasizes the sin. If we rely on works of the law--our keeping of this law—we will fail. We are all sinners and have all coveted. The only solution is justification by faith. But after justification we must keep the law through God's Spirit. The law is holy, just and good; it is spiritual and eternal.

In Galatians, Paul deals with the law of circumcision. We cannot be saved by being circumcised, because if we go to that whole system of which circumcision is a part for salvation we receive no grace or pardon, only condemnation. We cannot, with our natural human strength, keep the law (i.e. the Ten Commandments; we can keep circumcision--it is painful, but easy). So the only solution is again Jesus and justification by faith. What about after justification? Are we then to follow circumcision, and the system of the Sinaitic covenant? No, that would be to deny Jesus and our need for Him.

Once again, the reasoning in Romans and Galatians is basically the same, but the issues are different. The first is universal--the question of sin and morality. The second is the question of the historical place of the Sinai covenant in God's plan. Remember that the Ten Commandments did not originate with the Sinaitic covenant but with God at Creation and since. So they are not affected when the covenant is changed. They are universal and tell us what sin is.

Ephesians 6:1-3 is a very significant statement concerning the position of the Ten Commandments in the Gentile churches. Here the fifth one is cited. Notice the comment in verse 2. It is "the first commandment with promise." Not just that it was--it still is. And what does Paul mean by "the first?" He is obviously referring to a set of commandments--a group of them. And they still apply. This simple statement by Paul gives us an important insight into the attitude of the Gentile churches towards the Ten Commandments. Paul here shows they knew of these commandments. He does not have to introduce them or say that "Honor your father and mother" was once a commandment with promise--for it is a commandment at this time.

If Gentile Christians were indeed taught to honor and keep the Ten Commandments, why, then, does Paul make certain mitigating comments about "law?" The answer is rooted in the historical reality that Christianity at this time was viewed as a Jewish sect in the general public opinion. And therefore, much of what has been taken as a castigation of the Old Testament Law in the New Testament is actually an antidote to the idea that Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes before they could become "Christians. This idea probably gained credence simply because Gentile Christians were taught and read their Old Testament, and various

proselyting Jewish groups were spreading the message that Gentiles had to follow the whole system of first-century Judaism in order to partake of the salvation offered by the God of Israel. Certainly to Gentiles who had never heretofore been taught the Holy Scriptures, apostolic Christianity and contemporary Judaism must have seemed extremely similar (much as Methodism and Seventh-Day Adventism might seem similar to a Buddhist today) . Paul therefore had to take great pains to show how Christianity differed from Judaism. He had to do this because the two religions clearly had so much in common.

Nearly everybody knew what Judaism and the Old Testament taught. The Sabbath and annual Holy Days, for example, were commonly known. What Paul had to do was not reemphasize the Old Testament laws already known, but rather teach the new revelations about Jesus Christ and His spiritual magnification of the law that nobody knew.

No attempt was made by the New Testament writers to repeat everything of relevance in the Old Testament. To have done so would have made the Old Testament redundant. It would also have been utterly ridiculous, since the Old Testament was commonly presupposed to be inspired Scripture, the Word of God. It was the only Scripture then in existence.

Converts from paganism were, of course, tempted to revert to the religious culture from which they had come. They were influenced by various popular religions, syncretistic cults and astrological clans. But the contrast between Christianity and paganism was fairly clear. What was not so clear was the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Thus, even though Paul has to fight the influences of paganism and the contemporary culture, he seems to have found many problems from the Jewish side as well. In some cases, this problem may have been instigated by some sort of Jewish syncretistic group. (For example, a Jewish syncretistic astrological group may have been behind the problem in Colossae. In other cases, it was probably the basic Hellenistic Jewish mission to the Gentiles which upset the various churches.)

When this is understood, most of the presumed anti-nomian, anti-Jewish and anti-Old Testament sentiment in Paul's writings evaporates. Despite some differences because of his specific mission to the Gentiles, Paul suddenly looks a great deal like James and Peter and John in teaching what Jesus taught. Paul was no longer a Pharisee, but he remained a faithful Jew as well as becoming a Christian.

The book of James has been a perennial problem for those who would have the New Testament discard God's law. James calls the law of God "the royal law" in 2:8. He quotes Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," which is the epitome of the last six of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 13:9-10). James goes on to show that if you break one point of the law—any one of the Ten Commandments—you are guilty of all (Jas. 2:10-11). God's law is at the same time the "law of liberty" (2:12), since it frees man from the bondage of sin.

But it is the last half of the second chapter of James, verses 14 to 26, that gives antinomian Christians their biggest problem. James repeatedly emphasizes that "faith without works is dead" (vv. 17, 20, 26), that the best way to show real faith is by works (v. 18), that by works faith is made perfect (v. 22) and "that by works a man is justified and not by faith only" (v. 24). James 4:11-12 is a proper conclusion to this theme, putting the question directly to any who would do away with God's law: "if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge."

In the epistles of John, the subject of keeping the commandments comes up several times. 1 John 2:4 is direct: "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 3:4 is equally powerful in its blunt assertion that "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." Likewise, John 15:10 (cf. 1 Jn. 3:22-24), where Jesus tells His disciples before His death to keep His commandments as He had kept His Father's commandments.

Certainly these commandments included all of Christ's commandments, but the expression clearly includes the only set of commandments, the Ten Commandments. Compare Matthew 19:16-19 in this context. Here Jesus tells a rich young man, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." The young man asks, "Which?" And Jesus responds by enumerating five of the Ten Commandments.

The necessity to keep God's commandments is reemphasized in the book of Revelation. The Church—"the rest of /the woman's/ offspring"—is identified as keeping the commandments of God in 12:17. The saints are defined as those "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" in 14:12. And finally, those who shall be in the

incomprehensibly awesome new heaven and new earth of chapter 21 shall be only those who "do his commandments."

All the New Testament writers presuppose the Old Testament and often quote or allude to it. It was decades after the founding of the Church before Holy Scripture comprised more than the Old Testament. Furthermore, since Jesus Christ was the very personality who had given His law to humanity in general and to Israel in particular at Sinai (see Jesus Christ), He would scarcely have discarded—and He did not discard—in the New Testament the very law He had established in the Old.

The Old Testament is an essential part of the biblical canon. It is as much the Word of God as the New Testament. However, to New Testament Christians, the Old Testament has a special status in that it is not to be taken alone: it must be read in the light of the New Testament.

#### Law and Grace

Much of the misunderstanding regarding whether a Christian must keep the biblical law (i.e. the Ten Commandments) revolves around the term "grace." Those who do not think a Christian "must" obey the law conclude that since we are "under grace" (Rom. 6:15), we no longer "must" keep the law. Those who follow this line of reasoning point to various scriptures--especially those in the book of Galatians (some of which have already been mentioned)--to support their case. They maintain that Christ came to free us from "the curse of the law," or that "Christ is the end of the law" (Rom. 10:4); or that Christians are "dead to the law" (Rom. 7:4) . But Jude describes this line of reasoning as "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness /lawlessness/" (Jude 4).

This approach also illustrates a basic lack of understanding of the word "grace." "Grace," in its biblical meaning and intent, means "the favor, forgiveness, beneficence, generosity, mercy, kindness and compassion of God." Therefore, to be "under grace" means to live within this whole sphere of God's favor and compassion. The two greatest acts of grace are: 1) forgiveness of past sins, which God grants upon true repentance, faith and baptism; and 2) the unmerited freely-given gift of eternal life, which God grants upon the condition of faith. Hence, to be "under grace" means that one's sins have been forgiven,

that he is in a favored position with God, and that he is an heir of salvation.

But the Bible nowhere equates "grace" with freedom to disobey God. On the contrary, the exact opposite is stated: "Do we then make void the law through faith? /i.e. do we negate the necessity of keeping the law because we are under grace as a result of faith?/ God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31). We, as Christians, "establish the law" because when we accept God's grace through baptism we are acknowledging the existence of law against which we have sinned.

The true relationship between law and grace may be simply stated. Law defines sin because sin is the transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4). God's forgiveness of our sins is an act of grace. But this act of grace--this act of unmerited pardon and favor in God's eyes, along with the eventual entrance into God's Kingdom which shall follow if we are faithful--in no way grants us a license or permission to continue to sin. In like manner, a convicted criminal who has been pardoned or has had his sentence commuted by a judge is shown an act of grace, but is not permitted to go out and repeat his crime. Again, far from doing away with the law, grace establishes the law, because one who accepts grace acknowledges that the law has been broken. Without law there can be no grace, therefore grace can never do away with law.

The purpose of the law is not to provide a means of earning forgiveness and salvation. Salvation cannot be earned. It comes by God's free gift--salvation is by grace alone (Rom. 3:21-24; 5:15-16). Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the only requirement for this gift of grace. Keeping the law even in the most spiritual manner cannot and does not earn salvation. The central message of the New Testament is that salvation is a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Yet this by no means negates the importance of law in the process of salvation. While salvation is in the final analysis a free gift, God will not give that gift to one who is not willing to submit to Him. Gifts are not given to the unappreciative, and lack of appreciation is indicated in many ways, including a basic contempt for God's laws or a lack of any enthusiasm in trying to see how God's laws reflect His mind (1 Jn. 2:4). Note again the well-known case of the young rich man who

approached Jesus about the very subject of salvation in Matthew 19, as quoted above. When Jesus replied, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (v.17), He was not describing the method of salvation, but rather the prerequisite for His free gift.

The Jews in the time of the New Testament understood the importance of the law and the many promises about blessings for observing it. The problem was that many went on to assume that salvation came by observing it. When Paul and other writers showed them that this assumption was incorrect, it became a major stumbling block. Even after the Church had been in existence for almost 20 years, it was still necessary to call a conference over the question of circumcision, since some still believed salvation was impossible without it (Acts 15). Paul had a deep respect and appreciation for the law (Rom. 6; 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:19), yet he also understood that salvation was not earned by law keeping.

The New Testament makes it clear that sin brings on the death penalty (Rom. 6:23). And "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4). Since all have sinned and thus failed to keep the law perfectly (Rom. 3:23), all have brought the death penalty upon themselves. Only the giving up of human life will satisfy this penalty. Thus, the sacrifice of the Creator—of God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ—is the only means by which that penalty can be paid and thereby removed from all humanity. No one (apart from Jesus) has kept the law perfectly; all have incurred the death penalty. This made the death of sinless Jesus, the Son of God, a necessity. Recognition of Christ's freely-given sacrifice not only brings home the sober reality of sin but also enables us to see what true love is at first hand (Jn. 3:16).

The enormous importance of the law of God and man's living within it can be measured by considering this immeasurable price that God has put on the conditions for the forgiveness of sins—repentance and recognition and acceptance of Jesus Christ's death as payment for our transgressions of His laws. This certainly reflects God's love towards mankind, and can begin to motivate man to express his love back to God by wanting to live within God's laws.

God expects Christians to repent of sin (Acts 2:38). But repentance alone does not remove the death penalty.



Once one turns from his sinful way of life in wholehearted repentance, God accepts his repentance and Christ offers His own sacrifice on the cross as payment for the death penalty previously incurred by that repentant sinner. The Holy Spirit is promised to the repentant individual as a free gift which makes possible salvation and eternal life. Even one who is converted will still sin out of weakness. However, he can call on the sacrifice of Christ and gain forgiveness. It is the direction of his life that God is concerned with; God does not keep a tally, as it were, ready to send the individual straight to eternal death if he die's with a single sin he has not repented of on his record. Far from being some sort of "Almighty Bookkeeper," God wants to see His children receive salvation. He is very happy to forgive His begotten children who continually find themselves in trouble, so long as their hearts and attitudes are right—so long as they are wholeheartedly sincere and making progress despite weaknesses and setbacks.

Thus, the fight against sin is a very important component of the plan of salvation. Sin is horrible and heinous. Yet one can become so preoccupied with sin as to miss the point of the law in the first place. He can be so concerned about making a mistake that he never steps out and does good. Some people so concentrate on their "sinful wretchedness" that they never climb out of the mire and exercise their positive spiritual talents as they should. Sin is important, but recognition of our sinful natures should not discourage or cow us to the point of not making positive progress through faith.

#### New Testament Application of Old Testament Laws

Both the Old and New Testaments form the written Word of God. The Old Testament is no less the Word of God than is the New. It would completely miss the point of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments to require everything from the former to be repeated in the latter in order to be considered as relevant for Christian behavior. (Bestiality can be used as an extreme and ludicrous example to make the point.) Conversely, it would be equally illogical to attempt to enforce in the secular states of the twentieth century every exact regulation given to the theocracy of Israel over 3,000 years ago.

Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, and the New Testament does make some changes. The teachings of the Old Testament may also be understood in the light of the changed circumstances of the Church in the modern world. The Hebrew Bible was written initially to a congregation or church organized as a special nation in the culture and society of the ancient Near East. By the time of the first century, circumstances had changed to some extent. Furthermore, the full revelation of God's plan with the concept of a spiritual Israel required the modification of certain Old Testament teachings in their implementation within a physical nation. This modification process continues today.

The Church, as ordained of God and authorized by Jesus Christ, has the power of binding and loosing—of making judgments on the basis of biblical principles Mt. 16: 18-19). New situations arise not directly addressed in the pages of the Bible. The modern world is not the ancient world. Without the flexibility of making judgments and applying earlier laws to fit newer situations, the Church would become anachronistic and ineffectual. It may be necessary to look at the environment in which the Old Testament laws were given — the society, culture, national situation, contemporary legal attitudes, literary influences and so forth—in order to understand the reason why a law was initially given to Israel. But to understand the intent behind the law, we must examine the lives and teachings of Jesus, the apostles and the prophets. Once the purpose and intent of each law is discerned, its application to 20th century life becomes much more clear and obvious. (It is interesting and instructive to realize that though the principles underlying God's laws are immutable and unchangeable, the specific applications of the laws have changed in every period of biblical history.)

The following sections examine certain laws of the Old Testament and show how the Church has applied these today. It has not been possible to cover all the individual laws by any means, but the general principles used should be basically clear. Of course, some of these laws have been clearly modified in the New Testament. In other cases, the New Testament is silent on the subject, and the Church has made decisions based on the Old Testament alone. (Note that Sabbath, Annual Holy Days and Tithing and Giving are covered under those titles.)

Circumcision: One of the laws regarding which the Old Testament is very clear is that of circumcision. Circumcision was instituted as a sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17). It was a sign of the covenant with God and of the Israelites\* national identity. It made the newborn boy a part of the community. It was, in a sense, an initiation rite since any male of whatever age was required to undergo it to become a part of Israel. Therefore, it is not surprising that circumcision became an important issue in the early Church (Acts 10-11; 15).

Christians do not consider physical circumcision as a requirement for entry into the spiritual community of Israel, the Church. The reason is that the New Testament makes it clear that the only circumcision that is required is spiritual circumcision of the heart and mind. The question had already been debated and settled in the early Church (Acts 10-11; 15; Gal. 5:2-12). While one could voluntarily undergo circumcision, it was not a requirement for membership in the Body of Christ. To reiterate, the only required circumcision is spiritual circumcision—circumcision of the heart and mind.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Church rejected all physical rituals. Baptism was taught as a physical ceremony. The symbolism of baptism is that of death followed by resurrection to a new life. It is a voluntary act requiring active, conscious repentance on the part of the mature individual, whereas circumcision is an involuntary act carried out on the unknowing babe in arms.

The Sacrificial System and Temple Ritual: The New Testament has a clear teaching about the temple ritual, just as it does about circumcision. As long as the Temple was standing, it was certainly not deprecated. On occasion Christians actually offered up sacrifices (Acts 18:18; 21:23-26). However, the death of Christ was the supreme sacrifice, of which animal sacrifices were only a type (Heb. 10:1-18). The Old Testament system was rendered unnecessary by Christ's sacrifice. Christians look to this rather than merely to the "shadow" which represented it. Furthermore, Christians offer up, not only their possessions (livestock and grain stuffs), but their very selves to God by presenting themselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2).

Many of the laws in the Old Testament were specifically designed for a physical people who did not have the help of God's Holy Spirit and who lived in a national state. The whole sacrificial system was an extremely regulated and detailed physical ritual. It required a great many animals on a continual basis to keep it going. With many sacrifices, the person offering the animal was actually able to eat most of it along with his family. Only certain parts were burned on the altar and certain pieces went to the priest. But sin offerings were burned whole and neither the offerer nor the priest realized anything from them. It effectively hurt one's pocketbook to sin!

The principle of sacrifice has certainly not been eliminated for New Testament Christians. However, the sin offering we look to is not an animal offered at the temple altar: it is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His death rendered the physical sacrificial system unnecessary for converted Christians. This system had pointed to Christ. Christians can now view the sacrificial system with greater understanding than could the ancient Israelites who participated in it (Heb. 9-10).

This does not mean that the temple worship was wrong or even bad. The book of Acts shows that the apostle Paul himself participated in the sacrificial system on at least two occasions. He took certain vows which could be completed only by offering an offering in the Temple (Acts 18:18; 21:20-26 and cf. Num. 6:18). It was not wrong for Israelite Christians to continue to participate in the sacrificial system; it was simply unnecessary. Of course, once the Temple and sanctuary were destroyed, it became impossible for them just as for all Jews.

**Clean and Unclean Animals:** Many regulations in Leviticus have to do with being "clean" (Hebrew *tahor*) or "unclean" (Hebrew *tame'*). These regulations had two functions: (1) They usually required washing which served as a physical cleansing agent and helped prevent the contraction or spread of disease; (2) they served a ritual purpose in that anyone "unclean" could not participate in the sacrificial service. Ritual purity was a major emphasis in conducting any of the temple activities. Included in this regulation was the prohibition against eating all but certain types of animals (Lev. 11; Deut. 14) and such things as the blood and the bodily fat of these animals.

Nowhere in all these regulations is anything stated specifically about physical health. Yet physical health seems clearly to be one aspect of these regulations. The continual requirement of washing after touching dead bodies or engaging in certain activities has the concept of hygiene behind it. Modern science has also discovered the dangers of consuming animal fats (they are high in cholesterol among other things). Public Health doctors are also acutely aware of the importance of quarantine in avoiding the spread of disease, another requirement for various types of disease in ancient Israel (e.g. Lev. 13).

Modern science has also found that certain of the biblically proscribed animals present potential health hazards. For example, the danger of contracting trichinosis from pork is one known by almost every housewife. Such scavengers as crabs are also among the most affected by conditions of pollution since they tend to feed in contaminated areas and thus concentrate the dangerous substances in their bodies. Granted, these are only potential hazards. However, there is always the question of whether there may be other, as yet unknown, dangers to be discovered by science in the future—dangers known and forestalled by the Creator of all.

True Christians, however, obey these Old Testament directions because God says to do so. God stated that certain foods should be avoided by man, and He, as Creator of both man and animals, knows best. The laws of clean and unclean meats clearly transcend any ritualistic system given to Moses and Israel, since Noah obviously had known about clean and unclean animals generations before (Gen. 7:2; 9:4). It is recognized that total avoidance of these and other potential hazards in our environment is well-nigh impossible. They are physical matters to be kept in balance and perspective. The Church does not have a rigid, ultra-orthodox-type ruling which forbids eating out in restaurants or buying packaged foods. One simply exercises a reasonable amount of care, yet does not make a fetish of the regulations. Though the Church continues to abide by the prohibitions against blood, animal fat and certain animal foods, these laws are not considered to be of overriding spiritual importance since food does not constitute the Kingdom of God (Rom. 14:17). (The Church does not see any direct biblical support for the orthodox Jewish practice of not eating meat and milk products together and thus does not have any such regulations, even though some of its food practices may otherwise resemble those of orthodox Jews.)

The Year of Release and the Jubilee: According to Leviticus 25, every seventh year was to be set aside to allow the land to rest (no crops were to be planted and the permanent orchards and vineyards were to be left unattended) and for the releasing of all debts and of all fellow countrymen kept as slaves. Every fiftieth year was also to serve as such a year (thus making two in a row) but additionally as a time when land should revert to its original owner. The seventh year and the jubilee were major events in the society of ancient Israel and required the cooperation of the entire community to be effectual.

Today's society is not geared to such an institution. (Even the jubilee was evidently never observed after the return of the Jews from Babylon.) Farmers may not always own their own land. Those who do are often not in a financial position to allow their entire land to rest for a full year; their creditors would not allow them to do that. Debts are considered owed until paid, regardless of the year. (In fact, as discussed in the next section under "Monetary Interest," to release debts incurred voluntarily rather than from necessity was not part of the original intent of the law.) Fortunately, slavery is no longer practiced either, in most areas of the world, rendering that aspect of the law inapplicable.

It is recognized that allowing one's land to lie fallow every so many years is a good agricultural procedure. Thus, the seventh year land rest teaches a principle from which farmers can indeed learn. Yet the same result can be accomplished by letting a portion of the land lie fallow each year rather than the whole land every seventh year. The Church recognizes the agricultural and other principles in the laws about the year of release and the jubilee. But, because of our differently constituted modern societies, the Church teaches that each person should observe them as best he or she is able according to his or her circumstances and according to the spirit of the law. Farmers are not required to let all their land lie fallow each seventh year, nor should they feel a moral obligation to do so. The important thing is that they respect their heritage--the land and its environment--and do their best to protect it according to the ability and the means God has given them. In this way, the intent of the Old Testament laws (Lev. 25; Deut. 15:1-8) is achieved even though the exact means of application may not be the same as in ancient Israel.

Monetary Interest: A number of passages forbade charging interest on loans to the poor (Ex. 22:25-27; Deut. 23:19-20). The Church considers that this principle still applies today: one should not lend money at interest to anyone in genuine need. Yet most contractual loans today are not for the purpose of assistance to those in absolute need but instead are a means of obtaining capital for an immediate project (rather than saving up the capital over a period of time). In other words, a person has an amount sufficient to maintain his life and well-being but wants an additional investment or luxury. He could save his money over a long period of time to obtain the particular item. Or he could be enjoying it now while turning the savings payment into repayment for a loan. It is perfectly legitimate to consider interest in such a case as simply payment for services rendered. Likewise, for corporations and institutions to be able to borrow money from banks is essential for economic growth.

Our modern society runs on credit. To require members of the Church to avoid all borrowing or lending at interest would be asking them to live outside society. The original intent of the law was simply to avoid adding an additional burden on the poor man who had to borrow because of his financial straits in the first place. Only in such cases of dire emergency does the Church consider it wrong to charge interest.

Summary: Many other examples could be given, but the major ones listed above should be sufficient to illustrate how the Church applies the Old Testament laws. It considers the Hebrew Bible very much a part of God's Word. It is not considered secondary to the New Testament nor in any way inferior to it. Yet it is superseded in the sense that the New Testament has made some specific changes to deal with spiritual Israel, which nation has replaced the physical nation of ancient Israel.

In a number of cases on which the New Testament throws little direct light, the Church has had to make decisions on the basis of the Old Testament. Time may yet show the need for modification or change of some of these decisions. Nevertheless, the Church of God is exercising the power and authority given to it by God. If such decisions could not be made, each person would drift into doing what seemed right in his or her own eyes and confusion would quickly result. Therefore, the Church assumes its God-ordained prerogatives to step in and make decisions

where it deems them necessary and helpful, always remaining aware that each individual has to serve God according to the best of his own knowledge and conscience. The purpose of giving regulations is to achieve unity of thought and practice in major areas, without trying to take away from the direct, personal relationship each person should have with God.

By making decisions, the Church is attempting to stay true to, and consistent with, the Bible. In some cases, to attempt to apply the exact Old Testament practice today would actually violate the intent of the law rather than observe it. Changes have to be made as society and culture both change. Sometimes the Bible is not perfectly understood and mistakes are made. But this is inevitable as long as the Church is made up of human beings and as long as God continues to work through human instruments. The important thing is that there always be the proper respect for the Bible, and the desire to understand God's mind and to fulfill His wishes. This requires a continual searching for the mind of God and a continual making of decisions to keep the Church in line with that mind. Since the Old Testament also represents the mind of God, it cannot be neglected in this process. Progressive revelation of God's will cannot be logically inconsistent with previous revelation.

#### Conclusion; Law in the Life of a Christian

The law is very important in the life of a Christian. Of course, he knows that he cannot earn salvation by it. He knows it is not an end in itself but only the road by which he draws closer and closer to the mind of God and hence to God Himself. The law leads him to godly love. No written law can fully or completely express the depths of love. The "letter of the law" is always an inadequate means of expressing what love is. This is why Christians must keep the law in the spirit. Keeping the letter of the law alone may not be a complete expression of love; it is only when one looks behind the letter to the spirit, the true understanding, that he can see how to correctly apply the letter to show godly love.

For example, a Christian recognizes that killing another individual is hardly likely to be showing love for him. But just keeping the literal letter of the law which says, "Thou shalt not kill," is still not sufficient. One must also not hate the other individual, and go yet further and demonstrate a positive outgoing concern for that individual.



Yet true concern for another person's welfare does not usually come naturally (cf. Rom. 8:7), it has to be learned. It is a concept which must be captured and internalized. No amount of explanation can force a person to capture the true spirit of love; no amount of legal wording in a decree can bypass human nature. One can only grasp the concept when guided by the Holy Spirit.

The law of God, properly understood in its spiritual intent enables one to express both love toward God and love toward one's fellow human beings. It defines the relationship with God which shall encourage and stimulate one's spiritual growth. Furthermore, the law of God defines relationships between human beings that foster the development of genuine concern for one's neighbor. In so doing, the law of God also defines the spiritual parameters which, if observed, would maximize the genuine welfare both of individuals within a society and of society as a whole.

The law of God, properly conceived of in its spiritual intent, in no way restricts the flow of godly love. On the contrary, the law instructs man how to love. The law is inherently a law of love.

On the other hand, it is the love of God that enables a Christian to fulfill the law (Rom. 13:10). It is through godly love that the full meaning and intent of the law is expressed. Hence, God's love and God's law mutually envelop one another in a symbiotic relationship, with the one supporting the other.

The eternal and holy law of God kept in its spiritual intent provides the essential instructional framework that a Christian needs for directing his life. As one grows in understanding and in personal application of God's law, he nurtures within himself the qualities of holiness, justice and goodness (Rom. 7:12).

A Christian will make mistakes. If he is wholehearted and desirous of doing all he can to serve God, he may end up making more mistakes—sinning more--than the one who concentrates on his inward state and holds back from positive action for fear of error. God is concerned about the mind and attitude. He does not need us, and in that sense, our service to God is really no service, since He could do it

all much better without us. But our service is a means of building character and proving our devotion to God. It is that devotion and that love directed towards Him that He most wants for our ultimate good. Mistakes can be corrected and sins can be forgiven, but character is either present or lacking. Therefore, the Christian learns to put his life in perspective. There are sins which weigh one down and continually dog one's steps so that little can be accomplished. These sins must be overcome. But there are also the inevitable sins which occur as a consequence of the frailties of our human nature. These are also important, but one should not allow them to so dominate his thoughts that he turns away from life. There is more to a Christian life than just avoiding trouble.

The one who has been forgiven much is also the one who is grateful for much. He may not be as likely to take God's mercy for granted as the one who thinks that he has never really sinned all that much. The one who has been close to death appreciates life more than the one who has always had health and safety. Self-righteousness is perhaps the worst spiritual malady, and it tends to be bred in an environment of constant attention to outward forms of righteousness.

The true Christian knows that the law is good, not solely because biblical writers say it is, but because he has experienced its blessings in his own life. This does not mean that conforming to this spiritual guide is necessarily easy. On the contrary, it can be very difficult, even with the help of the Holy Spirit. Yet the end result is worth the toil, because God's law produces spiritual character and the natural blessings which result from expressing godly love.

Neither is it always easy to know what to do in any given situation. Comprehension of God's law is something which requires effort, study, time and practice. However, when the law is understood, the reasons for it become obvious and the beneficial results that accrue from following it stand out. Ultimately, the law can be understood, as well as followed, only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. Those who have made the effort to understand and to obey can testify that it makes perfect sense. The Christian grows, develops and builds character as he contemplates the law, meditates on it and sees its purpose and judgment.

A Christian realizes his need to live by faith. Faith is directed toward the future. It aims at a promise which has only been fulfilled in part by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet faith is not just a passive state or a vague form of wishful thinking. Faith implies action; faith requires works (Jas. 2:14-26). Works can never earn salvation but works are necessary for the Christian life. A person who is following God will produce good works—fulfillment of the law—as a natural consequence of his conversion and his possession of the Holy Spirit. These works are not an end in themselves. The ultimate goal is the Kingdom and Family of God. But even though keeping the law does not produce the Kingdom, one shall never reach God's Kingdom without them. For one who does not have good works also does not have the Holy Spirit, the sine qua non of salvation. Love—fulfilling the law—is the natural product of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, the goal of the Christian is to attain the mind of God. When that perfection comes, at the resurrection, there shall be no further need for guidelines. Perfect love shall have become internalized, fully expressible without external law, with the result that the need for law codes shall be no more. But love cannot be comprehended without the law. It requires an understanding of love to truly appreciate the law. But one cannot come to that understanding unless he first starts to obey the law. That is the beginning and love is its end.

To the Christian, God's law is the way to happiness, peace of mind and, ultimately, salvation. To follow God's law is the way one can become more like God, indeed, he can practice being God, so that God can give him eternal spiritual life in His Family.

True freedom comes only under perfect law. Human government recognizes that freedom requires regulations so that one individual's freedom does not encroach upon the freedom of his fellow citizens. There are limits to freedom in order for freedom to exist; the greatest enslaver is anarchy. Perfect freedom comes from the perfect law of God, which is the law of love. When perfect love is expressed, perfect freedom exists. The law, therefore, is a summary of what constitutes love and how it is best expressed.

James was inspired to call God's law "the perfect law of liberty" and the "royal law" (Jas. 1:25; 2:8). It is indeed a perfect and royal law, because it was given by a Perfect and Royal King—our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **BIBLICAL COVENANTS**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Both testaments record that God made certain promises to man in the form of specific contracts or agreements with man. These are called "covenants" and define the terms of God's relationship with individuals or groups in various circumstances and eras. Of these covenants the best known are the covenants made with physical Israel and the New Covenant established on "better promises," which will be fully confirmed with spiritual Israel after the return of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant, which also applies to the New Testament Church from the time of the original apostles, makes God's law even more relevant by expanding it to include one's mental attitude and spiritual intent.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

In recording the history of God's relationship to mankind, the Bible reveals various examples of covenants made between God and certain individuals or nations. A covenant may be defined as an agreement, written or verbal, whereby two or more parties agree to a certain relationship governed by specific rules and yielding commensurate results. This usually involves certain conditions to be fulfilled by one or all parties. Therefore, a covenant is most closely analogous to our present day "contract," though any such analogy must be an oversimplification.

A contract implies a clear bilateral agreement with both (or all) sides fully agreeing to the terms. But God's covenants are not always so bilaterally equal. In almost every situation it is God who sets all the ground rules, God who formulates all the conditions, and God who stipulates all the results. Man is simply given the choice of agreeing to comply and receiving the tremendous benefits, or not agreeing to comply, in which case he not only does not receive the benefits but suffers the terrible liabilities as well. As such, God's covenants could perhaps be better characterized as "promises" since they are most often unilateral. As God has defined His covenantal relationship with man, He promises to do something if man does something, and He promises to do something else if man does something else.

God's purpose in making covenants has always been, and still is, to officially and clearly delineate what He expects from man and what man can expect from Him. By understanding these covenants an individual may come to a better knowledge of God's will and desire for mankind and also realize the conditions which will lead to prosperity and abundance.

In the Old Testament a number of important covenants are discussed. In Genesis 9:8-17, for example, God promises Noah He will never again destroy life with a huge flood. Later on in Genesis we read how God made a covenant with Abraham--which He later reiterated and expanded--which, provided physical benefits to him and eventually to all humanity through Abraham's descendants (Gen. 15:18-21; 17:1-27). Another

covenant example was the agreement God made with King David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; 1 Chron. 17:11-14). To one degree or another most of the major biblical covenants interrelate and intertwine. To understand any one covenant wholly, we must usually have a working knowledge of the others. For example, the covenant God made with Abraham has as its promises certain blessings that are reiterated in whole or in part in later covenants.

The best known of the Old Testament covenants is that between God and the Israelites made at Mount Sinai. After bringing the Israelite slaves out of bondage in Egypt, God made an agreement or covenant with them (Ex. 19-24). In return for obedience to the Ten Commandments and other laws enumerated in Exodus 20-23, God promised certain physical blessings. Included among these were protection from enemies, removal of sickness, and abundance of food and water. Noticeably absent from among these promises was any mention of spiritual benefits or rewards such as forgiveness of sin and eternal life. The promises of the covenant given were strictly temporal and physical, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 bring out in clear detail. Conversely, disobedience to these laws would be followed by curses affecting the same areas of the Israelites' physical lives as did the promises. Moses served as the mediator of this covenant, which was then ratified with the blood of animals. Despite temporary periods of relative obedience, the later history recorded in the biblical account shows the unfaithfulness of the Israelites who repeatedly broke their part of the covenant.

In the New Testament, another covenant is proposed by God to replace this old covenant that had been made with the nation of Israel. This New Covenant had already been prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and is discussed in detail in Hebrews 8:6-13. This New Covenant is to be a "better covenant" than the Old Covenant since it will be established upon "better promises" (Heb. 8:6). These "better promises" are spiritual in nature and far transcend the physical promises given to ancient Israel. These promises include: grace (unmerited favor in God's sight demonstrated in numerous ways), forgiveness of sins, eternal life as sons in God's Family, God's putting His laws into our minds and writing them in our hearts, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, and other spiritual blessings of various kinds and of inestimable value.

Through these better promises God immeasurably extends the benefits of His relationship with man. For example, by means of the Holy Spirit, it is now possible to keep the spiritual intent of the law, whereas those under the Old Covenant did not generally keep even the physical letter of the law, The New Covenant is also non-ethnic, being offered to all who repent and through baptism become Abraham's spiritual descendants and heirs (Gal. 4:28; Is. 55:1-3; 59:20-21),

The New Covenant will not be applicable in its full force, and widest sense until Jesus Christ returns and establishes it with Israel. This is the clear message of the prophets. All peoples and nations of the world shall then have an opportunity to enter into this same New Covenant relationship with God, though Israel will be the international example as God's law will go forth from Zion (Mic, 4). Nonetheless, since Jesus Christ is called "the mediator of the New Covenant" (Heb. 12:24), the New Covenant is already in force for all true Christians today who have accepted Him as their Savior.

The differences between the promises of the Old and New Covenants extend beyond their content—there is also a difference in the timing of their fulfillment, and this difference is instructive in further understanding the application of the New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, the physical promises of blessings or cursings were fulfilled (within whatever time period) according to whether Israel obeyed or disobeyed God's law. Under the New Covenant, God's promises are surely given to His begotten children, but even such converted Christians will not receive the promises in their fulfillment until Christ's return. This event is described in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 when

... we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality.

Indeed all the patriarchs and prophets of the Bible have not yet had God's promises to them fulfilled:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided something better for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. (Heb. 11:39-40)

God has determined that He will fulfill His better promises of the New Covenant to all His people, from all the ages and eras of man, at the same time; this will be at the momentous turning point of history, the return of Jesus Christ.

It is critical to understand that the agreement and acceptance of the New Covenant commits both God and men to stricter—not lighter—terms. God is now bound to the spiritual promises mentioned above. Likewise man is more tightly bound to God's law, the Ten Commandments and Jesus' expansions of it. Far from being free from obedience to God's law, the true Christian is now more fully responsible to keep the law in its complete spirit and intent. As Jeremiah 31:33 states, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." Thus God says His law shall not be done away but rather become more deeply ingrained in His people (See also Heb. 8:8ff; 10:16ff).

Note that God's writing His law "within" His people and "upon their hearts" will not be some magical transformation or mystical experience by which God will suddenly and mechanistically re-wire our brains and re-program our minds. God, in His wisdom, has determined that true character cannot be built instantly by fiat, not even by divine fiat. While it is possible for God to command and enforce instant obedience, that is not at all the same thing as developing true godly character. Character can be defined as the internalized desire and determination to obey God, backed by the mental fortitude and resolve to in fact obey through all circumstances, however difficult. Character can only be generated by a process of conscious experience, test and trial, growth and development. God designed human beings to become His Sons; and sons must do more than just obey, they must radiate God's character from within. Consequently, under the New Covenant, God shall make His laws known and His Spirit available, enabling people to understand and keep those laws. Thus, the opportunity to enter into the process of conversion—of living God's way throughout a long, rich physical life—will be available to all who accept the invitation to be included in the New Covenant. Today it is only available to the relative few, those who have been called out of the world by God into His Church. After the return of Christ it will be available to the vast multitudes—those comprising physical Israel, as the example, and then every other nation on earth, all people who will gladly submit themselves to God.



The fundamental unity between Old and New Covenants is an essential element in biblical understanding. The law is principally the same, created by the same God, but our relationship to it differs. The law of the Old Covenant required physical obedience and offered physical promises; the law of the New Covenant requires spiritual obedience, which is far tougher, and offers spiritual promises, which are enormously greater.

The greatest illustration showing that God's law is expanded and made more binding (rather than abrogated) by the New Testament is the "Sermon on the Mount" (Mt. 5ff). Here Christ, speaking to His disciples (who would receive God's Spirit and hence enter into a new covenantal relationship with Him), clearly told them that not one "jot or tittle" would pass from the law. (This is indeed logical since the Jesus Christ of the New Covenant is the same Being who was the God of Israel in the Old Covenant. See Jesus Christ.) Jesus further spoke against the concept that obedience was not necessary by saying whosoever taught this error would not be in His Kingdom (Mt. 5:19). He goes even further and gives definite examples which conclusively show we must keep the Ten Commandments more strictly in their spiritual Intent than under the Old Covenant. For example, the commandment against the physical act of murder is expanded to include the spiritual attitude of anger; the physical act of adultery is expanded to include the spiritual attitude of lust, etc. Clearly the concept that the law need not be kept under the New Covenant is an error. Indeed what God is developing is an "internalization" of obedience to Him, flowing out of our own intrinsic mental character rather than through the external coercion of physical punishment.

The offer of the New Covenant to the world as a whole is a yet future event. Thus, its full effect will not occur until the return of Christ and His thousand-year reign. But God today is calling a few elect individuals to His Church and the accompanying New Covenant relationship. Upon repentance and baptism these individuals can receive God's Holy Spirit and enter into this New Covenant (Mt. 26:26-27; Heb. 10:9-10); and those who indeed will abide by its terms (acceptance of Christ's sacrifice and God's grace, obedience, faith, etc.) shall receive its incredible----promises.

God is not a God who leaves our relationship with Him to chance or doubt. He has rather formulated covenants through which He makes plain our responsibilities as Christians

toward Him and His responsibility toward us. If we fulfill our responsibilities toward God, we will surely receive the abundant physical and spiritual blessings He promises.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# TEN COMMANDMENTS

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The Ten Commandments, as revealed by God, codified by Moses, and ratified and magnified by Christ, are the perfect expression of God's law. They are the foundation of all biblical teaching, showing man how to express love toward God and fellowman, and are consequently the focal point of Christian life.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

When God initially spoke to the Israelites from Sinai, He gave them the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). It is true that the full covenant made with Israel at Sinai also contained other rules, regulations and commands (Ex. 20-24). Yet the only code spoken directly to the people, rather than through Moses, and written on the tables of stone placed in the Ark of the Covenant was the code of the Ten Commandments. The vital importance of these ten major precepts to our culture has been recognized even by historians who see no uniqueness in the Old Testament as a religious document.

Jesus Christ specifically listed five of the Ten Commandments (the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth commandments) when He told the young rich man, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Mt. 19:17). He also pointed out that the Ten Commandments have two basic objectives (Mt. 19:16-22; Mk. 10:17-22; Lk. 18:18-23): (1) the first four show how one is to love, worship and honor God, and (2) the final six give the basis for how to love other human beings. Indeed, Jesus summarized the two basic objectives of the Ten Commandments when He answered the Pharisee's question:

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:36-40).

James wrote that "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (Jas. 2:10). What "law" was James so strongly upholding in this context? He makes this plain in the next verse by discussing two of the Ten Commandments (the sixth and seventh commandments).

John wrote profoundly about God's commandments in his first epistle: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 2:3), for anyone "that

saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (v.4). Moreover, "whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 3:22).

Ultimately, the whole object is the love of God, which is the essence of God's being: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3). The entirety of the law—in both its major and minor points—has the object of teaching us what godly love is. Yet even though each part is a section of the whole, unique stress has always been placed on the specific ten points first enumerated as such at Mount Sinai. One can see an obvious reason for this.

The problems of our modern legal system are well-known. Some laws are so badly worded that the individual citizen is hard put to know exactly what the legislators had in mind in framing them and how he is to adhere to those laws. On the other hand, each individual is continually beset on all sides by a welter of picayune regulations which seem to irritate more than help. How is one to come to grips with the situation without having to become a professional lawyer, as it were? The Ten Commandments, by contrast, are a paradigm for the modern legislator. The Ten Commandments provide a few convenient categories by which all laws can be summarized and organized.

To illustrate the importance of the Ten Commandments as the basic summarizing principles of God's mind, the following section gives a précis of each and shows how it serves as a major category of rubric under which many important but more detailed commands can be systematized.

**First Commandment: Worshipping No Gods But the True God.** Many regulations of the Old and New Testaments relate to worshipping and honoring only the one God. In today's society there are few who follow blatant polytheism. And though historians acknowledge Israel as the cradle of monotheism, most educated Romans and Greeks also thought in terms of a basic monotheism by the time of Jesus. Yet polytheism easily exists in a more subtle form in every age and society. Human nature naturally places the self rather than God at the center of the personal universe. Man by nature first worships himself. Even the initial impulse to worship a superior being—a god—or even the true God—is often a selfish one, since such worship is undertaken in order to stave off disaster (by sacrifice or other propitiatory

means), or to ask a favor, or to obtain salvation. Worship of God for its own sake is completely possible only by means of the Holy Spirit.

Second Commandment: No Manufactured Images of God. Human beings naturally like to deal with physical objects. Worshipping an invisible God and recognizing that He is more real than even the physical world does not come easily. Therefore, man seeks physical "aids" in worshipping God rather than coming to grips with the true reality of the transcendent, invisible God inaccessible to the five senses. Pagan worshippers seldom regarded their idol as the actual deity itself. On the contrary, the idol was merely a representative of the invisible god in heaven. The idol served as an aid to worship just as the icons and statues still used in various religions do today. Since the use of images in reality only serves to impede true understanding of the spiritual and invisible Creator God, it was—and is— forbidden.

Third Commandment: Not Taking God's Name in Vain. Respect the world over is to a considerable extent demonstrated by the manner in which one refers to the object of respect. One does not address the chairman of the board frivolously or familiarly. To make use of God's name lightly—whether as an interjection in day-to-day conversation, or as a witness to an event which really does not concern Him (swearing and taking oaths), or in a context which does not show respect or honor—shows an unacceptable attitude toward God Himself. We all eventually have to come to see God as the center of the universe and of all reality. That required insight is impossible without the utmost respect and honor toward God. How one uses His name is an outward indicator of how one really feels towards Him.

The third commandment has a deeper meaning as well—we are not to do anything that could hold God's name up to scorn. As Christians—and as God's Church—what we do, what we teach and how we teach it directly reflects upon God. We should take this responsibility seriously.

Fourth Commandment: Sabbaths for Rest and Worship. The Sabbath command is very much a pivotal one, serving both as a means of honoring and worshipping God and of aiding man. First of all, the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation pointing to God as the Creator. Secondly, the human body requires rest for efficient bodily function and a proper

mental outlook. Therefore, God commanded man to rest a full day once a week plus setting aside certain other days for annual times of rest and rejoicing. Man by nature needs periodic holidays. Had God not given some to Israel, they would have invented their own. Moreover, God not only gave weekly and annual days of rest, but He required that slaves—and even beasts of burden—be allowed to enjoy rest on these days. This was a demonstration of love for one's fellow man as well as kindness to animals.

Thirdly, while periodical physical rest is sufficient to meet physical needs, the Sabbath and annual holy days serve a spiritual function as well. Indeed, this is their primary purpose. They provide the opportunity for study and for meeting to receive instruction in the ways of God. They provide the opportunity for worship and intellectual and spiritual pursuits which may not be possible during the day-to-day task of making a living. Again, any day of the week would suffice for this as well as for physical rest. The spiritual aspect lies in the fact that (1) it is a time God has chosen, a fact significant in itself since one shows respect to God by worshipping when and as He says rather than as the individual chooses; and that (2) the choice of the seventh day also points back to Creation and, as a consequence, to the Creator. Further, both the weekly and annual Sabbaths serve to point out God's overall plan to man. This is all part of the process of acquiring God's mind, which is perfect love. (An expression of the fourth commandment to include the annual festivals is indicated by some of the scriptures which utilize the plural form of the Hebrew word Shabbat.)

Fifth Commandment: Honor of Parents. The parents are the first authority in a child's life. They are also the first source and the first object of his love. By respecting and honoring his parents the child learns respect for constituted authority in general, and eventually learns respect for the ultimate authority, God. In the same way, he learns love from the love of his parents. As he returns that love, he begins to see how love must also be directed toward a broader circle, and eventually toward the Source of all things. Familial love is the basis of a stable family unit, which in turn is the basis of a stable society. Loving one's parents is thus crucial in a positive environment in which love is learned and expressed, and God thereby worshipped. It is also a necessary step in learning to love God.

Sixth Commandment: Respect for Another's Life. Any orderly society has certain restrictions on the taking of human life. Absolute prohibition against taking human life does not exist in human society, but the basic principle is, at least, recognized. A number of Old Testament laws governing warfare and the execution of criminals relate to a physical nation rather than to a spiritual church. Life could be taken under certain circumstances. However, Jesus showed that even hating was wrong, since hating preceded murder and murder never embodied love. Even Old Testament laws clearly taught that lack of care for the safety of another was only one step removed from deliberate murder. A number of laws regulated potential or actual cases of manslaughter. If a man accidentally killed another, the law protected him by allowing a place for him to flee to. That is, it prevented another life from being taken in revenge for the accident. On the other hand, the one guilty of manslaughter had to suffer a temporary exile, which demonstrated the seriousness of the incident, showing that he might perhaps have prevented a death had he been more careful. In other cases, the guilt of the careless individual was more clearly defined, as for example, in not building a guard rail on his roof or not keeping a belligerent farm animal safely locked up. Clearly, more than just premeditated murder is being regulated and punished.

Seventh Commandment; The Marriage Institution. Adultery is probably the most blatant offense against another person's marital partner. Forcible adultery (rape) or consenting adultery both violate an intimate bond between husband and wife, even if the wronged partner is not aware of it. Consenting adultery strikes at the very bedrock of society, the marriage family unit, shattering the most intimate human bond. Rape constitutes a violation of another person's body, mental and physical health, and right to make personal decisions. Rape could never be considered an act of love.

Other unlawful sexual practices (e.g. homosexuality, bestiality) are illegal, both because they degrade the human mind and body, and because they are a substitution for the God-ordained marital bond. Sexual relations with near of kin are potentially hazardous to unborn offspring. Premarital sexual relations are potentially adulterous since the partners in such relations may eventually marry someone else. Similarly, to live together sexually before marriage



is to give a distorted view of the purpose of marriage and perhaps to take away an important physical incentive for marriage in the first place. All of these have consequences for one's ability to love others.

Finally, since marriage is also a picture-in miniature-of God's plan, a wrong approach towards marriage can cause one to overlook the important spiritual truths about the ultimate and eternal Family of God which can be learned from a proper marriage.

**Eighth Commandment:** Respect for the Property of Others. Love for another requires respect for his empirical self, which includes his family and his physical possessions. While the greatest possession one has is life, and the next greatest is one's marital partner and family, personal property may be an important necessity for continued existence. To take another's property, in a poor society, may sentence him to malnutrition and a slow death. In a more affluent society, it may produce mental and emotional consequences. Consequently, we must learn to respect the rights and needs of others.

**Ninth Commandment:** Honesty in Dealing with Others. This commandment is phrased in a legal manner because one of the most obvious ways to defraud another is to testify falsely against him in court. This could cause loss of property, freedom, or even life. Yet, complete honesty and aboveboard dealing is also envisioned. One has, in a sense, witnessed falsely when he uses a scale which has been tampered with. Misrepresentation to get ahead means that a more deserving person is passed over. Lying to boost one's ego, thereby deflating someone else's, is also blatant disregard for another. Such self-centered dealings to the exclusion of others are unconscionable and the antithesis of love- a violation of the ninth commandment.

**Tenth Commandment:** The Beginning of True Love is in the Mind. The specific phrasing of this command proscribes desiring what is not lawful for an individual to have: another person's property or mate or position or whatever. In a sense, this gets at the heart of the four previous commands. One does not kill unless he desires something another person has or can give him (such as property, a better position, an improved reputation, the elimination of a threat or problem, etc.). Even revenge can usually be traced back to envy, a form of covetousness. One does

not commit adultery or other sexual sins unless he has first desired what he was not entitled to, what he was not allowed to have. One does not steal or gain through dishonesty without first taking possession of the forbidden object in one's mind. If a person can control his nature at this point, many of the other temptations shall take care of themselves. Indeed, the tenth commandment is spiritual in form and content--it is concerned with the unlawful desire in the mind as well as the specific act. In this sense, it points to and foreshadows the future teachings of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3,5: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves . . . . Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **SABBATH**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The seventh-day Sabbath is taught and kept holy in accordance with biblical instruction. Instituted at creation, reaffirmed to Israel as a part of the covenant at Sinai and taught by Jesus Christ who is the Messenger of the New Covenant, the observance of the Sabbath is considered basic to a Christian's relationship with God.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Worldwide Church of God continues to observe the seventh-day Sabbath as did Jesus and the New Testament Church. The Sabbath was established by God at Creation week; it was made for man, reaffirmed by Jesus, taught by the apostles and kept down through the centuries by faithful Christians. The importance of the Sabbath in the Old Testament cannot be disputed. Its continued observance is exemplified in the New Testament which confirms Sabbath-keeping as a fundamental practice of Jesus and the apostolic Church.

The original twofold functions of the Sabbath in the Old Testament were not ceremonial. The Sabbath (1) provided needed rest for the body and the psyche; and (2) gave opportunity for closer contact with God through study and prayer. When God established Israel as His people, the Sabbath was utilized as the time for congregational services, a commanded assembly of all the people. These needs are still very much extant in the 20th century.

The weekly Sabbath celebration serves as a reminder that God is Creator by its regular memorial of the Sabbath of Creation. It also affords a view toward a future new Creation resulting from God's Kingdom on earth.

While a simple, straightforward command from God to keep the Sabbath would be sufficient for us to keep it, an understanding of the Sabbath's purpose and intent is helpful and enlightening. The purpose behind most laws is clear, and that which lies behind the Old Testament commands about the Sabbath is evident. Once this purpose is understood, it becomes obvious why no New Testament restatement of the basic command was necessary or even likely. The New Testament discussions and examples concern how to keep the Sabbath (in spirit rather than in a rigid, legalistic manner), not whether to keep it.

The most important New Testament statement on the Sabbath was spoken by Jesus Christ as quoted in Mark 2:27-28. Jesus not only affirms the Sabbath command, He also instructs us about its purpose. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." Thus, it is apparent that the Sabbath

was made for man, for his spiritual and physical benefit. It provides the means for loving God to a greater degree by direct worship and, indirectly, by the spiritual renewal which enables one to keep up a constant direction of mind toward godly matters throughout the week. It is in our earnest attempt to express loyalty and love toward our Creator and to worship Him in spirit and in truth that we, as Christians, continue to keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

#### DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The English word "Sabbath" is basically an anglicized pronunciation of a Hebrew word meaning "rest" or "repose." This Hebrew noun is itself evidently related to the verb "to stop, rest or cease." This same verb is found in ordinary usage (e.g. Lam. 5:14, "The elders have ceased from the gate"). "Ceasing" is exactly what God did on the seventh day of Creation week. In the Hebrew, Genesis 2:2 literally says that God "sabbathed"—"ceased" or "rested"—on the seventh day from all His work.

By definition, the Sabbath is a weekly holy day, a solemn rest, an appointed feast, a holy convocation (Lev. 23:3). As such it is a period of time of approximately 24 hours reckoned from sundown Friday evening until sundown Saturday evening. The period of observation is borne out both by the repeated phrase, "And the evening and the morning were the . . . day," in Genesis 1 and by direct statements in such passages as Leviticus 23:32 on observing an annual Sabbath, "from evening to evening."

#### Old Testament Period

The initial and cardinal passage about the Sabbath is contained in the Creation account which reads: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (Gen. 2:1-3).

Since from the beginning the Sabbath is associated with Creation week and specifically the creation of man, the Sabbath's universal or cosmopolitan perspective sets it above any uniquely Israelite law and practice. The

Creation Sabbath is presented in much the same way that the later prophets envisioned it—namely as an observance for all mankind, for the Gentile as well as for the Israelite. Therefore, while the Sabbath was later a functional part of the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 20-24), its purpose and place are clearly much broader than that. (For example, Isaiah 66:23 shows that all nations will be observing the Sabbath during the millennial reign of Christ.)

In Exodus 16 the Sabbath is once again explicitly mentioned. This chapter records God's revealing of which day was indeed the seventh of the week—the Sabbath—to the nation of Israel. God's great efforts to show Israel His true Sabbath would, of course, be natural in light of the importance given the Sabbath in the Creation account. He would surely want His chosen people to know which day He had earmarked as "blessed and sanctified."

The account of Exodus 16 shows the great importance God places on a specific period of time for the Sabbath. The true Sabbath could never be just one day, any day, out of seven. God caused special miracles to ratify the holiness of the Sabbath—double the normal amount of manna was found on the sixth day and the extra manna did not spoil when left until morning as it would have on any other day. And when some Israelites went looking for manna on the Sabbath, God told Moses, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" (v.28) This statement is especially relevant since it took place before the covenant at Sinai, proving both that the Sabbath predated that covenant and that it is included as one of God's commandments and laws.

The additional significance of the account of Exodus 16 lies in the fact that it shows the supreme importance of the Sabbath to God. The fact that God revealed and maintained the identity of His Sabbath to Israel by the daily and the weekly miracles of the manna—along with the clear example of the types of punishment meted out upon those who broke the Sabbath as recorded in these verses—reemphasizes that God's original Sabbath command was a law of extreme importance. The fact that the events described in Exodus 16 actually occurred in Israel before the institution of the covenant at Sinai corroborates the truth that the Sabbath was not, as some contend, only part of God's specific pact with that nation and hence of significance to no other people.

But even then, the inclusion of the Sabbath by God in His covenant with Israel--His clear delineation of the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20--only adds weight to its importance, rather than detracting from it. At the making of the Sinai covenant the Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments recorded on the tablets of stone and kept inside the ark of the covenant. Other terms of the covenant were considered of less significance as was shown by their being kept outside the ark. Once again, it is only logical that God would include in His covenant those laws and principles He knew would be good for Israel, especially because Israel was a nation He hoped would be the example and showcase to the world.

Under the Sinai covenant, the Sabbath had national significance; its observance involved the entire community. God showed this by adding to the original Genesis command a communal responsibility of Sabbath-keeping which involved children, male and female servants and even animals and strangers within Israel's boundaries (Ex. 20:10).

God's Sabbath command of Exodus 20:8, "Remember the Sabbath . . . to keep it holy" represents an example of God definitely tutoring His special people in the obedience of a universal law, rather than His singling out one nation for obedience to an exclusive law not meant for the rest of mankind. The admonition, "Remember," itself indicates that this commandment is not instituting the Sabbath for the first time, but rather enjoining Israel to keep and retain what is already in existence. The Sabbath was in existence before Israel. Some quote Nehemiah 9:13-14 as disproof of this. Actually, these verses show the opposite. God gave Israel right and true and good laws, statutes and commandments, and He made known to them His Sabbath. It does not say He originated or instituted the Sabbath with them--it says He made it known to them. Israel had lost knowledge of it at that time, as Gentiles have today. But God revealed the Sabbath to Israel, who was to become His covenant nation. God did not create the Sabbath at Sinai, but rather made it fully known at that time.

Just as the Sabbath was commanded before the covenant of Exodus 20-24, so the Sabbath was also given as a separate covenant with special significance in Exodus 31:12-17. It is referred to as a "sign" (Hebrew 'ot) of the special relationship between God and Israel. (Signs referred to elsewhere as evidence of covenants are: the rainbow in

regard to God's covenant with mankind, Genesis 9:8-17; and circumcision as a sign of the covenant with Abraham, Genesis 17:1-14.)

Why was God's Sabbath day singled out in Exodus 31 as a sign? Because of its nature. Many other nations kept some of the laws of God in one form or another. Some had fairly tight moral laws, usually criminal ones. But none kept the Sabbath day. It was the one law of God that would make Israel stand out. It would act as a sign to show that Israel was the nation of God. It would also keep Israel knowledgeable of God as Creator—the one true God who made everything. When the nations of the ten tribes of Israel later gave up this Sabbath sign, they were lost to history. But the Jews continue to keep it to this day, and are known by it. It is even called "Jewish" by others. The Sabbath is the one commandment of the ten that will maintain a direct line to God.

This Sabbath covenant of Exodus was to be "perpetual." With reference to this, some quote passages referring to the sacrificial system being "forever" (e.g. Ex. 29:28) and conclude that when the Bible uses the term "forever," it does not mean that at all. This is not correct. The word in Hebrew translated "forever" in most instances is *olam*. It can mean "the world" or even "the age." From this we can come to the basic meaning of *olam*, that of continuousness. It essentially gives the concept of a situation in which there is no end in sight; this does not have to mean that there is no end, just that no end is seen from the immediate perspective. In some scriptures (e.g. Ex. 21:6) *olam* obviously means "continuously," whereas in others (e.g. Ps. 10:16) the same word means "eternally." What about "forever" in Exodus 31? The key idea to remember is that *olam* means to do something continually or that some condition exists continually. So we must go by the context. In the case of a command of God we can say that it is in force until God says differently. In the case of Exodus 31 the Sabbath remains between God and His people. God never did say stop. God still only deals with Israel—Abraham's seed—but in the New Testament, "Israel" has become spiritual and all peoples can, through Christ, become "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29), which promise—salvation—"is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22). Everyone has to become a part of Israel in order to enter into God's covenantal relationship.



The Church is the Israel of God (Rom. 9:6-8). So the Sabbath remains a sign to show just who is in that covenantal relationship with God, just who the true Church is or who the people of God are. This Sabbath covenant is not the same as the Sinai covenant of Exodus 20-24. So the modification of that Sinaitic Covenant to the New Covenant does not necessarily affect the Sabbath Covenant.

Ezekiel 20:12 shows that God gave Israel His Sabbath, as a sign for another reason as well: so that they would continually know who was the God that sanctified them. This means that the Sabbath is one means by which God sanctifies—a method God has chosen of consecration by setting apart for a holy purpose. Certainly sanctification is even more important in the spiritual sense of the New Covenant than it was in the physical sense of the Sinai covenant. Consequently the meaning, impact and importance of the Sabbath in its widest spiritual intent under the New Covenant, far from being diminished, must in fact be intensified for Christians.

Since the Sabbath began at Creation—not with the Sinaitic covenant with Israel—and then was made a special sign in a covenant forever with Israel, we still know the Sabbath as God's covenant people today; it is still the same sign.

Once again, the purpose of the special Sabbath covenant of Exodus 31 was to earmark Sabbath observance as a distinguishing practice that would help identify God's people among the world's populace. Thus it served to differentiate the true believers from the nonbelievers, God's people from the heathen, and not merely the civil Israelite nation from the Egyptian or Canaanite nations. Since the Sabbath was an important religious command of God, its observance helped to identify God's religious system and not merely a civil system or ethnic group. For this reason this special Sabbath Covenant applies today, with the same spiritually binding significance for all who wish to become and remain a part of God's true Church.

Leviticus 23 enumerates the Sabbath as one of the "appointed feasts of the Lord." Other passing references in the Pentateuch and historical books do not shed significant further light on what has already been mentioned. However, several important scriptures are found in the later prophets.

One of the greatest indictments against the people for Sabbath-breaking—along with a warning that such action would result in the overthrow of Jerusalem—was made by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 17:19-27). Jeremiah was ordered to stand in the gates of Jerusalem and warn the leaders and people: "Take heed for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day, or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers" (vv.21-22).

Verses 24-26 promise that if the people should keep the Sabbath day holy they should be blessed, and the city of Jerusalem should remain forever. But verse 27 goes on to warn of the dire consequences of negligence in regard to the Sabbath: "then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched." This threat was made good: the city of Jerusalem was overthrown, its palaces and Temple burned and the nation of Judah taken into captivity. Disobedience toward the Sabbath command was evidently widespread among the people in the latter years of the period of the monarchy. Jeremiah 17:23 confirms this fact: the people of Jerusalem did not heed Jeremiah's warning to keep the Sabbath ("they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction").

Ezekiel also speaks quite strongly against breaking the Sabbath and considers it one of the main reasons why Israel went into captivity. The lengthy passage in 20:10-26 is a scorching indictment of the continual disobedience of the nation. The captivity was the fulfillment of a promise in the wilderness: "Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations and disperse them through the countries, because they had not executed my ordinances, but had rejected my statutes and profaned my Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers' idols" (vv.23-24). This is a very succinct summary of the cause of the Exile. Clearly, one of the major reasons was profanation of the Sabbath.

Isaiah also emphasized the importance of the Sabbath for Israel:

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,  
from doing your pleasure /pursuing your own busi-  
ness/ on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a

delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable;  
. . . I will make you ride upon the heights of  
the earth (Is. 58:13-14).

However, more universal in nature is the promise to the Gentile ("the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord") who shall keep the Sabbath. Not only shall they be accepted, but those unfortunate enough to be eunuchs shall receive something far greater than children for their faithful Sabbath observance (Is. 56:3-7). While this promise is set in the context of national Israel, its international scope cannot be ignored.

The captives in time were freed and some returned to Palestine. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe their return and their attempts to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its Temple. Nehemiah 10 records a special covenant made by some of the people, including Nehemiah, in which they "entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord" (v.29). Among the provisions of this covenant was that "if the peoples of the land bring in wares or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day" (v.31). These verses make it obvious that Nehemiah and the people deeply recognized the seriousness of Sabbath-breaking and its part in bringing about their captivity.

Nevertheless, it did not take long for the emergence of a certain laxity in this regard. Nehemiah soon found himself confronting a situation in which the Sabbath was treated as an ordinary business day. He met the problem head on and apparently solved it for the time being (Neh. 13:15-22).

During the intertestamental period a great reawakening took place among the Jewish community with respect to the importance of God's laws. One catalyst was the remembrance of the exiles; another was the slaughter and persecution brought about by Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century B.C. The Jewish community "built a wall" around the law by adding regulations far beyond the biblical statements in an attempt to make it "impossible" for anyone to even approach breaking the law: the example of the Sabbath is a classic one.

Hence, as we approach the time of Christ's ministry, we find that the Sabbath, due to man's sincere but exaggerated interpretations, had become not a joy but a burden-

something not originally intended by God. As a result, Christ had to set out to clarify the true "spirit" of the law.

### New Testament Church

There is great emphasis on the Sabbath throughout the Old Testament. Much is also written about Sabbath observance in the New Testament. The emphasis changes, however, from a nationalistic system of communal Sabbath-keeping, fulfilling the letter of the law, to an individual responsibility of personal worship on the Sabbath, fulfilling the spirit of the law. The issues discussed in the New Testament never deal with whether the Sabbath should be kept. This would be utterly impossible as we will see. Rather, the questions deal with how the Sabbath should be kept.

The seventh-day Sabbath is observed today by only a few, because it is generally assumed that the New Testament shows the abolition of any need to keep the Sabbath. This assumption is rejected by the Worldwide Church of God. Granted, there is no explicit statement such as, "Christians must keep the Sabbath." When we actually go back to the New Testament environment, however, the fact that we should keep the Sabbath is so plain that no such statement is required.

A clear understanding of the Sabbath in the New Testament requires a brief summary of the state of Sabbath observance among Jews during Christ's time.

G.F. Moore, the well-known scholar of early Judaism, states: "The two fundamental observances of Judaism are circumcision and the Sabbath" (Judaism, II, 16). This was as true in the first century A.D. as at any other time. Both practices were referred to as "signs" (Hebrew 'ot) and as "eternal covenants" (berit 'olam) in the Old Testament. 1 Maccabees 2:32ff describes a group of Jews who were slaughtered because they refused to defend themselves on the Sabbath. As a result, Mattathias and his followers determined to fight in self-defense on that day if necessary, but even then they would not take the offensive (1 Mace. 2:41; 2 Mace. 8:26ff).

The book of Jubilees (2nd century B.C.) gives some detailed regulations for the Sabbath. Things forbidden included preparing food, taking anything between houses,

drawing water, riding on an animal or ship, making war or having sexual relations (2:29-30; 50:8,12). The Qumran community had a number of the same regulations. Other prohibitions included going more than a thousand cubits from one's town, helping an animal out of a pit or in giving birth, and apparently even using an instrument to save a human being from water or fire (Damascus Covenant 10.14-11.18).

Recent scholarly studies have emphasized the extreme strictness in, and rigorous administration of, Sabbath observance in the days of Jesus, even when compared to the later Rabbinic writings in the Mishnah.

Therefore, when Jesus was called into account for doing certain things on the Sabbath, it was not for violating specified Old Testament prohibitions, but for disavowal of non-inspired, traditional regulations concerning the Sabbath. The Old Testament did not forbid one to pick ears of grain on the Sabbath to eat on the spot. Yet when Jesus and His disciples did this He was called to account. The reason? Because the religious leaders had classified picking ears as "reaping" and rubbing loose the grain as "threshing."

The incident of the disciples plucking grain to eat in the fields (Mt. 12:1-8; Mk. 2:23-28; Lk. 6:1-5) was no violation of property law since this was specifically permitted in the Old Testament (Deut. 23:25). They were accused only of Sabbath-breaking. Jesus did not defend their actions on the grounds that the Sabbath was done away. Rather, he used relevant analogies; David and the showbread (KJV--"bread of the Presence," RSV) and the priests in the Temple. It was only after He had shown that the actions of the disciples were not a true violation of the Sabbath that He asserted, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27-28). By this means He showed not that the Sabbath was done away but rather the correct spirit in which to keep the Sabbath. Jesus was clearly a Sabbath-keeper, not a Sabbath-breaker.

Similarly, it was forbidden by extra-biblical Jewish law to treat a sickness when the sick person's life was in no immediate danger. Although being watched by the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11). To defend Himself He used the analogy of pulling a sheep out of a

pit on the Sabbath. This shows that it was not His intent to break the Sabbath but to show that relieving suffering was wholly consistent with the purpose of the day.

Similarly, when He healed a cripple who had been ill 38 years, He told the man to pick up his pallet and go home (Jn. 5:8). This carrying of a few ounces of weight was in no way a violation of the law against bearing a burden on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:21,22,27). It was only in the opinion of certain on looking religious leaders that He had violated the Sabbath. The incident is in perfect harmony with the other Sabbath discussions given in the gospels. (Other healings are also described in such passages as John 9; Luke 13:10-13; 14:2-4).

One passage is undisputed, at least insofar as a clear reference to Sabbath observance after Jesus' own lifetime is concerned. This is Matthew 24:20: "Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath." This admonition is directed at Jesus' own followers. And such instructions would have had little place in a non-Sabbath-keeping community. Scholars are almost unanimous in agreeing that this refers at least to a time as late as the 66-70 war against Rome, long after Jesus' death. (The dual implications of this prophecy also show that Jesus knew that the Sabbath would be kept by His people millennia later in the "time of the end.")

In addition, Christ's own example of attending the weekly synagogue is significant. In Luke 4, Jesus attends the synagogue on the Sabbath day in His own city "as his custom was" (v.16). Evidently it had not been His custom heretofore to speak in the synagogue since the listeners were astonished at His teaching. This indicates He attended regular services as a means of Sabbath observance rather than just for the purpose of teaching. And it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of Christ's own example since He told His disciples to teach all nations those things that He had commanded them (Mt. 28:20) .

Thus, we may conclude that the picture of Jesus as a lawbreaker or antinomian radical, while maintained in some fundamentalist circles, is easily refuted by the scriptures and is also generally rejected by scholarship.

The argument that Christians today need not do what Jesus Himself did and taught is refuted by Matthew 28:20, as mentioned above, where the disciples are told to teach what Jesus had commanded them. Furthermore, Matthew 11:13

shows that "all the prophets and the law" were in effect until John; this means that Jesus' own actions and teachings were more than simply fulfilling the Sinai Covenant—they were setting the proper example for all Christians for all time.

It is abundantly clear that the Jerusalem Church never gave up Sabbath observance during the New Testament era. On Paul's last visit to Jerusalem (about 58-60 A.D.), James and all the elders of the Church told Paul how the thousands of converted Jews "are all zealous /"ardent upholders," Moffatt/ of the law" (Acts 21:20). In such an environment, it is inconceivable that the cherished and holy Sabbath would no longer be kept.

In his letter to the Church in Rome in this same time period, 55-59 A.D., Paul reminds them that the Gentiles "have been made partakers of their spiritual things" in a direct reference to the poor saints in the Jerusalem Church for whom Paul was asking physical contributions (Rom. 15:26-27). One cannot imagine that "partaking of their spiritual things" would not include worship on the Sabbath, since it was fully revered by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and constituted a significant part of their spiritual lives.

The first ministerial conference in the apostolic Church is highly informative both for what was said and for what was not said (Acts 15). In the year 49-50 A.D., the issue of whether circumcision was required for salvation caused such dissension in the Church that Paul and Barabbas went up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders. Various issues of current interest were discussed— issues such as idolatry, fornication and certain eating laws— but the Sabbath was not discussed at all. It was not relevant. Why? Because it simply was not an issue. Nobody in all Christianity was as yet teaching that the Sabbath did not have to be observed and kept holy by the Church. Just the opposite, in fact, appears to have been the case. James, who seems to have been in charge, concluded by referring to what was actually happening in that crucial time. "For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21). As S. Bacchiocchi, a scholar who has researched the question, writes:

We should note that James' statement refers specifically to the Gentile Christians outside Judea. It is therefore significant to notice that

the Gentile Christians (possibly former "prose-lytes or God-fearers") were still attending synagogue, listening to the reading and exposition of the Scriptures "every Sabbath." The total silence of the Council on such an important matter as a new day of worship /or elimination or even denigration of the long-standing day of worship/ would seem to indicate that such a problem had not yet arisen.

Thus it can be seen that Acts 15:21 is a very interesting scripture, albeit, perhaps, somewhat enigmatic. James does not make a big issue about what he is saying; apparently, he does not have to. He is simply explaining why this major conference would only rule on a few things for the Gentile Christians to abstain from: "pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:20). Obviously, there were other things Christians had to abstain from, such as dishonoring parents, killing, lying, etc., but James is simply saying that all these other responsibilities of Christians were well known since God's laws were read every Sabbath in the synagogue.

As far as circumcision was concerned, a specific Church ruling was made, in accordance with the binding and loosing authority given by God (Mt. 16:19), not to require it for Gentile Christians.

The traditional anti-Sabbath rejoinder to Acts 15 asks how the requirement for Sabbath observance can be left in while at the same time the requirement for circumcision is ruled out? Or phrased another way, why would not the abrogation of the Sabbath commandment be included within the abrogation of circumcision which symbolized the Sinai covenant?

The answer is almost fully contained in the question itself. Circumcision of the flesh indeed symbolized the Sinaitic covenant which had now been superseded by the terms of the New Covenant. But the Sabbath far transcended the covenant at Sinai in both directions: it was instituted at Creation, long before Sinai; and it also foreshadows the future millennial rest in the Kingdom of God. The Sabbath, in fact, shall be observed following the return of Christ when the fullness of the New Covenant shall spread over all the earth (Is. 66:23).

The picture of the early Gentile Church in Acts illustrates continued Sabbath observance. From Acts 13 we learn that the apostles Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia on the Sabbath (v.14). They were so



successful that they were asked back the next Sabbath. Acts 13:42-43 is then an interesting passage. It shows that the Jews rejected Paul's strong message and went out of the synagogue. But the Gentiles wanted to hear more and beseeched Paul to preach to them the next Sabbath. Here are Gentiles, not asking to meet on a Sunday or a weekday evening, but on the Sabbath. The next Sabbath almost the whole city came to hear Paul speak (v.44). Notice that the Jews were not a part of this; they were angry with Paul (v.45). This was a Gentile meeting (v.48)—on the Sabbath! They knew the significance of the Sabbath day. If Paul had wanted to meet with the Gentiles on a Sunday, he could easily have said: "We can just assemble tomorrow on the Lord's day." But this is not the case. They all waited a whole week—then on the following Sabbath day we find Paul preaching to a whole Gentile city! He was not trying to impress the Jews. They had turned from him. But Paul kept the Sabbath, and here endorses it for the entire Gentile world.\*

In Acts 16:13 Paul goes out to a place of prayer (apparently because there was no synagogue). It was, in fact, Paul's custom to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 17:1-2). While these occasions were used as opportunities to spread the gospel, as would be natural, they are certainly also further examples of Paul's worshipping God specifically on the Sabbath.

The point that needs to be understood is that meeting on the Sabbath was completely normal for the Gentiles. There was nothing extraordinary about it, nothing to make an issue out of. What we find recorded in the book of Acts are some matter-of-fact comments by Luke concerning what occurred. It was common knowledge—and Theophilus (to whom the book was written, Acts 1:1) took for granted this fact—that the

\* There are some textual variants in these verses which do affect part of the argument. Scholars are not certain about the original readings, and there is consequently no strongly favored text. Nonetheless, the manuscripts most currently accepted, as reflected in the RSV for example, do not differentiate between Jews and Gentiles in Acts 13:42. Yet Gentiles were surely included in asking Paul to preach the next Sabbath (v.42) and indeed constituted the majority when the whole city gathered (vv.44-50).

entire Church, Gentile and Jewish, met on the Sabbath as spiritual Israelites. This is what would be expected: Paul preaching on the Sabbath and then meeting with Gentiles on the same day. It was nothing unusual. So we can now examine Acts alongside the gospels and still find no teaching—not even a hint of one—that the Sabbath day was removed or changed. On the contrary, we find Jesus and Paul keeping it, teaching on it and meeting with others to worship God on it—all on the Sabbath.

It is also significant that the Sabbath is called the Sabbath. This was not the common Greek way of referring to the seventh day of the week. So, Luke is actually giving additional meaning to the Sabbath by referring to it by name. He does not call it the "Jewish Sabbath" but simply "the Sabbath." (The Hebrew—or Aramaic—word was, in fact, borrowed by the New Testament writers.)

Acts was written years after the resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of the Church in Gentile as well as Jewish areas. If the Sabbath had been removed, it should have been long since gone. The date was probably in the middle or late 60's A.D. It was not common for Gentiles to call the seventh day of the week "the Sabbath," any more than it is common in the United States to call Saturday the Sabbath. (And Theophilus, to whom the book was written, could have been a Gentile.) So, when Luke says that Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, he is commenting in effect that this was God's Sabbath or rest day, for he calls it just that. The connotation would be the same today if we heard someone call Saturday "the Sabbath"; we would think it significant and probably assume that that person kept Saturday as his Sabbath or rest day. The same goes for Luke 23:56. The women rested on the Sabbath "according to the /fourth/ commandment." This is not meant as a mere historical narrative but as a comment on that day actually being the Sabbath. Calling the seventh day "the Sabbath" then is very significant, especially around 63 A.D. when Luke wrote his gospel.

There is more concrete evidence in Acts that Paul and all the apostles kept the Sabbath. Perhaps the strongest proof is that they were never accused by the Jews of breaking it. Notice in this regard John 5:9-18 and 9:13-16. Here these men thought Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing on that day. They wanted to kill Him for this and claimed the legal right to do so. This was serious. It was a major

issue to them. Then, in the latter passage, some of them conclude that Jesus could not be of God, because He did not keep the Sabbath. What we find in Acts are similar vicious attacks on Paul but a stark contrast regarding accusations about not keeping the Sabbath.

The Jews from Palestine were really after Paul. They wanted to find something against him. He was constantly under attack. But he was never even accused of breaking the Sabbath as was Jesus. This proves that he never even appeared to break it, much less did he actually teach against it. Paul, in reality, kept more of the laws of the Sinaitic Covenant than he had to (Acts 21:17-27), so obviously he kept the Sabbath which was considered so much more important. Paul was not lying or giving witness to something that was not true. James was not fooled. Acts 21:24 is true: that is what Paul did—he kept the law even to the extent of "the customs." So it is plain he also kept the Sabbath. The Ten Commandments or moral living are not even in question. James was not implying in verses 21-24 that Paul was Sabbath-breaking, or lying, or killing or otherwise breaking the law. There would have been no question on those big matters. The question was how many of the ceremonies and rituals should a converted Jew continue to keep?

We can be absolutely sure that the Jerusalem Church kept the Sabbath. James and the others had favor with the people—even priests obeyed the faith (Acts 2:47; 6:7). This would have been utterly impossible if the Church had been meeting on Sunday (or any other day) and breaking the Sabbath. If that had been the case, it would have been mentioned as the major accusation against, and problem for, the Church. The Church was indeed persecuted by the religious leaders of the day, but not for Sabbath-breaking.

Scholars recognize that the Palestinian Christian churches continued in Sabbath observance even after the break with Judaism. While the apostle Paul is considered by some as an instigator of a full-scale departure from Jewish law, such an interpretation depends in part on interpretations of documents outside and later than the New Testament.\*

\* When appeal is made to certain New Testament scriptures in an effort to change the Sabbath to Sunday, it is almost always in conjunction with  
(cont. page 17)

In several instances Paul appeals to Jesus<sup>1</sup> teachings as backing for his own commands. We find three such major examples in 1 Corinthians alone: in chapter 7 (on marriage) ; in chapter 9 (on support of the ministry); and in chapter 11 (on the "Lord's Supper"). If Jesus had done away with the Sabbath, it is inconceivable that Paul would have been ignorant of the fact. Yet if Jesus had done away with the Sabbath and Paul knew of it, it is absolutely inconceivable that he would not have cited this as proof of his own alleged teachings against the Sabbath, if such he had had.

Certain scriptures in Paul's writings are often adduced as proof of his alleged attitude that Sabbath observance is unnecessary or even evil. For example, it is often held that Romans 14:5-6 shows that it does not matter which day one keeps holy, but this is actually nowhere stated. Since eating is mentioned several times in the passage, some commentators suggest it may be a question of fast days or something else to do with food. Verse 5 speaks of esteeming one

\* (cont.)

such references as Ignatius, Pliny the Younger, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Didache and Justin Martyr. For example, the term kuriake" hemera, "Lord's day," in Revelation 1:10 is almost always compared with Ignatius, Magnesians 9:10, as a means of showing that it certainly refers to Sunday rather than the eschatological Day of the Lord mentioned so often in the Old Testament. Recent scholarship has thrown serious doubt on this use of Magnesians 9:10; the most probable text is now thought to refer to "the Lord's life" and does not mention the "Lord's day." It now seems that the earliest dated text to mention Sunday worship is Justin's First Apology (chapter 67), written about 150 A.D. The Didache cannot be precisely dated. The letter of Pliny specifies no particular day of the week. The Epistle of Barnabas is not certainly dated; about 140 A.D. is widely accepted and very plausible. Some think it could go back as early as about 130, but a date as late as 150 is not excluded. For this reason, a number of the arguments and references to early Christian Sunday worship so often repeated in standard reference works are not really very solid, and the earliest certain mention of Christian Sunday worship is about 150, a century after Paul.

day above another but says nothing about the reason for the preference. The word "esteem" (Greek krino) is not otherwise used of keeping a holy day. Similarly, in verse 6, the word phroneo ("regardeth," KJV; "observes," RSV) is not otherwise used to refer to the observance of festivals. To use this passage as proof that Paul no longer believed Sabbath observance to be necessary requires anti-Sabbatarians to demonstrate that this is in fact what lies behind the statement—something that has not been done up to this time.

The reference to "days, and months, and seasons, and years" in Galatians 4:10 is frequently applied to the Jewish Sabbath and holy day observance. The basis for this is the apparent Jewish identity of those causing problems in Galatia. That the troublemakers had certain characteristics which would gain them the label "Jewish" is correct (e.g. circumcision), but this still does not delineate the situation. Was it Pharisaic, was it Essenic, was it some sort of syncretistic group? What part did astrology play? What was the makeup of the Galatian congregation? Such things are often assumed rather than proved.

The fact is, we do not know anything about the group causing the problem other than what the epistle itself tells us. To assume more than this is not to rely on the evidence. Why does Paul speak of their "turning back" to the "weak and miserable stoicheia" (v.9)? These Galatians do not seem to be former Jews, since they are receiving circumcision--something Jews would already have. Unless one takes the "turning back" as purely a metaphorical expression, one would assume they are going back to their former pagan conditions .

Further evidence is found in the vocabulary here. Why would one speak of "days" (hemerai), "months" (menai), "seasons" (kairoi) and "years" (eniautoi), if one had the Old Testament festivals in mind? One would expect to see "Sabbaths," "festival days" (heorte), or similar words but not vague references to "days" and problematic and unspecified comments about "seasons" and "years." It is strange that Paul manages not to use a single normal word for the weekly or annual celebrations, if that is what he had in mind. We can only conclude that the passage cannot legitimately be used as evidence of Sabbath abolition. Indeed, in the Gentile world, up to one third of the days of the year were special in one way or another, with certain restrictions, etc. In addition, certain months were considered sacred. The Jews never observed any months.

Colossians 2:16 is the first scripture to give a certain reference to the Sabbath and annual holy days. Yet again we have a problem of background. We evidently have a syncretistic group exploiting the Church at Colossae. Certain ascetic practices of pagan philosophies are mentioned (Col. 2:8,18-23). Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul says, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink," since some people apparently were passing judgment. Of course, eating and drinking are only a "shadow" (forerunner) of what is to come, but the solid "body" (ultimate goal) belongs to Christ. Does that mean we should no longer eat and drink? Hardly. Paul is showing that the ascetic practices some wished to enforce were of little real substance. Any eating or abstinence is not the end but only a means to an end. A Sabbath observer could say the same about the Sabbath and holy days. They are—not were—a shadow of what is to come; and therefore are still important and necessary, just as eating and drinking are.

What is Paul specifically instructing the Colossian Church? From our historical perspective, it is difficult to know for sure. Could Paul be encouraging the Colossians who were being troubled by pagan Gentiles who were criticizing the new converts for keeping the Sabbath? Or was Paul allaying the fears of brethren who were being criticized by strict, proselyting Jews for the manner in which they kept the Sabbath? (Since Jesus taught the Sabbath as a blessing for man and not as a burden upon man, some extremely zealous Judaic factions might well have been claiming that the new converts were breaking the Sabbath when in fact these converts were keeping it precisely as Jesus Himself had done.) In either case, Colossians 2:16 is transformed into a clear statement evidencing that Gentile Christians were keeping the Sabbath. What is absolutely certain is that Paul is not speaking against Sabbath observance. If he were teaching against the Sabbath in Colossians 2, the discussion in the New Testament would have been enormous. No such discussion or dissension exists.

The fact that Paul expected Gentiles to keep the law is demonstrated in many scriptures throughout the book of Romans (e.g. Rom, 3:31; 7:12,22; etc.) Romans 2:25-29 is especially interesting and direct, though often overlooked. Here uncircumcised Gentiles are admonished to be circumcised of the heart (v.29) and to become Jews inwardly by keeping "the righteousness of the law" (v.26) and by fulfilling the law (v.27). (Obviously Paul could not have meant the full

Sinaitic Covenant in his use of the term "law" here, since circumcision was a part of that law.) Only with God's Holy Spirit, through Christ, can a human being fulfill the righteousness of the law (Rom. 8:4) and "delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22).

Aside from the actual New Testament verses in which Sabbath observance is directly mentioned, the question of why the Sabbath law is not repeated as a direct command must be addressed. A comparison of the treatment in the New Testament of the law of circumcision and the Sabbath (the two great pillars of the Jewish faith in Christ's time) will illustrate the problem, and supply the solution.

Sabbath observance was a practice among all Jews, in Palestine as well as in the Diaspora. In fact, Sabbath observance was very influential in the Roman world as a whole among non-Jews.\*

Circumcision was also a major pillar of the Jewish faith. For a male to become a full proselyte to Judaism, circumcision was required. Not unnaturally, few males were willing to take this course, yet this did not prevent many from becoming "God-fearers" or "semi-proselytes." This was especially popular outside Palestine—in the Diaspora. It was considered sufficient to accept belief in one God and to adopt a minimum of other commandments, such as the Sabbath, the dietary laws and the basic ethical requirements. Even though such individuals were not converts, strictly speaking, they were

\* This is clear from the number of references in various writers in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Horace shows that many people had "joined" the Jews or at least were careful of what they did on the Sabbath to avoid offending Jewish scruples (Satires 1.4.14ff; 1.9.60ff). Ovid indicates that many young Roman maidens frequented the synagogue on the Sabbath (Ars amatoria 1.75 and 415). Other writers indicating widespread Jewish influence, often with Sabbath observance of some sort, include Tibullus (1.3.13ff); Seneca (Epistle 2.40); and Juvenal (Satire 14.96ff). One historian summarized the situation as follows: "an observance of the Sabbath . . . became very common in some quarters of Rome under the Empire" (Dill, Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius, 84).

encouraged by Jewish leaders and evidently expected to share in the favor of God as much as Jews by birth (see for example, G.F. Moore, *Judaism II*, 325; G. Bornkamm, *Paul* 10; K.G. Kuhn, *TDNT VI*, 731).

However, even the "God-fearers" who were not forced to experience removal of the foreskin still had to observe the Sabbath, the second major tenet of Judaism. This poses a rather obvious but crucial question: If circumcision—which was not a universal requirement for Gentiles anyway—is such a major issue in the New Testament, why is the Sabbath not even an issue of controversy?

We have to remember that we are not dealing with a minor point. On an unimportant issue, the silence of the New Testament might be purely accidental. But we are dealing with one of two major pillars of the Jewish religion at the time.

It hardly needs pointing out, of course, that circumcision was an important issue in the early years of the apostolic Church. So long as the only new converts were Jews, no problem arose. But it was not long before the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10-11). God clearly gave His Spirit without requiring circumcision. When Peter was called into question about it, his answer seemed to have quieted any objections.

However, it was not completely settled, because it came up again, requiring the council of Acts 15. Even then circumcision must have been a problem, because Paul continues to mention it. Those troubling the Galatians were evidently teaching circumcision, so that Paul in exasperation, sarcastically wishes they would slip and castrate themselves (Gal. 5:12). He says many times that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision—physically—is of any spiritual consequence (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6). It is spiritual circumcision—of the heart—that counts (Rom. 2:25ff)~

This "pillar" of Judaism was so important that it received considerable attention throughout the New Testament. Despite precedents in conversion without circumcision, the subject was debated quite vigorously in the early Church. Yet the other pillar—the Sabbath—does not receive anywhere near comparable treatment. A silence at this point seems hardly accidental. Considering the historical situation, silence undoubtedly means that the Sabbath was a non-issue—never



challenged or questioned. The required conclusion must therefore be that Sabbath observance was both taught and obeyed by the early Church.

Sabbath observance was so important in the Jewish religion that there are statements in Talmudic literature to the effect that Sabbath observance is the equivalent of the Abrahamic Covenant, and that the law of the Sabbath was said to be equal to all the other laws and commandments in the Torah! (Mekhilta 6 3; Pesikta Rabbti 23; Palestinian Talmud Berachot 3; Nedarim 38; Exodus Rabba 2 5.) Although these are post-first century texts, they illustrate what is also clear from the earliest records: The acknowledged importance of the Sabbath to Judaism is highly relevant for achieving an accurate understanding of New Testament teaching regarding Sabbath observance for the Christian.

The enormous importance of the Sabbath in first century Judaism is powerful corroboratory evidence that neither Jesus nor any of His apostles following, ever "did away" with Sabbath observance on the day God created for rest and worship. The few scriptures (primarily in Paul's writings) often quoted in an attempt to end the obligation of Christians to keep the Sabbath, pale by comparison with the overwhelming significance of the Sabbath. If the apostles had dared to eliminate the Sabbath, surely a gargantuan conflict would have exploded into the New Testament record. Compare the major controversy in the New Testament Church over circumcision (e.g., Acts 15), which was declared to be unnecessary or optional for Christians, with the relatively minor controversy over how a Christian should observe the Sabbath (in contradistinction to the "customary" rigorous regulations of common Jewish law).

Since the Sabbath was considered by the Jews to be so important—as important as all the rest of the law put together in some circles (see above)—if Jesus and His apostles had taught and practiced the total abrogation of the Sabbath commandment as is often claimed, then the religious controversy and disputations should perforce have filled the gospels, the book of Acts and all the epistles. There is no such enormous controversy in the New Testament records, and therefore we can only conclude that the Sabbath was not abrogated'.

This would also explain why we do not find repeated reaffirmations of the Sabbath as a command of God. It is mentioned, of course (as already shown), but everybody in the New Testament world already knew about or believed in

the importance of the Sabbath. There was not the slightest doubt or uncertainty. To have emphasized Sabbath-keeping in the New Testament would have been like the proverbial "carrying coals to Newcastle" or "taking ice to the Eskimos in winter." The issue that Jesus (and later the apostles) addressed was not whether to observe the Sabbath—it had always been revered as the fourth of the Ten Commandments—but rather how to observe the Sabbath in the light of the restrictive concepts of the day.

Commonly available historical scholarship testifies to the fact that Christians kept the Sabbath even after New Testament times. Eusebius reports that even the liberal wing of the Jewish Christians "shared in the impiety of the former class /radical wing/, in that they were equally zealous to insist on the literal observance of the law." S. Bacchiocchi writes that around 80-90 A.D. "the Rabbinical authorities reconstituted at Jamnia /after the fall of Jerusalem/ introduced a test, in the form of a curse to be pronounced in the famous daily prayer Shemoneh Esreh by any participant in the synagogue service, against the Christians. The fact that a test had to be introduced to detect the presence of Christians in the synagogue would seem to indicate, as J. Parkes observes, that 'Judeo-Christians still frequent the synagogue.' It would therefore appear that no radical break with Judaism took place until the year 135 A.D."

It was after 135 A.D., when the Romans crushed the Bar Kokhba revolt and forbade the traditional observance of many Jewish laws including the Sabbath, that the new Gentile leaders of the Jerusalem Church probably began to adopt the weekly Sunday observance, thereby establishing Sunday as their day of worship. This became necessary in order to eliminate any possible association with Judaism—and any resultant suspicion—in the eyes of the Roman overlords.

Nevertheless, the observance of the Sabbath was such a strong tradition that it continued alongside Sunday for several centuries even in large portions of Catholic Christianity. For example, the so-called Apostolic Constitutions (about 375-400) exhort the faithful to assemble "on the Sabbath day and . . . the Lord's day" (2.59.1). Both days are to be feasts (7.23.2); Christian slaves are to be allowed to rest on both of them (8.33.1). Even though Sunday is given a slightly higher value, the Sabbath is to be celebrated as the memorial of Creation and a time for godliness (7.36.1-2).

One of the great Catholic theologians of the east, Gregory of Nyssa (about 335-394), writes, "With what face will you dare to behold the Lord's day if you have despised the Sabbath? . . . For they are sister days" (De Castig 2). Even the noted Alexandrian theologian Origen, the source of so much of later Catholic theology, wrote in his Hom. in Num. 23.4:

Leaving on one side, therefore, the Jewish observances of the Sabbath, let us see of what kind the observance of the Sabbath ought to be for the Christian. On the Sabbath no worldly affairs ought to be undertaken. If, therefore, you abstain from all secular works, and do nothing worldly, but employ yourself in spiritual works, and come to church and give ear to the Scripture lections and to sermons, . . . this is the observance of the Sabbath for the Christian.

Even as late as the 5th century, we find the Sabbath still being remembered in Catholic Christianity, with the notable exceptions of Rome and Alexandria. The church historian, Socrates, writing about 440, states:

Almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians at Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this (5.22).

His contemporary Sozomen similarly tells us, "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria" (7.19).

#### Sabbath Analogy of God's Plan

The Sabbath day has two great overall purposes according to the Bible: 1) It looks back as a witness to the physical creation; 2) it looks forward as a shadow to the spiritual rest and creation. (A third purpose can be listed as well: the Sabbath was to be a remembrance of the God who brought Israel out of Egypt, Deut. 5:15). God does things in type and anti-type, in "shadow" and in "substance."

When God created the earth in six days and then rested on the seventh, this completed the physical creation. There is no more physical creation going on. The works are finished

as Genesis 2:2-3 and Hebrews 4:3 attest. So the Sabbath day looks back to that Creation, the week of the physical creation (Ex. 20:11; 31:17). It is then a memorial, which helps us to remember the Creator who made everything. It keeps Him fully in mind every week.

But God also has a great spiritual plan—a spiritual creation—which is now in progress (2 Cor. 5:17). There is a new Creation, and the Sabbath also looks forward to that. Hebrews 4:1-11 refers to a rest for God's people. It is a yet future rest that we are to strive to enter—the ultimate rest in the Kingdom of God. The seven-day week (v.4) is a picture of this spiritual week God has instituted. God rested—so man shall too. Therefore, the Sabbath day each week also looks forward to that future rest—when the whole earth shall be at rest—when all shall be taught the way of God. Hebrews 4 shows this clearly and verse 9 is particularly relevant. It says, "There remaineth therefore a rest /sabbatismos—"sab-batizing to the people of God." So, because of the future rest (katapausis) spiritual Israel is to enter, there remains for us a sabbatismos or "sabbatizing." This means that we will keep that future Sabbath of millennial rest as we now keep the weekly Sabbath to look forward to it.

In other words, the Sabbath is both a memorial and a shadow. It is a memorial of Creation and a shadow of the coming future rest of God's people following the return of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath did not originate with the law of Moses or with the Sinaitic covenant with physical Israel—so it does not pass with that covenant; rather it originated with Creation and looks back as a memorial to it. The Sabbath is also a shadow, looking forward to the yet future time of the Millennium. A shadow remains as long as the substance is still future. So it remains--looking forward to that time. And when that time comes, the Sabbath shall still be kept (Is. 66:23) although no longer as a shadow but as a memorial to the then contemporary reality of Christ's millennial rule.

It was a widespread belief in both intertestamental Judaism and the early Church that the seven days of Creation were an analogy of God's plan for man. This belief held that the first six days represent the entirety of human history in which man is allowed to go his own way under the sway of Satan the Devil, and the seventh day on which God rested represents the millennial rest when God Himself sets up His own rule and Kingdom over the earth. Such a Kingdom is described in a number of Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:2-4; 11; Mic. 4:1<sup>^</sup>-8).

Moreover, two New Testament passages refer explicitly to this future Kingdom. Revelation 20:1-10 describes a time when Jesus Christ Himself returns to the earth and has Satan bound.

The righteous will rule. The time of this rule is specifically described as "a thousand years" (vv.4,6). As we have seen, Hebrews 3:7-4:11 draws a lengthy analogy with the Sabbath rest which physical Israel had never entered into. Christians have a chance to enter into this rest if they do not harden their hearts as the Israelites did. In Hebrews 4:9 this eschatological rest is explicitly connected with the seventh-day Sabbath rest.

### Sabbath in the Millennium

As already mentioned, the weekly Sabbath day was taken as a sign of a millennial "Sabbath" of one thousand years in which God (Jesus Christ) would rule directly over the whole earth. The Kingdom of God was already awaited by the Old Testament prophets. Some of the descriptions of it include references to worship on the weekly and annual Sabbaths. For example, Isaiah 66:10ff describes the restoration of Jerusalem as the capital of the world and the rule of God over all nations. The righteous are vindicated and rebellions punished. Verse 23 states, "From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Sabbath worship is envisioned for all peoples, not just for Israelites. (The new moon was often treated as a semi-holiday because of its importance for calendrical purposes. However, it is nowhere explicitly designated a holy day. See further discussion under Annual Holy Days.)

Ezekiel 40-48 describes Israel and the future Temple in prophetic vision. Regular observance of the weekly Sabbath and other holy days shall be established alongside a reinstated priesthood and temple ritual. The Passover and Feast of Tabernacles are discussed in 45:21-25. The weekly Sabbath is mentioned in 44:24; 45:17; 46:1,3,4,12. Then, as now, there shall be physical human beings with the same basic needs that human beings have always had. The physical and spiritual needs for the Sabbath then shall be the same as they are now and as they have been in the past.

### Principles for Observing the Sabbath

Genesis 2:3 reveals that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it—set it apart as a holy day—because He rested from all His Work. God did not rest because He was

tired (cf. Is. 40:28); He rested because He was creating something new by the very act of His resting. He was putting His holy presence into the seventh day of the week and setting the precedent for what all mankind should later do.

The Sabbath in the Sinaitic covenant and in later administrations was often hedged about with very strict legal ordinances about what could or could not be done on that day. These regulations had the purpose of teaching respect for the day and helping lead to the proper understanding of the day and its intent. Jesus looked beyond these legalistic ordinances surrounding the day and pointed to the true purpose of the day.

The Sabbath is a definite day, the seventh day of the week, established by God at Creation. To alter its observance to one day--just any day--in seven makes it lose its original meaning. Of course, modern man is aware of geographical locations in which the sun does not set below the horizon every 24 hours. The polar regions in summer are one example; outer space is another. Yet, just as individuals in such locations do not lose track of time in relation to the rest of the world, the basic time of the seventh day of the week on earth can still be known. Despite lack of a clear time of sunset, an appropriate demarcation of the Sabbath day can still be determined.

That period of time defined broadly as "evening and morning" was blessed and hallowed. To hallow or sanctify is to make holy or set apart for holy use. When originally defined, the days of Creation week were defined only in the broad terms of "evening and morning," not specifically as the time of sunset to sunset. It is the individual's responsibility, whatever the local geographic configuration or latitude, to determine as best he is able the meaning of "evening" which begins a day. Scandinavians certainly have more need of a broader meaning of "evening" than do people who live in the tropics.

Christians must keep the day in the spirit. And a true spiritual understanding of the meaning and purpose, of the day obviates the need for detailed regulations; indeed, detailed regulations cannot substitute for a proper spiritual understanding. To attempt to draw detailed lines of Sabbath do's and don'ts would be of little use and would only confuse those seeking to gain understanding of the real intent of

the Sabbath, which must come from the Spirit of God. Yet some guidelines are necessary—especially for the new convert. Therefore, a rather broad discussion is given here as a means of pointing to a proper understanding of the day.

The Sabbath is a special day, a holy day, a day specifically devoted to God and to spiritual matters. It is not a day for regular business (Is. 58:13) but a time to turn from the cares and concerns of the mundane life to the things of God. It is a day in which to rejoice, to enjoy, to rest and have time for God and for one's family. The concept of rest does not mean inactivity though, since spiritual activity is quite important. Physical activity per se is not prohibited since certain kinds may be conducive to a better observance of the day (Mt. 12:1).

Jesus' examples of doing good on the Sabbath are a further indication that physical activity as such is not prohibited (e.g. Mt. 12:9-13; Jn. 9:1-14). Doing good by helping others is very much in keeping with the intent of the Sabbath. Relieving the sufferings or taking care of the immediate needs of others is at the heart of Christian love. Since the purpose of the Sabbath is to lead to a more profound understanding of this godly love, activity which pro'-motes this is certainly in harmony with the Sabbath command.

On the other hand, whatever does not contribute to a proper use of the Sabbath is out of keeping with it. Doing one's normal business, earning a living, becoming burdened with the mundane cares of daily life, following purely physical pursuits to the exclusion of spiritual ones, or regularly participating in activities which prevent the needed rest of mind and body, are contrary to the purpose of the Sabbath. These all defeat its very intent--the reason why it was given to man--because they do not generate the benefits that the Sabbath was created to give.

It is not the responsibility of the Church to create an encyclopedic handbook for Sabbath observance. The Church teaches the broad principles and the members apply them in situations as they arise. The Church cannot legislate on every last situation that may be encountered. Each member must be educated and encouraged to make personal value judgments according to his own character and conscience within the general guidelines provided by the Church.

It is the duty of the ministry of the Church to teach the profound spiritual meaning of the seventh day from a biblical perspective. The ministry must teach both what the letter of the law says and what the spirit of the Sabbath law is.

The most important declaration regarding Sabbath observance was Jesus' statement that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). God created the Sabbath day to serve man—not vice versa. Man was not intended to be enslaved to a period of time. Sabbath observance should not be allowed to become an end in itself. Rather, the day is to serve and help those who observe it. The Sabbath was created, as Christ pointed out, for the service of mankind. It was the day upon which God "rested"—that is, ceased from His labors of creation--"and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). The example is clear: God rested, therefore man also should rest from his weekly labors. When man observes the Sabbath day, he is imitating his Creator and commemorating the Creation itself.

The Israelites were instructed to cease from their usual food-gathering labors on the seventh day as God Himself had set the example (Ex. 16:29-30). The day was to be a time of "solemn rest, a holy Sabbath" (verse 23).

In the giving of the Decalogue at Sinai, the command concerning the Sabbath became the "fourth commandment." The Israelites were instructed to keep the seventh day holy:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:8-11, emphasis ours).

The theocracy of Israel was primarily an agrarian society. "Work" most often meant farm labor of one kind or another. That is why the commandment included cattle or oxen (cf. Deut. 5:14). In context, it is clear that labor which involved planting, plowing and harvesting is what was being forbidden on the seventh day (cf. Ex. 34:21). There is a parallel between this kind of labor and the work of God at Creation—hence the discussion of Creation in Exodus 20:11.



As the community of Israel developed sophistication within the context of a national theocracy, the implications of the fourth commandment extended into other areas. In the special "Sabbath covenant" section (Ex. 31:12-17), the command to rest applied to "any work" (v.14). In short, the Sabbath is a day when God's people cease from their usual workaday labors as did God. The fact that we are imitating God's example when we do so shows our special relationship with God—it shows that we are "His people."

Isaiah 58 sheds more light on the meaning of the Sabbath day in Israel:

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord (Is. 58:13-14).

In short, the Sabbath is God's day. It is a day devoted to God and to godly activities. It is holy. It is hallowed. It is a day to be honored. It is a time to "delight in the Lord" as opposed to one's own mundane business affairs. It should be carefully noted that the term "seeking your own pleasure" (RSV—"finding thine own pleasure," KJV) in Isaiah 58:13 does not, in the Hebrew, have reference to personal enjoyment. The word "pleasure" is khephets in Hebrew. In the Jewish Publication Society translation of 1917, it is rendered "thine own business." The New English Bible makes the meaning clearer than either the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version:

If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy ... if you honor it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs ....

This translation shows the true intention of the words "your own pleasure." The Hebrew term rendered "pleasure" is often translated "desire" or "purpose" in other passages (e.g. 1 Kings 5:8-10; Eccles. 3:1,17; etc.). The Jewish translation speaks of "pursuing their own business" and "thy wonted ways," The Hebrew khephets is not addressing the question of pleasurable activities that are illegal on

the seventh day. If pleasure were not present, how could the day possibly be a delight?

This scripture—Isaiah 58:13—has been erroneously applied by some to such activities as television-viewing, swimming, listening to music, marital relations and even reading the weekly comics in the newspaper. Of course, any of these activities could violate the spirit of the Sabbath day if they were to be abused or overdone. Of and by themselves they are not wrong"! What is wrong is any activity which interferes with or detracts from the joy, rest and spiritual intention of the day. If any activity works against the spirit of the Sabbath, it is wrong, no matter what it is.

The main concern of most scriptures pertaining to the Sabbath is that one should not pursue his usual business or work activities on that day. One should have more of God and less of himself in his thoughts on the Sabbath. It is a day to honor God, to remember His creation, and to rest. Obviously then, it should not be a day of violent physical activity of any kind—work or play. It is a day of restfulness. It is a time to unwind and to draw close to God. One's own thoughts of business, money-making, buying and selling, or one's job, should be minimized if not forgotten. The cares of the week are left behind. It is a day to "take it easy" and to worship God. This is the spirit of the day.

This background should help put things in perspective. Jesus provided additional insight into the intention of the weekly Sabbath when He said, "it. ^s lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:12). He was speaking of such things as healing, or pulling a stranded animal out of a ditch or similar activities. Jesus was expounding the spirit of the day in these examples. By the "ox in the ditch" example (Lk. 14:5), He showed that it is not that all physical activity is wrong on the Sabbath—but that the kind of physical activity which is involved in earning a living or in doing business is. Pulling an ox out of a ditch can involve considerable expenditure of physical effort, yet it is not wrong because it is "doing good." It is a matter of capturing the spirit of the law and ordering one's priorities aright. If we can do good for a domestic animal, how much more for a human being who is of infinitely more value (Mt. 12:9-13)?

The sect of the Pharisees had missed the point of the Sabbath law, They thought that virtually any physical effort, except for a very limited amount, was wrong. Christ showed that what is important is not the effort, but the kind of effort and the direction of that effort. Doing good—serving people who are in dire need—is not wrong on the Sabbath day. Serving one's own business interests is wrong. What about doing one's own business on the Sabbath if that business is "doing good"—in the health services, for example? Obviously, emergencies and responsibility for human welfare follow Jesus' own examples regarding doing good on the Sabbath. Yet there can be a fine line between such responsibilities and the regular full-time work of the normal week. One who truly desires to keep God's Sabbath will not seek an excuse to regularly engage in work on the Sabbath; yet will be instantly ready to aid fellow human beings who are in need of help.

With these basic guidelines in mind, it should be evident that the individual must evaluate each situation that confronts him as it arises. He or she must answer several basic questions: will this activity violate the spirit and intent of the Sabbath day? Can I do it in faith? If there is doubt in the person's mind, if the activity contemplated is questionable, it is probably best to avoid it (Rom. 14:23). If it would offend his conscience—or that of others in the Church—he should avoid the activity. Paul said, "if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall" (1 Cor. 8: 13) .

These guidelines are what the Church provides to its members as the basis for their personal decision making. It is not the duty of the ministry to spell out and rule on every last kind of activity in the human realm! It is the ministry's responsibility to teach the law, especially in its spiritual significance. It is the individual's responsibility to interpret that teaching in the light of his or her own situation.

By way of clarification, the following examples may be instructive:

It is obviously out of step with the spirit of the Sabbath day to participate in violent physical sports activities. Can one "keep the Sabbath holy" while charging down a football field or a basketball court? In competitive sports, one must go all out to the point of exhaustion to win. The Sabbath is a day of rest.

The Sabbath would not be a day to dig up the garden, or plow or harvest in a major way. But there is nothing wrong with watering the lawn or pulling up a few carrots or breaking off stalks of celery for a fresh salad.

One should not do the entire week's shopping on a Saturday; one should plan ahead. But if the baby needs milk, and you are out of it, there is nothing wrong with picking up a quart or two. There is a principle here.

As a rule, Christians should avoid getting into situations where Sabbath observance becomes difficult. As we have always said, it is best to remain far from the edge of the cliff. Why get into borderline situations in which there is a hairline between keeping the Sabbath and violating it? Why trouble your conscience? This is especially true concerning business matters. Partnerships with non-Church members can be difficult in this respect. One has to remember that, for a Christian, there is a balance between the proper keeping of the Sabbath for himself and his Christian duty to treat his neighbor with the utmost respect and outgoing concern. Herein lies the ever-present danger of the two extremes: 1) a Christian can delude himself into not helping his family or his fellow man because of his self-righteous desire to "perfectly" keep the Sabbath holy; 2) the same Christian can delude himself just as convincingly into not keeping the Sabbath because he has persuaded himself that others "need" him to work.

There is no simple solution to this dilemma: no formula to apply, or panacea to discover. God designed our minds and His law so that we would have to confront difficult and unique situations throughout our Christian lives. How we handle each of these situations shall determine the quality of the character we are building; that is what building character is all about.

In all this, we should remember that Israel was a self-contained, controllable, theocratic community. In today's world, on the other hand, Christians cannot control the circumstances of their environments except to a very limited extent. We are sent into the world (Jn. 17:18). We must co-exist with a world that, for the most part, does not obey God. Our situation is quite different from that of ancient Israel.

The Church therefore advises its members to use vision and foresight in planning business ventures that could pre-

sent problems in the future. They are encouraged to avoid awkward and difficult situations. Oftentimes we are presented with difficult choices. In the developing nations, for example, certain activities on the Sabbath are compulsory by law. Those failing to comply can be shot or imprisoned! If a man is to be imprisoned and taken from his family who rely upon him to support and provide for them, it is far better that he perform a public service on the Sabbath (e.g. garbage disposal) if the law require it, than to allow this to happen. God places heavy emphasis in the New Testament on a man's responsibility to provide for his own family. He who fails to do so is considered to be "worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

In certain parts of Europe, it is possible to lose custody of one's children if one does not send them to school on the Sabbath. If this were to happen, parents would have no control over their children whatsoever. Moreover, they would still end up going to school on the Sabbath. It is better to allow them to attend school that half-day than to lose them altogether! Of course, it is not ideal, but it is the best thing to do under the circumstances.

The Sabbath is a means of honoring and worshipping God. We can honor and worship Him in the privacy of our homes by having the time to draw closer to Him. This can be accomplished by rest, prayer, reflection (meditation) on His ways and by reading His handbook of life--the Bible.

We should also more formally show honor and worship to God by assembling with His true Church on His Sabbath. The Sabbath is called a "holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3). The book of Hebrews states that God's Church must not neglect "to meet together" (Heb. 10:25). J.B. Phillips translates this verse: "And let us not hold aloof from our church meetings."

The Sabbath demonstrates one's recognition of God as Creator, both past and future, and as Lord of our lives. If we do not set aside the Sabbath day--not just any day of the week, but the day specifically ordained, sanctified and commanded by God and His Word--perhaps it is because of a disinclination or "inability" to serve Him and put Him first. One's respect for the Sabbath is one means (among many) of showing one's true attitude toward God and His rulership.

Keeping the Sabbath in its full spiritual intent is a means of developing and demonstrating godly love. It is also a solemn command from God, who wants only the best for His creation. Physically and mentally, the Sabbath renews the body to do more in six days than could be done in seven without such rest. Spiritually, it shows respect and love toward God. God's Sabbath is surely "for man" (Mk. 2:27).

## APPENDIX

### The Sabbath Outside Israel

The word "Sabbath" or some similar word is found in many different languages and cultures around the world, and is used to represent the seventh day of a seven day week or some similar concept. Some have theorized that this is what would be expected if they all stemmed from a common, original source indigenous to all mankind. To prove such would indeed be interesting. However, we have to recognize that many of the occurrences of such names in various languages are the result of borrowing from Hebrew or another Semitic language, either directly or through an intermediate language such as Greek. Whether there is a residue of unborrowed "indigenous" roots in various languages is something which would be difficult to prove or even investigate, though it has been asserted at times.

There may be some relationship between the seven day week and the oft-mentioned seven-day periods in several different literatures of the ancient Near East. In Genesis 8:10-12, Noah sends out birds at seven-day intervals near the end of the biblical Flood. The Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic tells of a great flood in which a few people are saved in an ark. In this story the hero, called Utnapishtim, also sends out birds but on the seventh day after the ark comes to rest (Tablet 11, lines 140ff).

In the Ugaritic texts many things are done according to a seven-day pattern. When one goes on a journey, he always reaches his destination on the seventh day. When a job is performed, it is generally worked on for six days and comes to completion on the seventh. For example, when one of the gods has a temple built, it is described this way:

Fire is set on the house/Flame on the palace.  
Behold a day and a second/The fire eats into the  
house/The flame into the palace. A third, a  
fourth day/The fire eats into the house/The  
flame into the palace. A fifth, a sixth day/  
The fire eats into the house/The flame in the  
midst of the palace. Behold on the seventh  
day/The fire departs from the house/The flame  
from the palace.... 'My house have I built of  
silver/My palace of gold have I made' (Text  
51.6.23-38).

These periods of seven days do not certainly correspond to the biblical week, nor is there any indication that the seventh day was a day of rest. Nonetheless, there may be some interconnection, even if rather indirect, as a number of scholars have proposed.

On the other hand, the Sabbath in Israel was quite unique in certain ways. Even though there are other societies which have regular days for ceasing from work or a "week" of a certain number of days (varying from four to ten), the Sabbath has an essential difference, as explained by the noted archaeologist and Old Testament scholar Roland de Vaux:

Its characteristic feature lies not in the regularity with which it recurs, nor in the cessation of work, nor in the various prohibitions which the cessation of work implies: all this is found, more or less, in other civilizations. Its distinctive trait lies in the fact that it is a day made holy because of its relation to the God of the Covenant; more, it is an element in that Covenant (Ancient Israel, Religious Institutions, vol. 2, p. 480).

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# ANNUAL HOLY DAYS

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Just as it keeps the weekly Sabbath, the Worldwide Church of God also observes the annual holy days that were ordained by God, kept by the ancient Israelites and continued by the early New Testament Christians. These seven annual "appointed feasts" picture God's plan of salvation for man.



## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The annual holy days are named the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day. These days occur on specific dates of the current Hebrew calendar, with the exception of Pentecost which is counted in a biblically prescribed manner. Like the weekly Sabbath, each is reckoned from sunset to sunset.

The functions of these annual holy days are partly the same as those of the weekly Sabbath. The primary importance of the festivals is their function as spiritual symbols, outlining God's plan of salvation for the individual and the world. These days include religious instruction and worship which provide for spiritual renewal on a regular basis.

The holy days serve as spiritual, psychological and social high points of the year. They allow people to get together in an atmosphere of leisure and enjoyment. In addition, these days provide opportunity to rest physically. Psychologically, the human need for change of pace and a time to forget the ordinary concerns of day-to-day life is met by these periodic festivals.

However, the central concern of these days is spiritual. Supplementing the weekly Sabbath services, there is still a need for intensive concentration on spiritual matters over a period of days without the distraction of the normal routine of making a living. The spring and autumn festival seasons supply this, especially the Feast of Tabernacles which is customarily held only in a few central locations.

The holy days fulfill the spiritual objective of being holy convocations for the Church today. They also are "shadows of things to come" pointing to and outlining the substance of God's Great Plan of salvation for all mankind. This is briefly summarized as follows:

The Passover represents the sacrifice of Christ which pays for the sins of all who repent and accept it in faith. It also represents partaking of eternal life through Jesus Christ (shown by the bread and wine which symbolize His body and blood). The Feast of Unleavened Bread is symbolic of the continual removing of sin from the spiritual sphere of one's life and the continual practicing of a new godly way of life, represented by Christ, who was unleavened, that is, without sin.

Pentecost pictures both the foundation of the New Testament Church and the sending of the Holy Spirit for the individual. The Feast of Trumpets symbolizes the spreading of the gospel to the world like the trumpet call of a watchman; it also shows the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. The Day of Atonement, a solemn day of fasting and self-searching represents the time when sin shall be placed upon the head of its ultimate source, Satan the Devil. The removal of the cause of evil allows God's Kingdom to hold unopposed rulership over mankind. The Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of the millennial rule of God through Jesus Christ and His saints. It shall be followed by an opportunity for salvation for all who have lived and died and were not previously called to have a part in the first resurrection—this is the meaning behind the Last Great Day. The culmination shall be the new heaven and new earth (Rev in which all creation shall be renewed in preparation for the humanly unfathomable eternity on beyond.

/Note: Annual Holy Days presupposes a prior reading of Sabbath, since many of the scriptures and lines of logic used to support Sabbath observance apply equally to the annual holy days./

#### DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Apart from the Sabbath there is no explicit mention of the annual festivals in Genesis. However, the Hebrew word translated "appointed time," (mo'ed) used elsewhere in the Old Testament to specifically refer to the annual festivals, occurs in Genesis 1:14 in reference to purposes for God's creation of the heavenly bodies. It is also possible that the phrase "end of days" might be an oblique

reference to an annual celebration, though this is not certain (Gen. 4:3, Hebrew text).

Exodus 12 is the first clear biblical reference to annual festival days. The institution of the Passover at the time of the Exodus is well known and need not be rehearsed in detail here.

Exodus 23:14-17, a part of the Old Covenant passage, describes "three times" or seasonal observances in a year within which the seven annual holy days fall. These "times" include the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost) and the Feast of Ingathering (Feast of Tabernacles). Similarly, Exodus 34:18-24 lists the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Tabernacles. Originally all of these festivals were built around the system of agronomy in the ancient Near East. By following this logical system the holy days gain significance and their spiritual purport can be more easily understood.

Several passages give a more complete and detailed description of the annual holy days. The most complete is Leviticus 23; others include Deuteronomy 16 and Numbers 28-29. The following information is taken primarily from these passages.

Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread: The Passover lamb was slaughtered on the 14th of Nisan. It was eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs on into the evening. That night the death angel passed, spared the Israelites who had put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, and slaughtered the Egyptian firstborn. This began a period of seven days of eating unleavened bread. The 15th and 21st days were holy days on which no work was to be done. The intervening days were not holy days, but no leaven was to be eaten or any leavened products to be in the houses. It was on the Sunday during this period that the first sheaf (onter)-of the new harvest-was offered as the Wave Sheaf offering. Only after this offering could the spring harvest begin.

Pentecost (Feast of Weeks): This festival took its name from the manner in which it was determined. Rather than being celebrated on a particular calendar day, it was counted seven weeks or fifty days from the Wave Sheaf Day---hence the term "Feast of Weeks" in the Old Testament

and "Pentecost" (Greek "fiftieth") in the time of the New Testament. It marked the end of the spring harvest. The basic instructions for determining the date of Pentecost are clear in Leviticus 23:15-16 which reads as follows according to the Hebrew text: "You shall count beginning with the day after the Sabbath, the day on which you brought the wave sheaf (seven Sabbaths shall be completed), to the day after the seventh Sabbath; you shall count fifty days." In other words, one begins and ends counting with a Sunday, hence a Sunday is the day of Pentecost. This interpretation is confirmed by the practice of the conservative and priestly groups represented by the Sadducees, the Samaritans and the Karaites.\*

\* Granted, other groups used either the first or last holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as their reference for counting, rather than the weekly Sabbath. This interpretation evidently originated in the change of the meaning of the Hebrew word Shabbat. This is the word occurring three times in Leviticus 23:15-16 (and translated "Sabbath" each time in the translation above). The original meaning of the word was the weekly Sabbath, but it was occasionally used for the annual Sabbaths as well, though always clarified by the context. However, during the inter-testamental period, the word came to mean "week."

Thus, the Pharisees took the word "Sabbath" in the sense of "annual Sabbath" and "week," so that they counted seven "weeks" beginning with the first holy day. The Essenes, while using a solar calendar, and the Falashas interpreted the word as "week," counting seven weeks from the Sunday after the Passover week. These interpretations, although originating before the first century A.D., were evidently incorrect. The term "Sabbath" was not likely to be used of an annual Sabbath without clarification. Thus, the Pharisaic method was an unlikely interpretation. Further, to take the word "Sabbath" in the sense of "week" as the Pharisees, Essenes and Falashas all did, was anachronistic; the word did not have this meaning in Old Testament times.

Feast of Trumpets: This festival, on the first day of the 7th month (Tishri), was celebrated by the blowing of trumpets—hence the popular name. The Old Testament significance of this day seems to have had its origins in the trumpet sound of alarm used to call people to a state of general warning or preparation for war (Ezek. 33). The spiritual significance will be discussed later. In later times, it marked the beginning of the civil year just as it does among Jews today. (However, it is not clear that this was the case in Old Testament times. A popular theory among Old Testament scholars has been that the new year began with this day in Old Testament times; but recent studies have called this into question and have advanced reasons for believing that in Old Testament times the new year began in the spring with Nisan 1.)

Day of Atonement: The 10th day of the 7th month had quite an elaborate ritual in Old Testament times and continued up until the destruction of the Temple. It was a commanded fast day in which nothing was eaten or drunk for 24 hours, from the evening of the 9th to the evening of the 10th. On the day itself, the ritual of the two goats was enacted as described in detail in Leviticus 16. Two goats were selected. By drawing lots, one was chosen to represent God and the other to represent "Azazel." In later literature "Azazel" was considered a name for the chief of the demons, i.e. another name for Satan (1 Enoch 9:6; 10:4). The high priest first sacrificed a bull for himself and entered into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat. Then, he slaughtered the goat "for the Lord" and sprinkled its blood on the mercy seat, as he had done the blood of the bull. In this way the high priest was the only person to ever go into the Holy of Holies, and then only on the Day of Atonement. At all other times, and to all other people, it was off limits. The goat for Azazel then had the sins of the people confessed over it by the high priest. After that it was taken away live into the wilderness and turned loose, symbolically removing all the transgressions of the people away from the camp. Thus, the Day of Atonement symbolized the reconciling of the Israelites to God.

Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day: This was a festival period beginning with the 15th day of the 7th month, a holy day, and continuing through the 22nd, another holy day. During this time the Israelites were to build temporary shelters or booths (Hebrew Sukkoth) comparable to that used by a watchman in a field or vineyard. This led to the

designation "Feast of Tabernacles" or "Feast of Booths" (Hebrew Sukkoth). This festival corresponded to the end of the autumn harvest.

A distinction is made between the first seven days of the festival, the Feast of Tabernacles proper, and the last or eighth day. Some passages refer only to a feast of seven days (Deut. 16:15). Leviticus 23:33-36 shows that the last or eighth day is in fact a separate festival. That is, just as the Passover commences the Feast of Unleavened Bread but is a distinct celebration, and just as the Wave Sheaf Day is a distinct celebration even though, falling within the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so is the Last Great Day the consummation of the Feast of Tabernacles though considered a festival in its own right.

#### Old Testament Examples and History

The rejoicing and the enjoyment of the bounties of the land were made possible and accentuated by the coincidence of festival season and harvest time. That is, all of the annual holy days fall at the beginning, during, or at the end of a harvest period. Furthermore, the Israelites were told to set aside a certain part of their harvest produce for use exclusively at the festivals, (This is discussed further under Tithing and Giving\*)

The regulations for observing the festivals are contained primarily in the legal sections of the Pentateuch, In the historical and later books only passing reference is made to the annual holy days. Certain references in the historical sections strongly imply that whole periods went by in which there was little or no celebration of the holy days. Following are some of the more important passages,

Joshua 5:10-11 describes the first Passover after Israel crossed the Jordan. Chapter 6, which tells of the destruction of Jericho, may envision the seven-day siege as the seven days of unleavened bread; but this is nowhere explicitly stated. Nothing is stated in the book of Judges—which describes a period of partial anarchy and feudal chaos—except for 21:19: "Behold, there is the yearly feast of the Lord at Shiloh." The exact feast is not named.

The first chapters of 1 Samuel show a functioning sacrificial center at Shiloh where the ark and the Tabernacle were located. None of the festivals are mentioned by name. However, the general description plus the mention of Elkanah's coming up annually suggests that the annual festivals were being observed in some manner. The ark continued to be a religious symbol, but the actual extent of a fully functioning religious system is not clear. Only after David captured Jerusalem and transferred the ark was there an atmosphere which both allowed and encouraged the traditional observances. David proposed to build a temple but was prevented.

Under Solomon, with the construction of the Temple, a full temple service was instituted. This is the first explicit mention of festival observance outside the Pentateuch. 1 Kings 8:2 states: "And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month." It was at this Feast of Tabernacles that the ark and the holy vessels were brought up to the Temple (see also 2 Chron. 5-7).

The temple service was continued through Solomon's reign and for a time afterward (e.g. 2 Chron. 8:12-13). However, with the split of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the northern kingdom of Israel ceased to go to Jerusalem to worship. Instead, Jeroboam set up calves of gold in Dan and Bethel and ordained a festival in the eighth month (1 Kings 12:25-33). After this there is a period of approximately two centuries in which worship at the Jerusalem Temple by the northern tribes evidently fell into oblivion. At various points the books of Kings mention that individual kings over the northern kingdom continued to follow "the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (e.g. 1 Kings 15:34; 16:26; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3, 10:31).

The next mention of a major festival observance is under Hezekiah, shortly before the fall of the northern kingdom (2 Chron. 29-31). But evidently this revival was short-lived, undoubtedly because of the acts of Manasseh, his son. It was not until the time of Josiah that the Temple was repaired and the services begun again. At that time a copy of the law was found and its instructions followed. This shows the depths to which worship of God had degenerated (2 Kings 22-23). A Passover was observed according to the law—"no such Passover had been kept

since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah" (2 Kings 23;22).

It was almost a century before another festival observance is mentioned. With the return of the exiles from Babylon, worship services were set up again, the Feast of Tabernacles was kept in that first year even before the foundations of the new Temple were laid (Ezra 3:1-6). Yet some three quarters of a century later, at the time of Ezra, we find the temple service evidently requiring some revival. Despite the new Temple, the law was still in need of promulgation. Exactly what had happened in the meantime is not clear; it is clear that the law was being little observed. Even though the Feast of Tabernacles was observed with the first return of the exiles, this seems to have been forgotten until Ezra made it known again to the people in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 8).

After the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, there are long periods for which we have very little information. Yet the Temple survived and the service continued to a greater or lesser extent. With the second century B.C. our information becomes much fuller. Despite the attempts at extirpation by Antiochus Epiphanes and the annexation of Judea by Rome, the temple service continued basically unabated for two centuries before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

It might be noted here that the new moons are often mentioned in association with festival celebrations in the Old Testament. During the lengthy centuries when the calendar was determined by observation of the new crescent, witnesses had to report to the proper authorities and the new month could officially be declared. The day of the new moon was, consequently, very important. Therefore, the new moons were always given a certain special regard.

On the other hand, new moons are never designated holy days. They are not included in any of the lists of festivals. No special sanctity is ever attached to them. The only extraordinary regard accorded them was that certain special offerings were carried out on their days, But this did not in any way hallow them, since offerings were offered every secular day as well. They also lost something of their former special function when the calendar became determined solely by calculation in the early centuries A.D.



Holy Days in the New Testament

In scholarship it is widely acknowledged that the early Church continued to observe the annual holy days of the Old Testament: "In the early Christian Church the propriety of celebrating the festivals together with the whole of the Jewish people was never questioned, so that it needed no special mention" (The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, 628).

However, it is obvious that the annual festivals took on a new significance in the apostolic Church and were transformed into Christian celebrations. Jesus Himself played a great part in this by His teachings and example.

The gospels show a number of examples of Jesus observing various festivals. It was so expected that He would be in Jerusalem for these occasions that people waited to see whether He would come when His life was in danger (Jn. 7:11; 11:55-57). In addition to His last Passover, He came to Jerusalem on at least one other Passover (Jn. 2:13) , as well as spending one in the region of Galilee (Jn. 6:1-4). John 7 describes happenings during a particular Feast of Tabernacles. Unnamed feasts are mentioned in John 4:45 and 5:1. He also attended the Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah), even though this was not one of the Old Testament institutions.

By far the most important festival of Jesus' life was the one at which He was betrayed. On this occasion, He met with His disciples at the beginning of the 14th of Nisan. It is clear not only from the gospel of John that He had the Last Supper a day earlier than the Jews (18:28), but this is also indicated by passing remarks in the Synoptic gospels. (While it is recognized that there are still some unanswered questions in any attempt at harmonizing all four accounts, it is evident that Jesus took His Passover a day earlier than the Jews.)

In any case, Jesus at this time changed the symbols of the Passover for Christians and also went through the ceremony of washing the disciples' feet. Then He died as the Passover Lamb of God.

The apostolic Church had its own beginning some several weeks later on the day of Pentecost. Again, an Old Testament observance immediately took on deep new Christian significance

for the Church, because the Holy Spirit was first sent on that day.

Various of the festivals are mentioned elsewhere, though generally only in passing. Pentecost is mentioned twice besides Acts 2 (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8). The Day of Atonement is called by its common designation of the time, "the Fast" (cf. Acts 27:9). These all indicate an environment in which the holy days were known, accepted and observed.

One passage is basically undisputed as showing holy day observance in the early Church. This is 1 Corinthians 5:6-8:

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

As most commentators and scholars who have written on this verse point out, observance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is presumed. Otherwise, the play on being physically versus spiritually unleavened, and the reference to "let us celebrate the festival" would have no meaning. Again, this passing reference shows a time when festival observance was taken for granted.

Of course, the most detailed discussion is devoted to the celebration of the Christian Passover. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 gives detailed directions on how to take the "Lord's supper" (kuriakon deipnon) or "communion." The memorial celebration was conducted "on the night when he was betrayed," that is, the evening at the beginning of the 14th (v.23). The symbolic meaning will be discussed further below.

The scriptures often cited by Christian churches to refute the necessity of keeping God's holy days—Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16—are discussed under Sabbath. Suffice it to say here that if it is assumed that Paul was "doing away" with the holy days, the relative obscurity of the specific meaning of these scriptures and the general lack of importance of the whole issue is totally incongruous and inconsistent with the enormous importance of these holy days in the religious environment of the times. The fact that Paul stated that the holy days "are /present tense/ a shadow of what is to come" (Col. 2:17) in no way lessens the Christian's obligation to keep them. (The present tense

reference to the holy days is interesting by itself, indicating continued Church observance.) Indeed, for the Christian, who can now see in these God-ordained feasts the profound spiritual substance of salvation through Jesus Christ, the imperative to keep the holy days is far greater now than ever.

### Spiritual Meaning

The holy days serve as an outline or picture of God's salvation plan—both for the individual and for mankind in general. This understanding is based on a multitude of scriptures and is ultimately derived from the examples of Jesus and the New Testament writers who expound the meaning of some of the celebrations in unequivocal terms.

The holy days not only teach us God's plan of salvation, they point us directly to our Savior Jesus Christ. Christ is our Passover. It is by putting on Christ that we put out sin (Unleavened Bread). Christ was the first of the first-fruits, and it was through His resurrection that we can receive the Holy Spirit as Counselor, Comforter, or Advocate (Pentecost). It is Christ who is going to intervene in world affairs on the Day of Trumpets and become King of kings and Lord of lords. Those who have accepted Christ are now at one with Him through baptism and His Spirit--having their sins forgiven. Christ is coming to set up His government in the Millennium and rule this earth, and His people are now preparing the way for and are representatives of that Kingdom by following in Christ's footsteps (Feast of Tabernacles). Finally, Christ shall make salvation available to everyone in the last great step of His plan, which is the ultimate conclusion of His personal sacrifice as our Savior (Last Great Day).

The Church keeps God's annual holy days in their true spiritual intent as constant reminders of the plan of God. It stresses their spiritual meaning just as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 5 when he wrote: "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Passover: The bread and wine which Jesus instituted at His last supper and which are taken yearly by the Church—today are explained symbolically both by Jesus Himself and by the apostle Paul. The wine represents the shed blood of Jesus who gave Himself as an offering to pay for all the sins of mankind. That full and complete sacrifice

makes it possible for one to have any and all sins forgiven upon repentance. The wine also represents the New Covenant made between God and the Christian by the blood of Christ.

The bread represents the body of Jesus which was torn and beaten for us all, in Christ's ultimate sacrifice for mankind. Perhaps the fullest discussion of its meaning is found in John 6, in which it is shown that Jesus is the "bread of life." The eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine represent partaking of the eternal life which only God can give. The beaten body of Christ also represents the stripes He took on His back enabling us to claim the gift of divine healing for our physical infirmities (Is. 53:4-5; 1 Pet. 2:24).

The purpose of the foot washing ceremony is explained by Jesus Himself as being to show true humility and the proper sense of service (Jn. 13:12-17). No one can be greater than His lord, who is Jesus Christ; yet Jesus was the greatest servant of all and gave more than anyone else for mankind. This spirit of Christian love and service is expressed symbolically by washing another person's feet and then allowing that person to reciprocate.

Thus, the Passover represents Christ's sacrifice for all—both the individual and the world—and pictures the initial step in salvation. Only through acceptance of this sacrifice can one repent and be forgiven. Repentance is the first stage in individual conversion.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread: Leaven is used to symbolize a number of things, both good and bad. In relation to this festival it is a negative symbol, representing sin (1 Cor. 5:6-8). The putting out of leaven from one's house pictures ridding one's life of sin as a continual process. It also represents the action of the new convert in attempting to leave the world (symbolized by ancient Egypt) and in removing sin from his life. Conversely, the positive act of eating unleavened bread represents our conscious desire to actively seek a sinless way of life in following God's laws.

The crossing of the Red Sea is symbolic of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Ancient Israel crossed the Red Sea sometime during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (some commentators suggest on the last day). The new convert soon finds that it is not so easy to leave "Egypt" (the world), that "Pharaoh's

army" (sin) comes pursuing him.. But God provides help and leads him safely through baptism, driving back the power of temptation, sin and the world through His Holy Spirit.

Pentecost; Pentecost is the anniversary of the founding of the New Testament Church. It initiates God's plan of salvation for the world. Just as Pentecost marked the spring or first harvest, so Pentecost symbolizes the first small harvest of individuals through God's Church. In the salvation of the individual, Pentecost represents his receiving of the Holy Spirit after baptism. This Holy Spirit enables him to do what he could not do before, just as the disciples were able to go forward in spreading the gospel in a way totally impossible before the Holy Spirit came. An example is Peter's boldness in proclaiming the gospel so soon after clear cowardice when Jesus was betrayed. (A late Jewish tradition holds that ancient Israel received the law from God at Mount Sinai on Pentecost. This would make sense, since only through God's Holy Spirit can a person keep God's law in its true spiritual intent.)

Feast of Trumpets: Trumpets were an instrument often used to sound the alarm for war. They were also the instrument of the watchman to arouse the sleeping populace if danger threatened. This festival represents the preaching of the gospel to the world by God's faithful watchmen who have the responsibility of arousing the people from their spiritual slumber (Ezek. 33:1-16).

The day pictures the intervention of God and the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Kingdom of God on earth. Christ Himself comes at the sound of the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15; 1 Thess. 4:16). At this point, God has ceased to let mankind go his own way. The time has come to save not just a few in His Church, but all peoples— to save man from himself. Otherwise, man would succeed in destroying himself.

The Day of Trumpets also symbolizes the resurrection of all who died in Christ and the change of all who will be living in Christ. This stunning event—the achievement of eternal life for millions through birth into the Family of God—will occur simultaneously with the return of Jesus Christ at the last trump. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52).

Jewish tradition adds some interesting parallels. For example, the Day of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) is said to picture the most important judgment time, when the inhabitants of the world shall be judged by the Creator. Furthermore, Tishri 1 was considered by some Jewish commentators to be the beginning of Creation—which would create a complete parallelism, since this shall be fulfilled by the "Day of the Lord," the time of the Creator's physical return to His creation as Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Day of Atonement; The Day of Atonement symbolizes both the reunion of God and man after Christ returns to earth, and the binding of Satan to render him inactive. The evils of human nature are the attitude of Satan the Devil. As long as the source of evil remains active, evil will have a part in subverting the world. At this time, the sins of the world shall, correctly, be placed on their source, as symbolized by the Azazel goat which was sent away into the wilderness. Satan shall be chained and no longer allowed to deceive the world (Rev. 20:1-3). This is not to diminish our own role in sin, for the Day of Atonement also represents the reuniting of God and man through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.

Feast of Tabernacles: This festival analogously acts out the Millennium—the 1,000 years of Christ's reign on earth. The true harvest of mankind can now take place. Without Satan—the source of evil—around, all nations can be brought to God. For 1,000 years, a Golden Age shall reign: happiness and peace shall be a reality and worldwide salvation shall be possible. This harvest of persons is far larger than the first one, just as the fall harvest is much the larger harvest season in the agricultural cycle. The Millennium shall be the time when God sets His hand to save the world. It shall be a time of rebuilding, the forging of a new modern society under God's laws.\*

\* An interesting interpretation of the Feast of Tabernacles as symbolic of the millennial reign of Christ is found in the writings of the late third century Catholic commentator, Methodius. Although he evidently did not keep the festival himself, he perceived it—perhaps reflecting an earlier tradition—as picturing a time when the "earthy tabernacle" would be put off and Christians made immortal would celebrate the true feast (Symposium 9.1).

The Last Great Day: Despite a thousand years of peace and happiness, it must be remembered that untold millions have lived and died without ever having had the knowledge to understand salvation. The Last Great Day represents the time when they shall be resurrected and given that chance—not a second chance but a first chance, a chance they will not have had before. Only then shall God's initial plan for mankind be at an end. Thus, this last great holy day of God pictures the greatest period of salvation for mankind—the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15).

The culmination of the plan of salvation is marked by the renewal of the whole creation in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21). Death and destruction are now no more; human history is at an end. The Kingdom of God has become eternal.

#### Observance in the Worldwide Church of God

The Church observes these same holy days given by God in the Old Testament, and upheld and kept by the Church of God and the apostles in the New..

The major distinguishing feature of the annual holy days is their spiritual function and significance. They provide the opportunity to forget the mundane day-to-day cares of the world and to concentrate on the things of God. In addition to private worship and devotion, church services are held just as on the weekly Sabbath, though two meetings rather than one are usually the custom. At these services, the spiritual significance of the particular festival or holy day is generally the theme of the sermons.

The need for periodic festival celebrations seems intrinsic to all human beings. It is doubtful whether there has been a human culture in recorded history without certain annual or periodic observances. This need is met in the Church today in the manner our Creator ordained, by continuing to maintain the annual festivals kept in the Old Testament and by the early Church. Like the weekly Sabbath, these days have necessary spiritual, psychological and physical purposes.

The functions of the annual holy days are partly the same as those of the weekly Sabbath. They provide physical rest from the regular routine. Yet there are a number of

differences on the purely physical plane of observance. The annual festival periods provide high points of the year as social occasions on which to see friends and relatives and during which one can have the means and the leisure to enjoy good food and recreation.

Psychologically, the annual festivals usually allow a more lengthy break from regular routine than does the weekly rest day. They are something to look forward to. They provide the occasion for doing things as a family unit. While they differ somewhat from the traditional modern holiday or vacation, their psychological function is very similar, especially for those who do not have other vacation periods during the year.

One of the major differences of the annual festivals from the weekly Sabbath is that Church members are enjoined to follow the biblical injunction of Deuteronomy 14:22-26, and set aside up to one tenth (or tithe) of their income in a special fund for use in celebrating these days. (See Tithing and Giving.) This provides the opportunity for the enjoyment of extra-special food and drink. During the non-holy days of a festival, suitable recreation is also encouraged, especially for the family unit. A special offering is taken on the annual Sabbaths in accord with Deuteronomy 16:16-17.

In addition to regular church services on each of the annual holy days, the following festivals have their own special observances.

The Passover is observed on the evening at the beginning of Nisan 14 in a very solemn ceremony, the most structured of any of the annual assemblies. The order is first the foot washing service, then the taking of the bread, and finally the drinking of the wine. Before each part of the ceremony appropriate scriptures are read. The service is concluded by a reading of selections from John 13-17. The next night, the evening at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th, is marked by a joyous celebration of small groups in individual homes. This is, of course, the time of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The entire seven-day period is a time of eating only unleavened food products. All leaven is removed from the homes before sunset at the end of the 14th.



The Day of Atonement is kept by a complete fast (no food or drink) from sunset to sunset. (Exceptions are of course made by the individuals themselves in cases of serious illness and the like.)

The Feast of Tabernacles is considered the highlight of the sacred year" It is primarily for this festival that Church members save special funds. Since the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated only in certain central locations, most members must travel a certain distance to attend, and spend the entire time away from home. While actual booths are no longer built, the same symbolism is maintained by the fact that Church members live in temporary dwellings (motels, hotels, camp-sites) away from home. Of course, in order to spend the eight days away from home, as well as to meet the expense of travel to and from the place of assembly, saving ahead is necessary (cf. Deut. 14:22-26).

Along with the weekly Sabbath, these festivals place worship and service of God at the forefront of the minds of Church members. Rather than taking over former heathen celebrations which have been syncretized with Christian observance or making up celebrations without any precedent, the real human need of regular festive celebrations is met by age-old, God-ordained observances clearly attested in the Bible itself. The days carry a symbolic teaching which looks forward as well as backward and places God squarely in the center—the focus of its range of vision.

### Millennium

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the rule of God's Kingdom on the earth (a time identified as the 1,000-year rule of Christ described in Revelation 20). Some of these prophets describe holy day observance in several passages.

One of these passages is Ezekiel 40-48, in which an eschatological temple is pictured in detail. Along with the weekly Sabbath (described under Sabbath), the annual festivals are referred to in a general way in several verses (.45:17; 46:9,11). The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Tabernacles are named specifically (45:21-25) as being kept in the prophetic Kingdom of God. Zechariah 14:16-19 pictures a time when all nations shall come up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles. Those who refuse shall be punished by natural disaster until they repent

and worship as God desires. This demonstrates that the annual festivals of God are not restricted to Israel but rather are designed for the entirety of mankind.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **TITHING AND GIVING**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Tithing and generous giving are biblical injunctions applicable to all people who choose to follow the way of God. The dedication of ten percent of one's income to God is a private act of worship and thanksgiving which recognizes Him as Creator. It is by means of the tithes and offerings of its faithful membership and interested co-workers that the scriptural commissions of the Worldwide Church of God are being fulfilled.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The entire universe belongs to God--He designed it and created it; He sustains and maintains it. God, in fact, owns everything.

God created the material universe, including the earth and its resources, as a fit environment for an even greater creation. It was here that God placed man and began the creation of His own character in children eventually destined to be born into His own family. Thus, this earth--and its vast store of animal, vegetable, and mineral resources--is only a preliminary step in a much larger drama unfolding progressively before mankind. It is God's purpose that human beings should eventually attain an infinitely greater role in rulership over God's creation by inheriting not merely this world and its resources but even the entire universe (Heb. 2:6-8).

Every human being owes his entire existence to God--his very life and living. In designing man, God knew it would be in man's best interest to worship his Creator in the fullest, most logical manner. Prayer is an important vehicle for that worship. So is obedience to God's Law, which is His system for governing man's proper behavior and activities. Tithing is an integral part of that Law.

The biblical precepts of tithing and giving are essential steps in accomplishing God's ultimate objective for man. The minimum of giving is established at ten percent by scriptural command and example. Since it is a recognized scriptural principle that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much," the steadfast tithing of one's wealth, whether meager or abundant, serves to teach one a profound spiritual lesson. If a man can learn not only to share his substance for the benefit of others in a spirit of humility and generosity, but also to acknowledge that God is the source of all things, then that man shall be developing the very same spiritual qualities required to properly handle the far greater wealth he then inherit in God's Kingdom (Mt. 19:28-29; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

It is with this perspective that the Worldwide Church of God views the subjects of tithing and giving of offerings. In seeking to more fully understand the mind of God in this respect, we look to the Bible as the expression of God's will.

Tithing was ordained by God as one of His ways of teaching man how to honor and worship Him. Tithing is one of the most important ways by which a godly person of deep conviction and dedication can express his acknowledgement of, and appreciation for, God's blessings in his physical life today. Man, through tithing, continuously acknowledges that God is the Creator and Owner of the Universe, and as such has a prior claim on the whole content and produce of our lives.

Tithing accomplishes two other important goals in the Christian's life. Through it we build godly character by developing a giving spirit. Simultaneously, we are using our resources to share with others both the message and the blessings of the Christian life. Tithing serves as a means of expressing one's love towards both God and his fellow man. The biblical injunction of cheerfully giving ten percent of one's own income is a physical procedure designed to teach profound spiritual principles and lessons. It is, indeed, in mankind's best interests.

Since tithing is biblically enjoined upon all who are called to obey God, the Worldwide Church of God strongly teaches the overall laws, principles and basic administrative guidelines for tithing as revealed in the Old Testament instructions of God. But tithing, like prayer, is a very private and personal expression of an individual's relationship with his God. It reflects one's faith in God and one's appreciation for the blessings that He has bestowed. Therefore, actual implementation of how one should calculate his tithes is left strictly up to the faith and understanding of that particular person. Tithing is a matter between a person and God.

God's Church has always been, and shall always be, a work of faith--a work totally relying on God for support and sustenance, as well as for guidance and leadership. Nonetheless, the Work of the Church in the electronic age of the 20th century requires considerable financial resources. Gone are the days when itinerant evangelists would walk from town to town preaching the gospel wherever they could find an audience. The media utilized today are the printing press, radio, television and mass-audience campaigns. It is no longer possible to be effective and still earn one's own necessary expenses while spreading the gospel.

In addition, the responsibility of the Church to its own membership requires a full-time ministry of considerable size, involving the expense of training and deploying ministers and maintaining their education on an ongoing basis.

Moreover, the Church recognizes its responsibility to help the poor, indigent and needy in (and outside) the Church who are not always able to receive government help or assistance from some other source.

Thus, based on biblical precedents, the Church sees three basic financial needs for which the membership has a responsibility:

- 1) Support of the Work of the Church—both in its efforts to present the gospel to the world, and in providing for the spiritual care and growth of its membership.
- 2) Attendance at the annual festivals.
- 3) Assistance to fellow Church members in temporary or permanent financial straits.

These needs are met by a three-part system of tithing on the part of Church members:

- 1) With some exceptions, all Church members contribute a tithe of their income for the support of the Work of the Church. This contribution is generally supplemented by various voluntary offerings. This goes to carry out the first need indicated above.
- 2) Members are expected to set aside a tithe in a special fund to meet the expenses of the annual festivals. This money is saved by the individual and does not come to the Church except for a requested small amount to help meet the expenses of renting large convention sites, or in voluntary offerings given at the Feast being observed. While those members who can are encouraged to save the biblically stated ten percent of their income in this festival fund, it is recognized that this is not possible for all. Those whose tithe is more than sufficient are asked to provide help for those unable to meet their festival expenses.

3) Members who are able have the responsibility-based upon biblical precedent—to contribute to an assistance fund to help indigent members (and nonmembers as well). This fund is centrally maintained and distributed, and all contributions to it are used exclusively for assistance to the needy. By these means, each Christian expresses his worship of God and outgoing concern for his fellow man as he practices true Christianity and develops character. For those who are able, the biblical precedent is a tithe given to the poor every third year. It is not expected, however, of those who would be placed in financial straits by paying the tithe. One should give according to his ability and his faith; it is a tithe for the poor, not from the poor. The question of one's ability to give is a matter of faith and honesty before God on the part of the individual.

### DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

#### Old Testament

The practice of tithing long predates the time of the nation of Israel. In the book of Genesis, tithing is mentioned twice. In both instances, tithing is used as a means of honoring God, of showing one's profound appreciation for the blessings God has given. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek on the spoils which he had gained from his slaughter of the five invading kings (Gen. 14:17-20; Heb. 7:1-4). His grandson Jacob promised to give a tenth of all that he acquired to God. This was after his dream of the "heavenly ladder" at Bethel (Gen. 28).

A detailed tithing system was introduced with the Levitical priesthood. The entire tribe of Levi was set aside to carry out the sacral functions with the family of Aaron functioning as a central priestly core. Numbers 18 recounts the basic method of financing the Levites who were responsible for all the priestly and temple services. Various types of offerings came to them, including the firstfruits, redemption price for the firstborn, firstlings, and portions of sacrifices. But the major means of sustenance was the tithe. All agricultural produce was to be tithed at the time of harvest and given to the tribe of Levi. The Levites in turn were to give a tenth of it to the priests. Leviticus 27:30-33 shows that livestock was to be tithed as well as vegetable produce.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 describes another type of tithe. In this case it was not to go to the Levites but was saved by the individual to meet his expenses for celebrating the festivals at the central location. This tithe was also

levied on plant produce but not on livestock. Instead the firstling\* animals are mentioned as being eaten at the festival site. This particular tithe is not given a name here; in later Judaism, it bore the name "second tithe."

Every third year (that is, the third and sixth years out of a seven year cycle) a tithe of plant produce was set aside for the poor. It is not clear from the Hebrew whether this was designed to be another use for the second tithe or whether it was a totally new tithe in addition to the second. One tradition of interpretation in later Judaism indeed envisioned two separate tithes from Deuteronomy 14, making three in all when the tithe to the Levites is counted. However, most later sources, in discussing the question, see only two uses of the same tithe. That is, it was saved to meet festival expenses in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of a sabbatical cycle, whereas in the third and sixth years it was given to the poor. (In the seventh year the land rested and no tithes were paid. Presumably, the produce of four years was sufficient to meet the festival expenses for the full seven years.) In any event there are three distinct uses for tithes in the Bible: supporting the Work of God, attending the festivals of God, and caring for the poor.

Tithing is mentioned in other passages in the Old Testament. Several texts which describe the revival of temple services after they had fallen into decay naturally mention the priestly tithe, since the temple ritual could be maintained only where the priests were sustained by tithes and offerings (Neh. 10:37-38; 12:44; 13:12; 2 Chron. 31:5,6,12) .

\* A question arises about firstlings. The firstling was a firstborn male; if the firstborn was a female, there was no firstling offered to God from that particular animal. According to Exodus 13: 11-15 and Numbers 18:15-18, the firstlings were to be sacrificed and given to the priests. Therefore it is difficult to see how the individual could eat his firstlings if they went to the priest. One solution which harmonizes the passages understands that the priests did not receive the entire firstling but only those parts which they received from other offerings as well, i.e. the breast and right thigh. The individual bringing the animal could then use the rest of the meat for his own festival enjoyment.



In addition, two prophetic passages mention tithing. Amos 4:4 sarcastically calls on the people to bring their tithes and sacrifices, because these would obviously be of little value in the state of moral degradation they were in. Malachi 3:6-12 is delivered in a different vein: it equates failing to tithe with robbery of God. Curses result from failing to bring in the full complement of tithes and offerings, whereas faithful tithing produces bountiful blessings.

Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing. (Mai. 3:8-10)

Many Old Testament scriptures emphasize a responsibility to the poor. In addition to the poor tithe discussed above, provision was made for them in other regulations having to do with gleaning, leaving the corners unreaped and not returning to pick up the forgotten sheaf (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-21). If a poor man had given his coat as a pledge for a debt, he was to be allowed to have it during the night to keep himself warm (Deut. 24:10-13); the poor hired hand was to be paid at the end of the day because he had no money.

One of the major provisions of the sabbatical and jubilee years was the release of debts (Lev. 25:2-17; Deut. 15:1-11). The Israelites were also forbidden to refuse a loan if that refusal was based on the fact that the year of release was near. Furthermore, they were not allowed to charge interest on loans to needy persons (Lev. 25:35-36).

Oppression of the poor was considered a proverbial sign of depravity and godlessness (e.g. Job 20:19; 31:19; Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 22:22; 28:3). It was the duty of any person of means to help the less fortunate. It was the duty of kings and rulers to give aid and protection to the widows, the orphans and the helpless (Deut. 10:18; 27:19; Is. 1:17). One's responsibility in this regard was continuous. There was no reason to think that strict payment of the poor tithe or other legal demands removed any need for an ongoing, active concern.

New Testament

Whereas the Old Testament provides a definitive system for giving and financial responsibility toward one's God and fellow man, the New Testament concentrates on the spirit and attitude behind giving. Christian giving is discussed a great deal in the New Testament. The proper, godly use of money is an important subject dealt with by Jesus Christ and the apostles. This use has two aspects: The first concerns the responsibility of a Christian to help the poor. Poverty was evidently a major problem in the early Church, as it was in Palestine as a whole. Acts 4:32<sup>37</sup> describes a period after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when the Church continued together in Jerusalem living on voluntarily donated property and funds. These donations were not compulsory, so when Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property they were not compelled to donate the funds, As a result, when they did, but only turned over part of the amount while claiming to be giving it all, they indicted themselves. Their lie for the sake of self-aggrandizement met with quick retribution (Acts 5:1-11).

During a time of famine in Judea the churches in the area of Antioch took up a collection to provide relief. This indicated that those in Palestine were generally harder hit than those further north (Acts 11:27-30). Even churches as far away as Asia Minor and Corinth were encouraged to assist (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:1-5). This is only one of a number of examples.

A second aspect of Christian giving is support of the work of the ministry. The apostle Paul was willing to work with his own hands to earn his living on occasion. However, this was only for the sake of expediency, because he did not want to offend those sensitive to such things. 1 Corinthians 9 discusses this in detail. In this passage, Paul is very strong in his comments. He does not mince words; he does not apologize. He emphasizes that he has an absolute right to be supported by the churches in his evangelistic duties. He cites or refers to several Old Testament laws to support his right in this regard, including the ones concerning the threshing ox which was not to be muzzled, and the support of the priests in the Temple. Those who devoted their time to preaching the gospel should receive their living from this work. Those who had already benefited from this preaching--those who had already been converted through his efforts--were the ones who should make possible the continuation of his work.

Paul also cites a precedent from Jesus himself: "In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (verse 14). This has reference to the time when Jesus sent out groups of disciples preaching in Palestine. They were to preach only where they were provided with hospitality (Mt. 10:5-15; Lk. 10:1-12). Thus, Paul states that Jesus Himself had commanded support of the work of the ministry by the recipients and beneficiaries of that work. Paul himself had not taken advantage of this right in the case of the Corinthians because of their spiritual weakness with regard to this point (verse 12), yet he gladly received help from other churches (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:14-16).

Many scriptures discuss one's attitude toward money. It was on the occasion of asking for famine relief that Paul wrote:

But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you. (2 Cor. 9:6-8)

Similarly, Jesus stated, "give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38). Obviously then, generous giving of one's financial resources to do the Work of God is an absolute command in the New Testament.

Money is considered to have potential for either good or evil. It can be used for good, as some of the scriptures mentioned imply. It can also be a source of oppression, greed, egotism and an obstacle to the Kingdom of God. The "rich man" is proverbial. He was generally expected to be arrogant, selfish and despotic (e.g. Mt. 19:24; Mk. 10:24; Jas. 2:1-6; 5:1-6). The desire for money is the immediate source of most evils and is easily capable of leading even the faithful Christian astray (1 Tim. 6:10).

Thus, a great deal of stress is laid on the right attitude towards money. On the one hand, it is right and even necessary to acquire money honestly to provide for oneself and one's family (2 Thess. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:8). It is a means of assisting the less fortunate and of furthering the spreading of the gospel. On the other hand, it can be the cause of all sorts of wickedness and a major stumbling block to proper Christian living.

Jesus made reference to the meticulous tithing of the Pharisees (Mt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42). In one of His parables a Pharisee is made to introduce careful tithing as one of the signs of his self-righteousness (Lk. 18:12). In each case Jesus is condemning the emphasis on judging righteousness by external rituals rather than by the internal and true righteousness of the heart. To have the one without the other is pure hypocrisy. On the other hand, care in these outward matters is not condemned but rather encouraged, so long as the "weightier matters of the law" are not omitted.

Consequently then, though it was not his main point, Jesus instructed his disciples that people who want to follow God should tithe when he stated "these ought ye to have done" in reference to tithing (Mt. 23:23).

Another direct New Testament reference to tithing is to be found in Hebrews 7. Here tithing is used in an argument to show the superiority of the Melchizedek priesthood to the Levitical priesthood. Even though the Levites received tithes, they had in effect paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham because Abraham—who as their ancestor had had them in his generative organs, as it were--had tithed to Melchizedek. Thus, even though Christ was of the tribe of Judah, which did not have the priesthood in Israel, He obtained the Melchizedek priesthood, a superior and perpetual priesthood, through offering Himself as a sinless sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Tithing as a subject per se is not discussed in the New Testament. The question is, Why? The explanation obviously lies in the historical environment. Tithing never became an issue in the culture of the early New Testament church; it was simply taken for granted.

The Temple and its related service were still functioning until sometime after the beginning of the war with Rome in 66 A.D. Faithful Jews of the general Palestinian area would tithe to it. Since no discussion to the contrary is contained in the New Testament, continued tithing to the Levites would have been accepted by Christians in Palestine. Indeed, Matthew 23:23 confirms this from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, since it is safe to assume that Christians in those first few decades would have followed what Jesus Himself had stated so recently.

However, it was not considered by the Judaism of the time that tithing was required for those living outside the borders of Israel in the same way as it was for the Jews in the Holy Land who had direct access to the Temple. Therefore, it was probably in the Diaspora that it first became customary to tithe to the Church rather than to the Levitical priesthood. The fall of the Temple and the attendant abandonment of the temple system must consequently have produced a change in Palestine as well.

Unfortunately, our sources outside the New Testament for the early history of the Church are rather meager. We are not told how the Palestinian Church met the crisis of the fall of the Temple or the exact system of financing the work of the ministry throughout the Roman Empire. The change of situation evidently required a new application of Old Testament laws.

Recognizing the importance of the existence of the Temple during New Testament times is extremely relevant for understanding why tithing per se was not discussed as an issue. By the time Jerusalem and the Temple fell in 70 A.D., Paul had already written all of his epistles to the Churches. In them tithing had not been an issue. It would have been a diametric contradiction of Jesus' direct words that one "ought" to tithe to the Temple if the apostles in Jerusalem had decided that Christians should stop paying tithes to the Temple and start tithing to the Church instead. It would also have been a severe affront to the priests of God (whom Jesus Himself had supported), and would have resulted in great additional accusations and persecutions against the nascent Church. Had such a radical decision been made, had the Jewish Christians stopped tithing to the priests and started tithing to the apostles, we would surely have some record of it. But there is only silence. As a result, the whole question of tithing as a general Church obligation could not possibly have arisen until sometime after the Temple had been destroyed.

During the New Testament period, Christians in Palestine tithed to the Temple and freely gave generous offerings to the Church. Consequently, those who would use the New Testament's silence on tithing as supposed "proof" that God's Church cannot (or should not) teach tithing today betray their historical ignorance.

But when the Temple was no longer in existence, when the Levitical priesthood was no longer functioning, a new

situation arose. Then, as now, the responsibility of the Church to make binding decisions in applying the laws of God to changing situations became apparent.

In this context, it is worth considering Paul's discussion of tithing in Hebrews 7. Jesus Christ, though not a Levite, had a more fundamental (and ancient) right to receive tithes, as "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" to whom Abraham (the ancestor of Levi) paid tithes. Therefore, it is entirely logical for the ministers of Jesus Christ to apply the statements regarding tithing throughout the Old Testament, from the example of Abraham to the powerful injunction of Malachi, in teaching the Church membership that they should continue to worship God through the same God-ordained system of tithing that God has always used, and which Jesus Himself supported during His earthly ministry. Only now, rather than the Levitical priesthood, who are no longer carrying out the work of God, Jesus Christ has empowered His ministry to accept the tithes of the Church in order to continue the Work of God in this generation.

#### The Church Today

It is against this expansive backdrop of Old and New Testament history that we view the subject of tithes and offerings in the Church of God today.

The most often-voiced counterargument to tithing is that the New Testament nowhere absolutely and directly commands a Christian to give ten percent. Of course, those who put forth this argument really mean that no such command is found recorded after Christ's death, because Matthew 23:23 is a New Testament verse plainly corroborating the binding nature of tithing on those in Christ's day. The Church views such arguments against tithing ("It's not commanded by the New Testament," or, "It's not commanded after Christ's death") as putting artificial restrictions on the power and responsibility of the Church to make binding decisions, as well as misunderstanding the purpose of the New Testament and the proper application of the Old.

The responsibility of whether and how tithing should be applied and administered today must, in the final analysis, rest solely with the Church. The ministers and leaders of the Church, in accordance with the responsibilities of Matthew 16:19 and after carefully and prayerfully reviewing all the scriptures on this topic, reaffirm the long recognized

fact that called-out Christians should tithe as one of their biblically enjoined forms of worshipping and honoring God and supporting His Work. Christ explicitly devolved to the Church leadership the authority to bind upon the members decisions of the Church based upon its understanding of scripture and its spiritual insight into God's will.

("Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," Mt. 16:19. The circumcision decision of Acts 15 is one example of this.) The membership, of course, is not "forced" to follow Church decisions; on the contrary, the individual members are the ones who voluntarily put themselves, and voluntarily keep themselves, under the authority of Church government.

Another powerful section of Scripture which establishes Church authority is 1 Corinthians 9. We have already discussed these verses under the previous section. But the implications of this chapter need to be reemphasized. Paul here appeals to the Church to understand that he, as a minister and apostle, has authority among them:

Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. (1 Cor. 9:1-2)

He then proceeds, in verses 4 through 6, to declare that he has an absolute "right" (RSV, "power" KJV) to eat, drink, have a wife and require support for him and his work of preaching the gospel. He explains that he has "not made use of this right" (i.e. of receiving monetary support, v. 12), but clearly avers that it is his "right," because "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel" (v. 14). Notice also verses 11-13:

If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? If others share this rightful claim upon you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings?"

The essence of these verses is that Paul had the authority, by virtue of his office as a minister and apostle

in God's Church, to require certain things of the congregation in several areas of Christian living—one of which was the area of the financial responsibilities of its members.

Just as the early Church had to confront new situations and learn to adapt Old Testament precedents according to new Christian understanding, so the Church today must make decisions based on present circumstances, yet always endeavoring to remain faithful to the spirit and intent of the law, the Old Testament directives, and the New Testament teachings.

Times and conditions do change. The Old Testament tithing system was based on an agrarian society in which a high percentage of the population owned property. It did not envision a society based primarily on monetary exchange with most people earning wages rather than producing food. Furthermore, families were given free land with laws to insure that a family would not lose its God-given inheritance of land forever. Even the exact tithing system of the Old Testament is not clear with regard to the festival and poor tithes. In addition, there is now no functioning Levitical priesthood. All told, it would be not just impractical to try to transpose the precise Old Testament commands about tithings, it would be absolutely impossible.

Yet when one examines the intent behind the Old Testament system, three purposes for tithing stand clear:

1) The Levitical tithe was a means of maintaining religious worship and instruction. The theocratic government envisioned for Israel was, of course, replaced by a monarchy. Yet the original purpose for the priesthood and the Levites was the fulfillment of many of the governmental and educational functions of the country, as well as to supply its religious need. In other words, in the theocracy of Israel, the Levitical tithe was used to do God's Work.

2) The festival tithe made it possible to attend worship services at the central altar during the annual festival seasons. This was necessary for the maintenance of "religious unity as well as being necessary for individual worship.

3) The poor tithe was a major way of helping the needy, even though other forms of aid were provided to supplement it.



The Worldwide Church of God sees similar purposes continuing today. Tithing, as established by God, is the most equitable, honest and consistent method of establishing the necessary income for the operation of the Church. This supportive responsibility is shared equally by all. Thus, the freewill giving of tithes and offerings—the biblically revealed system—is the God-given responsibility of all the members of His Church.

It should be recognized that the Church becomes an object of disrespect when it receives only the dregs of the incomes of its members. God should have the first place in a Christian's mind—not the last—when it comes to the proper use of his financial resources; God should come at the top of the list in the allocation of one's income, not as an afterthought.

The Worldwide Church of God reconfirms and re-emphasizes its adherence to the basic principle of tithing as established and exemplified in God's Word. The Church teaches the giving of tithes because it is the law of God. Consequently, the withholding of one's tithes, which violates that law, is a sin.

Tithing is the biblical method by which God finances His Work. Not only do members of the Church see the examples of tithing and giving and the admonitions regarding them in the Old Testament, they have also seen and experienced the blessings which come from faithful tithing and the giving of generous offerings.

Many otherwise nonreligious people have attributed their financial success to their own freewill giving and philanthropic activities. They follow the principle of "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Conversely, history and modern society are a witness to the evils of selfishness and thanklessness toward God. The fiscal ruin of governments and nations around the world is, at least in part, testimony to the results of financial management without regard for God's laws and principles.

#### Calculating Tithes and Offerings

Tithing is an act of worship; it is a private matter between the individual and God. The Church does not "enforce" or "police" tithing, but simply teaches the responsibility to tithe. Each individual has the responsibility to honor the Lord with his substance and with the first-fruits of all his produce" (Prov. 3:9). God has determined

that the minimum standard whereby one honors Him is a tithe of one's income. However, what is to be considered income is not necessarily the gross amount taken in. In ancient Israel one tithed his "increase" or produce because there were no tangible expenses. This is not true in modern society. A continual tithing of one's investment would erode the money-producing base. Therefore, it is recognized that what is to be tithed is what comes in over and above the monetary investment.

It is considered the responsibility of each individual to determine what his "increase" is. A businessman would naturally deduct the cost of doing business before computing his tithe. If one invested an amount of money which had already been tithed, he would not tithe the entire investment each year, only the actual profits. These examples illustrate that only one's true "increase" is to be tithed. To reiterate, each person should conscientiously determine for himself what his increase is as an act of worship and of obedience to God.

Some individuals wonder whether one should tithe before or after government taxes. Here are some general principles to consider.

First of all, it is not the tithe that has become a burden, but skyrocketing tax rates. The "tithe" is always a tenth, and never a burden. But taxation rates vary widely and are subject to constant adjustments. A fundamental fact generally overlooked is that in ancient Israel each individual head of household was responsible for making his own decisions, before his God, as to what constituted "increase." Nowhere in all the Bible are specific details or regulations given. God's law provided each head of household with an area of land on which he did not have to pay property tax—much less rent or purchase price (Num. 27:11; 32:1-5, 33-42; Josh. 13:8ff., n.b. v. 14). This was the acme of financial security. .

Furthermore, when God gave instructions about tithing cattle, He did not require the first animal that came down the chute—even though He could have: He asked for the tenth. If no tenth animal came through or passed under the rod, God did not take anything. He simply did not claim the first tenth, only a tenth (Lev. 27:32-33). The conclusion is that the Israelites did tithe on the bulk of their income. God allowed offerings to take care of that.

We follow the same practice today. The Church does not generate a whole legal code governing the interpretation of "increase."

In Israel, under Saul, ten percent was exacted from the people for human government in addition to the tithe which was part of the tithing system God had instituted when He had established the nation as His own. Many other burdens were imposed by Saul besides the ten percent tax (1 Sam. 8:10-18). The imposition of taxes in Saul's reign has an important bearing on the question of tithing before or after taxes today. Did Samuel make a ruling that Saul's tax was now deductible from one's increase prior to determining God's tithe? No such ruling is anywhere recorded in Scripture. The Church today has no biblical precedent for deciding that all taxes withheld from salaries are deductible prior to figuring the tithe. On the other hand, the governments of this world seldom limit themselves to a ten percent tax structure. Many are collecting twenty-five percent, thirty percent, forty percent or more in income taxes--oftentimes without allowing any deductions for donations to charitable or religious organizations. In effect, this suggests that governments can exercise the right to a prior claim--prior even, to that of God's--to one's earned income. This becomes obvious when certain countries have legislated eighty to ninety percent tax rates for individuals in the upper income bracket. For individuals in this category to pay tithes on their gross income requires over one hundred percent of their income, a self-evident logical absurdity.

Obviously, whenever any government allows its tax rate to become prohibitive, it is proper for the individual whose tax burdens are significant to seek relief from that tax burden by modifying his increase or titheable base. The laws of certain countries--the United States is the best example--permit the taxpayer to adjust his tax base downward by the amount of his charitable contributions. This mitigates the effect of the tax--especially for those in higher tax brackets--and allows a person to more easily continue to tithe on his gross income. In any case, the individual, not the Church, must make whatever decision is appropriate. Whether in a general situation or on any specific question, the individual himself is responsible before his God and he alone must answer to God for his stewardship. This is crucial.

Attitude is the key factor. The Church's doctrine on tithing must not be used by members as if it were a legalistically worded personal income tax form, hopefully providing

various "loopholes" to lessen tax burdens. No one shall ever enter God's Kingdom with a miserly, selfish, grasping attitude of "get" instead of the loving, sharing, helping attitude of "give." The individual must know, in his deepest conscience before God, that he is living in faith before God and is staying on the generous side of his personally-calculated tithing obligations.

It is the Church's and the ministry's responsibility to teach the general principle and to provide biblical examples as guidelines. With every nation having its own tax laws, and constantly changing its laws at that, there is no possible way for the Church to make a definitive and equitable decision applicable to everyone in the matter of tithing before or after taxes. The same principle holds true for any other potential deduction used to determine one's real "increase" or titheable base.

Before coming to a decision regarding whether to tithe before or after taxes, an individual needs to consider several things: his own financial capacity, the tax rate, the deductibility or nondeductibility of charitable donations, and the benefits received from taxes. These factors vary from country to country. For example, many countries have free education, free medical care, child allowances, and many other systems of financial returns on the tax dollar. How one figures his titheable base and what deductions he makes, are both very personal, private matters between the individual and his God. Any questions of conscience should be more than resolved with the giving of generous offerings when one is able so to give. God is calling us to be co-workers in His Work today and preparing us to be sons in His Family tomorrow. Our financial responsibilities toward Him are a significant aspect of our stewardship--they are not part of a game. God knows our minds and our hearts, and whatever we do or think is obvious to Him.

Other factors may influence one's decisions in determining the precise nature of his tithing responsibilities. For example, in a situation where a converted husband has an adamantly antagonistic mate opposed to tithing, the man may consider his wife entitled to half the income. This means that the man pays tithes and offerings only on one-half of his actual income. Further, a wife whose antagonistic mate prevents her from tithing at all should consider herself free of any obligation.

God's Church uses the tithes of its members and interested co-workers to pay for the spreading of the gospel to the world, which is the Church's commission (Mt. 24:14; 28:19-20). These

tithes also serve to support the ministry whose primary concern is care of the local congregations. These two broad concerns cover a multitude of specific activities on the part of the Church.

Yet the basic tithe on income does not fulfill one's obligation to God. It simply represents the minimum of a Christian's responsibility. Most Christians freely give offerings well above what is required.

In ancient Israel other dues were also required (firstlings, first fruits, redemption of the firstborn, etc.). In addition, the Israelites were commanded not to appear empty-handed at the annual festivals; they were rather to bring offerings, each according to God's blessings (Deut. 16:16-17). These were offerings of animals on the altar. The material offering today is monetary, and is contributed to help the Church do its Work rather than being burnt on the altar. The amount is voluntary, to be determined by each person on the basis of what he can afford and how he has been blessed by God.

It is not the policy of the Church to take up offerings at regular Church services. Normally, each individual sends in his tithe and offerings privately. The only offerings taken up in services are on the seven annual holy days in accordance with the biblical command.

#### Festival Fund

Attendance at the annual festivals is considered mandatory for Church members except under unusual circumstances. Most holy day services are conducted in the local church areas and do not require extensive travel or time away from home. However, the Feast of Tabernacles is conducted at a few central locations and generally requires some travel as well as necessitating a person's being away from home for the entire eight days. Consequently, one's participation requires planning ahead.

Based on the precedent of the Old Testament festival tithe, the Church teaches its membership to set aside an additional tithe for festival expenses. Since the calculation of the festival tithe in the Old Testament was slightly different than for the Levitical tithe (omitting cattle but including firstlings, which were usually fewer than ten percent of a flock or herd), the exact percentage of one's income saved for the festivals may be somewhat variable. Nevertheless, the biblical standard is a tithe, even though it may be a test of one's faith to set it aside. If one feels he is unable to save a full tithe, he should save what he can and still attend the festivals.

The precise administration of the festival tithe, in both its saving and its spending, is the sole responsibility of each individual. Those who have more than enough should make their excess available to those less fortunate who are unable to afford to attend the Feast. This can be done by sending the excess to a central fund which the Church maintains to help those with such needs.

The money each member saves in his own festival fund is, of course, his to use—within biblical parameters—for his own enjoyment of the festivals. He may wish to take part or all of his holy day offerings from it, but any given to the Church is done so on a voluntary basis. The festival fund is not money for the Church, but money for the individual: to enable him better to worship God, to learn to be a responsible and mature member of the body of Christ, to enjoy the physical pleasures God has made available, and to help others rejoice as well. Because part of the expense of the central Feast of Tabernacles celebration is the cost of renting facilities, the Church, as a purely administrative policy, may request the members to send in a portion of their festival fund to help meet this collective Church expense.

#### Assistance to the Needy

While the exact implementation of the Old Testament tithe for "the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. 14:29; 26:12) is not entirely clear, the Church applies it in principle as a method of providing funds for the assistance of the needy. A significant number of members either follow precisely the biblical system of setting aside a tenth of their income in the third and sixth years in a cycle of seven, or they apply the intent of the law by averaging the amount of tithe over every year. The primary goal is, of course, to develop the godly attitude of giving cheerfully to help one's fellow man. Many people follow this today and have personally experienced the additional blessings that come from so giving.

One should be willing to help others in whatever way possible, whether it be in time donated, in gifts of goods or money to charity, or in one-on-one aid where needed. But for the assistance of its own members who are in need, the Church maintains this "assistance fund" to which those who can are asked to donate.

Of course, anything sent in to this fund should be for the poor, not from the poor. It is neither wisdom nor godliness to make one's own self and family destitute in order to help others. It makes no sense at all for a person to attempt to contribute to the Church's assistance fund when that contribution is going to place his own family in need of assistance. A person can give to the point that he destroys his base for producing the income which allows him to give. This does not reflect the mind of God. One has to be willing to sacrifice everything, even one's own life, if necessary, in the service of God. Yet the time for such sacrifice occurs only on rare occasions. To sacrifice one's health or to ruin one's finances when the occasion does not demand it is foolish.

On the other hand, to withhold aid when one has the ability to give, to help and to alleviate suffering is often condemned in the Bible. Just as one's financial resources may be a means of showing love to another person, so is excessive concern about material possessions a way of showing unconcern, selfishness and even hate. Over-generosity is seldom (never?) criticized in the Bible; lack of generosity is often censured (Mt. 25:31-36). It is the policy of the Church that the membership contributes to the assistance fund on an individual basis according to their individual ability.

In the light of varying laws regarding welfare, Social Security, national health programs, etc., which can be considered a part of our assistance to the poor since they are supported by our tax dollars, there is considerable latitude in the interpretation and implementation of this special "poor tithe." Consequently, a person can decide on his own what percentage of his income he shall give to help the poor according as he is able and as God has blessed him. Of course, it is meaningless for those receiving assistance from the Church or government to try to aid others until they are financially sound themselves.

Christians are to care for those in need who are ineligible for government welfare—or who cannot subsist on welfare alone. We must all, as much as possible, go above and beyond the taxes we pay for welfare in taking care of the needy and the handicapped. In fact, biblical law teaches us that we must do more than fulfill the poor tithe (Deut. 15:7-11). Even the strict payment of a ten percent poor tithe did not relieve the Old Testament Israelites—and certainly does not relieve Christians—of their continuing responsibility to be concerned for the poor.

In summary, it is the policy of the Church to continue the tradition of the biblical "poor tithe" to take care of its needy, with whatever modifications are necessary to adapt it to our present economy. The Church has the God-given responsibility to make such decisions based on biblical directives and principles, and the individual member has a similar responsibility to determine what his proper contribution should be.

### The Law of Giving

Service to God consists of many things. A multitude of people will voice the desire to serve God, whether or not they really intend to seek out the means of doing so. Perhaps no other area is more sensitive in this regard than the financial one. But, as the book of James states, Christian love consists of more than kindly words or sweet platitudes. One can, of course, serve through encouragement, counsel and prayer. But the work of the Church cannot go on in this modern world without the necessary finances. Diligence in this area is often the test of one's real desire to serve God, to discover whether one is willing to put one's full faith in His Laws and His Ways.

God is the greatest giver. He is the one who gives life and makes everything possible and enjoyable by His wonderful creation. God has set the example of giving by supplying what could never be repaid, and giving it to those who could never return the favor. Giving is at the heart of Christian love. We all receive; we show our appreciation by offering thanks and contributing what we can to God and to our fellow man. God, in His infinite love, gave us His Son, setting the ultimate example of generosity. The biblical precept of giving tithes and offerings provides man with the opportunity to emulate this facet of God's character in a material as well as a spiritual way.

By establishing a minimum standard of ten percent, God teaches us that we can give more to Him than is "required" — and makes us inwardly richer in the process. Many people have liberally given above and beyond what would be "required" in order to do God's Work more effectively, and to assist the needy in God's Church more fully. As a direct result, these generous Christians have experienced the great rewards, both physically and spiritually, of God's blessing.



Tithing must be—and must so be represented as being—a very personal matter between the individual and his God. It must never become a case of some being more "righteous" than others in determining their titheable base. The offerings of everyone should be sufficiently above and beyond what is "required" (depending on individual circumstances, of course) that any doubts about having tithed fully and properly before God are obviated.

Everyone should be careful in giving specific advice in matters of tithing to others. How one determines his increase is a personal matter between that person and God.

The most important point to remember is simply that tithing, like prayer, demonstrates the very essence of one's own personal dedication to God, to the Savior, Jesus Christ, and to the very Work of which Christ is the living Head. We cannot enter into God's Kingdom by deception, either in our private prayer lives or in our private tithing lives. We must beware of the "leaven" of the doctrines of either extreme: of the Pharisees, who tithed with rigorous, minute, painstaking and self-righteous effort; or, conversely, of those who are careless with their income, think selfishly and do not have a true spirit of giving. Christ commands us to "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Lk. 6:38). Giving is commanded. Nevertheless, God allows us to decide whether we will obey.

Never should any person attempt to "check up" on somebody else concerning faithfulness in tithing. We all should recognize that if a person is being unfaithful in tithing, he will, in all probability and as a natural consequence, be slackening in other equally personal aspects of private Christian life. The attitude and the intent of the heart are the whole thing—they are what counts.

It is not Church policy to disfellowship a Church member for not tithing. When serious spiritual problems emerge and tithing is one of several other deeply personal matters which come to the surface, disfellowship may have to occur. But neither the primary nor the covert reason for such disfellowship should ever be the amount of one's contributions.

Those who hold, or seek to hold, offices of spiritual responsibility in the Church should be judged by a higher

standard. The position of trust that they hold before the brethren presupposes that they have been found fully faithful in the area of tithing and generous giving. Those who teach others what to do are required to first set the proper example in their own lives.

Far more important than an individual members' wisdom regarding the manner in which he determines his increase is his attitude toward it. A truly converted Christian is full of the spirit of giving--and is not filled with greed, covetousness, selfishness or resentment for having to give to God's work. God looks on the heart, not in the pocket-book. It is where Christ's ministry must also look--on the heart. And indeed, this is what the Church stresses. The Pharisees tithed with punctilious exactness, but it took a widow with two mites to illustrate generosity of heart--she gave her all.

The Bible is replete with financial admonitions, for example, in 2 Corinthians 9:5 Paul states: "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren. . ." 2 Corinthians 9:6-9 goes on to fully exemplify God's attitude.

Remember: sparse sowing, sparse reaping; sow bountifully, and you will reap bountifully. Each person should give as he has decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver. And it is in God's power to provide you richly with every good gift; thus you will have ample means in yourselves to meet each and every situation, with enough and to spare for every good cause. Scripture says of such a man: 'He has lavished his gifts on the needy, his benevolence stands fast forever.' (NEB)

Tithing is a God-ordained means of giving. It supports the Church, enabling it to become God's instrument in performing His Work of giving that most precious thing, knowledge of the way to salvation and eternal life. Tithing also makes possible material help to hundreds and thousands of unfortunate people who do not have enough. Tithing is a natural and living law of God which is rewarded in many ways, even though reward is not the object of that giving. Many faithful tithe-paying Christians have learned that one

cannot out give God. The opportunity to tithe is considered a privilege. Those who have dedicated their lives to God can testify that there is no greater blessing than that which comes from the outgoing actions of helping others. Tithing is an expression of honor, love and obedience to God and His laws, and of outgoing concern toward both the brethren in the Church and the people in the world.

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# SIN

### **Doctrinal Statement**

Sin is the transgression of God's law—the falling short or missing the mark of the character of Jesus Christ. Although the penalty for sin is death in the lake of fire, all sin can be completely forgiven by God who desires that all men be saved. (The unpardonable sin is sin for which the sinner asks no pardon.) God forgives sin upon the repentance of the individual who accepts the shed blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment in full for the penalty of his sins.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The most consistent and important theme of the New Testament concerning sin is that it will be gladly forgiven by God upon any human being's repentance, acceptance of the shed blood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and baptism. Hence, sin need not have "dominion" over a Christian (Rom. 6:14), nor must it "reign" over his life (Rom. 6:12), nor block his entrance into the Kingdom of God!

Sin is "all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 5:17); "for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 Jn. 3:4, KJV or "lawlessness," RSV). Sin, in fact, cannot be imputed when there is no law (Rom. 5:13), "where there is no law, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15).

The seventh chapter of Romans deals with the relationship between sin and law. Paul wrote, "If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin" (Rom. 7:7). Using the tenth commandment as his example, Paul continued, "I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet<sup>1</sup>.'" Paul explained that sin is made obvious because the law condemns it. "For sin, finding opportunity in the commandment, deceived me and by it killed me" (v. 11).

But this in no way maligns the law as some would quickly and erroneously conclude. Paul immediately thwarted this false concept by writing, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (verses 12-13).

Sin is more than the breaking of one of the Ten commandments in an outward, physical manner. Christ amplified the law of God to include the spirit and intent of the law. Likewise, this amplified the meaning of sin to include the breaking of the spirit or intent of the law through one's actions or attitudes. For example, the New Testament expands the law so that looking upon a woman to lust after her is the moral equivalent of adultery and thereby sinful; so that hating one's brother is the moral equivalent of murder and sinful. Thus one appearing outwardly righteous may harbor evil.

Such external appearances of righteousness can often lead to self-righteousness, perhaps the most insidious of sins since it is so difficult for the person himself to comprehend since he "knows" that he hasn't done anything wrong. Christ spoke pointedly against this type of hypocrisy which is common to men.

Paul understood the universal power of sin. It permeates every nation, every race, every citizen of planet earth. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God" (Rom. 3:10-11; Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3); "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Sin envelops every human life. On the one hand, sin includes much more than just our occasional wicked actions. On the other hand, true sinlessness is more, much more, than just the outward adherence to any set of behavioral regulations and/or religious rituals. Paul saw this clearly in his own life, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do . . . . For I delight in the law of God, in my\*inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom. 7:19, 22, 23). All is not hopeless, indeed the recognition of the full reality of the almost omnipresent problem of sin in one's life is the first step toward--indeed it's the major part of--the solution to the problem. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 7:24-8:2).

In addition to being the breaking of God's law, sin is also the result of falling short of God's way of life. The two concepts overlap greatly, but stress different approaches. There are two basic ways of life, one of "giving" and the other of "getting." God's way is the giving way; that of outgoing concern for and understanding of others; it is the way of love which is God's primary characteristic. Man's way is the way of "get"; of vanity, jealousy, lust and greed; it is the way of satisfying his own desires without care or concern of others. God defines

His way by His law. When man breaks that law and thereby sins, he falls short of God's perfect way.

Two further expansions of the scope of sin were developed by Paul and James. Both relate to missing the mark of a godly orientation to life. Paul wrote that "for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). This means that if a person does something that his conscience tells him is wrong even though the act itself is not actually wrong in God's sight, (e.g. drinking an alcoholic beverage), the very fact that the person has violated his own principles is sufficient to convert it into a real sin. In other words, doing something that is not a sin becomes a sin if the person who does it thinks it's a sin--because he defiles his conscience. This shows the critical importance God places on a person's mental attitude and approach. It also indicates the great appreciation God has for the human conscience, which He created as an efficacious tool in impelling us toward good conduct and right motives (if properly educated). To countermand one's faith violates one's conscience and risks destroying it (I Tim. 4:2 refers to consciences "seared with a hot iron.") Furthermore, Romans 14:23 indicates that there can be at least some areas of sin which are relative to the individual person's attitude of mind--i.e. they may be sin to some people and not to others--thus adding one more reason for not judging our brothers. (A New Testament example is eating meat which had been offered beforehand as a sacrifice to an idol. This relative determination of sin is governed by conscience and does not, of course, apply to the obvious areas where God's laws are already explicitly clear.)

James referred to sins of omission when he wrote, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin" (James 4:17). Sin, therefore, is expanded beyond its traditional (albeit fully valid) "thou shall not" boundaries. Not doing wrong is no longer sufficient to keep one from sinning. Affirmative positive action is obligatory for an individual to do in certain situations or sin will result. If the person does not do what he knows is right to do (for whatever reason, e.g. laziness, inconvenience, etc.), then that is just as much a sin as the direct breaking of any of God's law. Not helping the poor, for example, when one is able (either by giving of one's time or his resources) is a sin; not going out of your way to sacrifice and show outgoing concern for one's parents, children, spouse, relatives, friends, strangers or enemies may violate James 4:17 and become a sin if one knows that it would have been proper to do, but yet neglectfully did not do it.

Although sin and the breaking of God's holy way of life ultimately originates in the mind, mere temptation to sin is not sin, however strong the temptation may be. Christ was tempted by Satan in all points and in every respect but never sinned (cf. Mt. 4:1; Heb. 4:15). No temptation should make a Christian feel guilty; temptations are normal, but they must be instantly resisted because the line between temptation and sin may become fine indeed. James expressed it this way: "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown brings forth death" (Jas. 1:14-15). As this verse and others point out, the ultimate penalty for all sin is the second death in the lake of fire (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14-15).

The common penalty of death for all sin illustrates the important truth that God does not categorize sin in the ultimate spiritual sense. Some sins, of course, cause more character damage than others, or demand a more severe physical penalty, or are more depraved than others—but spiritually speaking, all sins are equally serious because they equally demand the death penalty. One who has broken any one of God's laws is a lawbreaker—and, except for God's great mercy, is unfit for His Kingdom (Jas. 2:10-11; note that two of the Ten Commandments are used to define God's law.)

God did not originally create sin, but by giving free moral agency to His created beings He did leave the door open for sin to be committed. One of these great beings—later named Satan the Devil—had been created full of wisdom and perfect beauty (Ezek. 28:12). This being was actually perfect in his ways—until iniquity, sin, was "found in" him (Ezek. 28:15). Satan is the one who introduced sin into the universe and became the adversary of God and man (Is. 14). (Ultimately, God will place the full responsibility for sin on its originator. This is the meaning behind the Day of Atonement which pictures Satan being bound after the return of Christ, so that the millennium will be devoid of his evil influence. This was also represented in ancient Israel by sending the "scapegoat," Azazel in Hebrew, into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement. Lev. 16:10.)

Satan likewise introduced sin to mankind through Adam and Eve. Although created in moral and spiritual neutrality, Adam and his wife were deceived by Satan into disobeying



God's command that they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In turn all since Adam and Eve (except Jesus) have sinned and themselves incurred the death penalty for their own sins. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin: and so death passed upon all man, for that all have sinned..." (Rom. 5:12).

Sin can be either by omission or commission, individual or national, affecting others or affecting only the self. But in the final analysis, all sin is against God, because God is the author of the law against which man transgresses (Ps. 51:4). While the types of sin are as numerous and varied as human beings, the effects of sin are direct and specific. As explained, the final penalty for all sin is death in the lake of fire. But sin has other effects.

Sin makes people miserable; it ruins their lives and their families; it maims, devastates and kills; it is the cause of all human misery and suffering. This is why God hates sin so much—not because of what sin does to God, but because of what sin does to sinners whom God loves. Furthermore, sin perverts the mind; it can change the values of the sinner, his point of view and outlook, and make him rationalize that he is doing right when he is actually doing wrong. Sin blinds and deceives the sinner by causing a veil to fall over his eyes so that he cannot understand the reality of God's truth as expressed in the Bible. More importantly, it cuts one off from God. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Is. 59:1-2).

Sin is the absolute antithesis of God, the opposite of everything He represents and for which He stands. Thus the sinner can never be given eternal life as a member of God's family until all sin has been wiped away from his life—until it has been repented of and forgiven by God. This forgiveness is available only through the sacrifice of Christ upon repentance (Acts 2:38). But it is freely and fully given to all who ask. There is no sin that God won't forgive, if the sinner is truly repentant.

Repentance is a gift from God. It comes when God opens one's eyes to recognize his own sinfulness, and to see that his life has been a constant journey of self-centered vanity

in defiance of God. Once one has acknowledged the reality of his sins, and has come to the heartfelt determination to change to a new life with Christ's help, he can be baptized and receive total forgiveness for his sins. But repentance is not a one-time thing. Rather, one must repent of additional sins as he becomes aware of them; the now converted Christian must confess them before God on a daily basis.

It is crucial that Christians deeply realize that God does not forgive sin begrudgingly. He is quick to forgive lovingly and mercifully any repentant person of any and all sins, no matter what their magnitude, number or frequency may be—and then permanently block even the memory of those sins from his mind for eternity. God says he "hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:10-14).

One with God's Spirit is under no "condemnation" whatsoever in spite of the fact that he must still wrestle, against sin and may on occasion succumb to sin (cf. Rom. 7; 8:1). Such a converted person is not counted as a "sinner" although he may indeed sin out of weakness. He is rather looked upon by God as "holy" (Col. 3:12) because God imputes His righteousness to him through faith (Rom. 4). Only one who has had the burden of the penalty of sin completely lifted from his shoulders and has experienced the deep exhilaration of knowing that his every sin has been totally forgiven and forgotten by God can fully appreciate David's statement, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom. 4:7-8; Ps. 32:1-2). Such a person has been given the "joy and gladness" which comes from having peace with God (Ps. 51:8). A forgiven Christian knows he need not feel hopeless if he sins in weakness, because God looks upon the heart (I Sam. 16:7). He realizes that God hates sin but loves the sinners enough to have sent His only Son as their Savior. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16).

God can appreciate our human frailty because Jesus Christ, our mediator and intercessor, is always at His right hand. To Jesus, sin is not some theoretical theological concept; for He experienced the full force of temptation in all points of human susceptibility (Heb. 4:15). He also experienced the full force of the penalty of sin. Though he never sinned, Jesus can well remember the enormity of the incessant battle, constantly resisting Satan's wiles and ceaselessly fighting his own human nature. Jesus will never condone sin; but He will understand it, he will never condemn the person for it, and He will always be extremely desirous of asking God to forgive it.

God in His perfect wisdom knows that not all men will repent of their sins or accept the sacrifice of Christ. Some will absolutely decide, of their own free will and volition, while knowing better, never to obey God and never to repent. Hence, a person who has steeled and hardened his mind against repentance is a person who cannot be forgiven, not because God will not forgive him, but because the person himself does not want to be forgiven. This sin, against the Holy Spirit<sup>^</sup> (which is the Agency by which God removes sin,) is called "unpardonable", not because God lacks the power to pardon it, but because the sinner has rejected God, and His Holy Spirit, and refuses to ask for pardon. Those who accused Jesus of performing miracles through the power of Satan were perilously close to that ultimate hardness of heart which will refuse to repent, and therefore refuses to ask God's pardon for sin. The lake of fire is the ultimate penalty for one who commits this unpardonable sin. But, the great God who created the universe will only destroy an individual for whom eternal life would become unending misery, the ultimate torture of terrible frustration.

Yet it must be emphasized and understood that anyone, at any time, can and will be able to repent of any sin when he sincerely desires to be forgiven and to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This is God's will for all mankind—"Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (II Pet. 3:9; cf I Tim. 2:4). Even Paul, as we saw, had his problems of not always living the way he should—of missing the mark—of not having the perfect attitude (Rom. 7:15-23). Even he was influenced by Satan's attitudes and human covetousness. But he knew that Christ's sacrifice would forgive and cover all sin (Rom. 7:25).

Thus, the unpardonable sin is not at all the fearsome weapon of a sadistic God who refuses to forgive a poor sinner who has made a few mistakes out of weakness. The opposite is the case. Anyone, at any time, can and will be able to repent of any and all sins simply by desiring to be forgiven and by accepting the blood of Christ as payment in full for the penalty of those sins. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). It is only in Jesus Christ that "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us" (Eph. 1:7). Redemption is through "the precious blood of Christ" (I Pet. 1:18-19), with which converted Christians were (and are continuously being) washed from their sins (Rev. 1:5-6). The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was "for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:12) because His life, as Creator of everything (Col. 1:16), was more important than all other lives put together.

In connection with the topic of sin, many skeptics and sincere believers alike through the centuries have wondered why God allows sin to even exist: "If God is both all good and all powerful," they ask, "why does He allow such terrible evils on earth?" The answer is rooted more in the biblically stated purpose of human life than in the philosophically structured arguments of intellectual tradition.

God is, through man, reproducing Himself. In order to enable man to build righteous character, God created his mind with free moral agency. This means that human beings have been given the right and capacity to make their own choices and to guide their own actions/ thoughts, and lives. Therefore, in effect, God has given man the right and the capacity to do evil. Yet even this accomplishes God's purpose. For in allowing man to commit evil, God enables man also to learn a great lesson from the experience of the evil: that disobedience to God's ways, laws and principles will produce horrendous results. Once man has thoroughly and completely learned this hard, painful lesson of history— that disobedience of God produces destruction and death— he will never make the same fatal mistake Satan did; he will never rebel against God, because he knows such rebellion will produce only corruption and calamity.

While we need to deeply recognize the presence of sin in our lives as highlighted by God's law, we^ need to forgive

and forget sin, just as God does (Ps. 103:12). This applies to both our own sins and the sins of others. One of the most common problems for true Christians, having been trained in, and imprinted by, puritanically based Western culture, is the continuing guilt complex over past sins ever after they are fully repented of and buried with Christ. As far as God is concerned, He sees no reason why the repentant person should feel guilty since He Himself will not even remember their sins. Christians, therefore, should grow toward having this same attitude regarding their own sins and (equally important) the sins of others. Once forgiven, all sins should be forgotten.

Certainly sin affects us all because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). But sin—however heinous and antithetical to God's way—has become an intimate part of God's plan of reproducing Himself through mankind. God's forgiveness--the greatest expression of His total loving kindness and mercy—is the perfect antidote that completely nullifies and makes void Satan's efforts at turning man from his Creator.



WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# THE CHRISTIAN

### **Doctrinal Statement**

A true Christian is one in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. His attitude of mind and behavior are consistent with the teachings and life of Jesus Christ; he follows God's way of life as expressed through His laws and respects his fellowman by being concerned with "giving" rather than "getting." A Christian strives for success in all areas of his active, abundant life.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The early disciples of Jesus Christ strove to imitate His actions, teachings and way of life. It was for this reason they were labeled as "Christians" (i.e. followers of Christ) by nonbelievers to whom the disciples' way of life was obvious (Acts 11:26). During the time of the early New Testament apostolic Church, the term "Christian" was certainly in every way accurate—for the disciples were indeed imitators and followers of the person and teachings of Jesus Christ. But today in the 20th century, the word "Christian" is extremely loosely and inaccurately used, the description being frequently applied to any person or group that simply professes a belief in the person of Christ and acknowledges Him as the Savior. The appellation "Christian" is even applied to all people, irrespective of their religious convictions, who are simply born and reared in a "Christian" culture. These usages are far from adequate when we consider the original meaning of the term "Christian," which is: "One who actually follows the life and teachings of Christ in detail." Even a cursory examination of our ostensibly Christian culture in general and the many purportedly Christian groups in particular brings out little dependence on the teachings of Jesus Christ and even less resemblance to His actual life.

To be a Christian, a person must have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within him. "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). Before one can be baptized and receive this Spirit, he must repent of his sins, express faith in Christ and then accept Him as his personal Savior. This deep identification with Christ must precede the receipt of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to having the Holy Spirit, one must live and act by the teachings and values of Christ if he is to be considered a Christian. He must live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4); "he who says he abides in him ought to walk, in the same way in which he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6). The greatest expression of that obedience is a wholehearted demonstration of love toward God and toward neighbor. In this regard, Christ said His disciples would be known because of their love, especially for one



another (Jn. 13:35; 15:10-17). Ultimately, of course, it is through the Holy Spirit that man can obey God and express love. In turn, God will give His Spirit only to those who are willing to obey Him (Acts 5:32). Therefore, the basic qualities of Christianity go hand in hand with being a true Christian and cannot be separated.

Christianity is a way of life. It is more than just believing. It is the attitude of mind which leads an individual to follow God's directives for social conduct and for personal behavior. Indeed, before the name "Christian" took over as common terminology, it was their way of life that set Christians apart as different (Acts 9:1-2; 19:9~7 24:14).

Christianity revolves around clear, demonstrable actions which reveal the intents and beliefs of a person trying to live as Jesus lived. Mere belief in a name or title in and by itself, as James points out, is valueless: "You believe that God is one? you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder" (Jas. 2:19).

A Christian is one whose whole outlook and frame of mind is in the process of transformation from "carnal" to "spiritual." When one rises from the baptismal waters he becomes a "new man" by taking on a whole new spiritual lifestyle, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Whereas before his conversion he armed himself to face life with his own pride, ego, strength and intellect alone, the true Christian now adds the "whole armor" of God—the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Word of God (Eph. 6:13-17).

These fruits or characteristics of the Holy Spirit become progressively more manifest in the life of a Christian. Hate is replaced by love, anxiety by peace, fearfulness by faith, indulgence by temperance, and pride by meekness. All these and the other fruits of the Spirit work together to overshadow the natural, carnal characteristics of adultery, idolatry, strife, envy, wrath and the many other aspects and variations of human nature.

As the Christian begins to express godly qualities, he grows in the appreciation of their superiority over his own human qualities. From this appreciation grows the goal of expressing more and more of the righteousness of Christ living within him (Gal. 2:20) while he roots out, with God's

help, his own disobedience and self-righteousness. He struggles to move closer to the basic essence of "pure and undefiled" religion: an outgoing concern for others with no thought of recompense for the self; this godly attitude is exemplified in James' admonition in 1:27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

The Christian will strive to avoid some of the pitfalls of close human associations. Judging one another (Rom. 14:13), making spiritual comparisons (2 Cor. 10:12), offending those who are weak, gossiping and spreading rumors (Jas. 3); none have any place in true Christianity. On the contrary, each Christian must do his or her best to "never ... put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Rom. 14:13), to compare ourselves only with "the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), to strengthen those who are weak, and to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

Likewise, the Christian will grow in the knowledge of God's Word and begin to express the wisdom which comes from this knowledge as understood through God's Spirit. The Spirit of God united with the "spirit of man" within him opens his mind to comprehend godly things (1 Cor. 2:9ff). It gives him understanding and insight and reorders his values and priorities so that God and His knowledge are now first in his life (cf. Prov. 1:7).

Having God and His plan primary in one's life in no way denigrates the physical cares and requirements of normal living. Quite the contrary, a Christian addresses himself to these things with new understanding of their place in his goal of following God's way in this present physical life as he strives toward gaining eternal life and entering the God Family.

The Christian knows that one who will not provide for his house is worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). Thus, the physical cares of life are no longer an ephemeral end in themselves, but are a means of developing and expressing love through giving. Christians should certainly be the greatest examples of both spiritual and physical success. For a Christian to accomplish less in his physical life than he is able is not only a waste of his own abilities but a neglect of his God-given potential.

The true Christian views his secular education, the establishment of a career and subsequent professional development as vital keys for building the successful life exemplifying the characteristics of God. Additionally, the opportunity to become professionally accomplished and prosperous by the world's traditional standards—to gain a good reputation in one's field, a position of responsibility, social recognition and financial rewards—are not only good but desirable, as long as God and His laws always come first. God wants His children to be successful in all aspects of their physical lives. To develop the full range of our God-given human potential as responsible, mature, effective adults is something all Christians must Strive for. To do any less neglects these God-given gifts and squanders opportunities for both physical and spiritual growth. Indeed, a successful Christian makes a powerful witness to the practical, efficacious veracity of God's way of life as revealed in the Bible.

A Christian life is thus in no way passive. It is full of challenges, both physical and spiritual. It requires great resolve to obey God, to shun both the overt and the subtle evils and influences of human society.

The true follower of Jesus Christ will strive to prove the superiority of a godly way of life through his own example. A Christian does not debate religion with others; he does not try to twist their arms into believing as he does, nor does he try to "convert" them in an antagonistic manner. He is, however, prepared and happy to answer questions about his beliefs when asked by an interested person. As Peter stated, "be ready always to give an answer to -every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). A Christian strives to be a "light" to the world by allowing his actions to speak for themselves. He knows that one who tries to love his neighbor as himself will win that neighbor's love in return and may, according to God's will, encourage that neighbor toward following Christ as he himself does.

Thus, a Christian has many positive qualities. The most basic summary of these qualities is to say they comprise a life of giving as opposed to getting, of serving others instead of being served, of loving instead of selfishness, and of accomplishing and building instead of tearing down and destroying. It is the way spoken of by Christ in the beatitudes and in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the way naturally produced by the motivation of God's Holy Spirit. It is the way Jesus lived and acted; and a Christian is one who follows Christ in this way.

But the requirement for a Christian to adhere closely to the principles of Christ does not mean that all Christians must be totally identical in personality, personal tastes or preferences. Quite the opposite is true. God, as the Creator of mankind, was the One who designed the potential for wide differences in human proclivities and personalities, likes and dislikes and even in our physical and mental makeup. He intended from the beginning that differences in environment and heredity should allow (and even cause) great variety within the human species. And God intends that these differences should be expressed (within certain limits).

We are required to lead a life of personal responsibility and character before God and our fellow man—a life that is pleasing and obedient to our Creator and one that enables the individual to find and reach his greatest personal potential and fulfillment.

God's great love for man has given man the basic guidelines for living life which, if followed, will ensure a full, abundant physical life and the growth of godly character in every pursuit and activity. These fundamental instructions, as revealed in the Bible, allow for great individual variation so that all can still maintain their own personal identity, preferences and individuality.

The two overriding principles one should consider in applying God's law to the everyday cares and pursuits of life involve the continuing and conscious recognition that: 1) Christianity is a way of life; and that 2) everything we do as Christians should be done as if under the scrutiny of Christ (Col. 3:17). In different areas of life, these principles take on different meanings.

For example, the Bible clearly recognizes the arts as representing some of the highest expressions of man's creativity and potential. Obviously, any art form which encourages the breaking of any of God's laws is wrong, but beyond this, the Bible makes little distinction as to "right" or "wrong" in art, music, literature, poetry, architecture, etc., other than to emphasize positive purpose in their expression. The application of God's laws in these areas of artistic expression is more complex today than it was in biblical times. The key principles, applying the fundamental standards of God's word, are balance and beauty, elegance and harmony, inspiration and skill, sensitivity and creativity. (Cultural differences may necessitate that certain criteria, "beauty" and "quality," for example, be subjectively determined. What is beautiful

music to an Asian or an African might seem discordant to a European and vice versa. The unifying principle is to be found in an affirmative answer to the question, "Is it edifying to the individual Christian?" As in other matters, each person must use wisdom and discretion based upon these general guidelines and make his own decisions for himself.)

A godly way of life must include the basic aspects of physical health: good nutrition in a balanced diet, proper amounts of exercise and sleep, living in accord with public health ordinances and principles, and taking care to avoid bodily injury. While eschewing faddism or fanaticism of any kind, the Church encourages everyone to eat natural foods as much as possible and to avoid those processed foods and preservatives which can have debilitating physiological effects. In this context, a Christian will avoid the use of tobacco or illegal drugs in any form and drink alcoholic beverages only in moderation. If illness or injury should occur, a Christian has a great advantage over the nonbeliever; he can ask for God's help in healing, in addition to seeking the most competent medical aid available.

In matters of dress and style, the Church teaches and emphasizes the biblical principle of modesty. Balance, good taste, quality and modesty are stressed in the use of all clothing and bodily decorations such as hair styles and makeup. How a person looks and what he wears is a personal matter, but an individual should attire himself in such a way as to be presentable to Christ. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," The Church encourages its members to look "normal," in keeping with the styles and customs of their times and places. Church members should not look overtly different from other people in their immediate surroundings, though they should always be striving to improve themselves, being representatives of God, in all areas of their lives. In all such matters the members are encouraged to avoid extremes and to use common sense. This sound-minded, temperate approach is what a Christian will develop as he grows in God's Spirit (2 Tim. 1:7; Gal. 5:22-23). The use of balance in these areas is essential, though the Church does not police its members' personal lives.

In the area of celebration of nonreligious holidays, the Worldwide Church of God has never taken any stand against the observance of various and sundry days during the course

of each calendar year, whether they be national or personal. In all countries around the world, our members keep nonreligious days which are special to their countries or themselves. For example, the majority of American Church members celebrate Thanksgiving day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, Washington's Birthday and the like. Other personal days have long been commonly observed by Worldwide Church of God members, days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day and wedding anniversaries. These are commonly observed either through the exchanging of gifts (as in Mother's and Father's Days), the celebration over a family meal (as in Thanksgiving), or merely abstaining from work or going on an outing (such as Labor Day, the Fourth of July, etc.)

The Worldwide Church of God, likewise, has no specific statement of doctrine concerning the common custom of the celebration or the observance of birthdays. The Bible itself keeps careful track of the ages of the patriarchs and of the kings of Israel and Judah (especially at the beginning of their reigns). Levites worked in the service of the tabernacle of the congregation from thirty to fifty years old (Num. 4:23). Our society also requires that we continually list the date of our birth in everything from job applications to the national census.

To some families, the passage of the birthday of a child at age six is quite an important occasion with congratulatory hugs and kisses and the sending of a proud little boy to his first day in grade school. Perhaps, in other families, the event is comparatively unimportant, and there is no special note taken of the passage of any particular year. In all of our memories, it is safe to say that some birthday observances have retained special meaning.: perhaps it was a particular plateau of life at which a certain achievement or accomplishment may have been on the horizon, such as entering into teenage or reaching the age of legal responsibility.

Of course, these national or personal holidays should never overshadow the observance of God's holy days. They are not on a par with, nor should they be elevated to, the importance of the Festivals of God which reveal His plan and thereby convey great spiritual significance.

Taken all together, the Christian life is one of deep religious conviction coupled with vigorous activity, serious accomplishment, sound-minded balance and common sense. As he applies God's principles to every facet of his life, the Christian strives to meet the challenges of becoming fully successful while living above reproach before both God and man.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

**THE  
CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP  
WITH GOD**

**Doctrinal Statement**

A Christian's personal relationship with God is fundamental to his current spiritual condition and his ultimate spiritual state. Prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting and serving fellow human beings are the chief means by which such a relationship is initially established and continually deepened.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Salvation is an individual matter between a person and God. God will grant salvation as an unmerited gift of mercy if the individual has the proper relationship with Him. God will forgive our sins if we ask Him to do so in prayer. God will greatly reward those who diligently study His Word and meditate on His Way for the purpose of better serving Him. Thus, it is of profound importance that one attain the deepest and closest possible state of personal fellowship with God.

But the Christian does not merely seek to build and nurture this close camaraderie between himself and God because he must do so. Rather, the true Christian finds the developing rapport with his spiritual Father to be a uniquely satisfying and joyous experience that transcends any physical friendship or association. This warm, personal relationship gives the peace of mind, spiritual confidence and faith that can only come from knowing that one really has contact with the Designer, Sustainer and Ruler of the entire universe.

The intimate relationship that a Christian has with his God is that of a Family—the affinity is that of a son or daughter with his deeply loving and concerned Father. "As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord tenderly sympathizes with those who revere him" (Ps. 103:13, Modern Language Bible). The tie between a Christian and God far transcends the "blood" relationship of physical families—it is the relationship of God's Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1:3). It is through this Spirit that we can have contact with God when even words cannot express our feelings (Rom. 8:26). It is through this Spirit that we are begotten as God's sons; through it we gain the right to know God, and indeed to call Him our "Father" (Rom. 8:15-16); and it is also through God's Holy Spirit that we gain brotherhood with Jesus Christ so that He becomes our spiritual elder brother (Heb. 2:11) .

As a physical and biological creation, man is constantly in need of food, air, water and other necessities of life to maintain and strengthen his body. In like manner, the Christian's life as a spirit-begotten son of God also requires



proper maintenance. The Spirit of God is nurtured and grows within our minds in much the same fashion as our muscles are nurtured and grow within our bodies. Constant, constructive activity of a spiritual nature is essential if a Christian is to thrive and reach his fullest potentialities. Personal and private devotion includes prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting. These serve to initiate, and then to augment and enhance, a person's relationship with God.

Prayer is man's personal communication with God. When one prays, he utters verbally or mentally his praise for God, his thanks for God's blessings, and also his requests from God for himself and for others. Biblical example shows one should maintain close prayerful contact on a daily basis—even several times daily (Dan. 6:10). The Christian's prayers are an offering to God; they are described as incense stored in golden bowls before God's throne (Rev. 5:8). A Christian's prayers are not mere repetitions or imposed or stylized prayers, but rather heartfelt, personal communication with the Creator, analogous to communication with an intimate personal friend. A Christian shares his hopes, dreams, frustrations, needs and desires with God as he would with a physical father whom he loves and who loves him.

Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6:5-13 are the clearest in the Bible regarding prayer. We are told to pray to our Father in secret; not to heap up empty phrases; to address God as our Father; to hallow His name; to pray for His Kingdom to come; to ask that His Way be followed and His will be done; to thank Him for our sustenance and other blessings; to forgive us for our sins; to help us forgive those who sin against us; to keep us from temptation; to deliver us from Satan; and to help us understand, appreciate and look forward to the majesty, power and glory of God.

While no one can dictate the amount of time one should spend in personal prayer, Paul's admonition "be constant in prayer" epitomizes that the proper mental attitude for the Christian is to always be close to God. Although praying on one's knees is a common biblical example (Acts 20:36; 21:5), there is no official posture or position of prayer. One can pray at any time, in any place, with any position and for any reason, and know with full assurance that God is listening. Of course, the attitude of the individual is critical in determining how God reacts to our prayers.

On the one hand, God states that it is our iniquities and sins which separate us from Him, so that He will neither hear nor answer our prayers (Is. 59:2). On the other hand, when we go to God in faith, with a humble and contrite spirit, He will both hear and spiritually revive us (Is. 57:

In order to pray, we must realize that Jesus Christ is our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), our Intercessor (Rom. 8:34) and our High Priest (Heb. 2:17-18). He sympathizes with our weaknesses and understands our problems, because He was "in all points"—"in every respect," (RSV)—"tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:14). It is only through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice that we can approach God the Father in prayer. This is a remarkable reality, truly an awesome opportunity to literally come into the presence of God and have His full attention, interest and concern. This is why the veil into the Holy of Holies (where God symbolically dwelled) was ripped apart when Jesus died, as direct access to the Father was suddenly made available for all mankind for the first time (Mt. 27:51; Heb. 9, especially v.8). But even more than this, our direct contact with God the Father can be bold and with confidence. Through Jesus Christ our high priest, we can "come boldly before the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15). Though God is the very Creator of this vast unfathomable universe, He wants us to speak to Him strongly, directly, honestly and resolutely. This means that Christians should pray to God "with confidence" (RSV), asking Him to forgive them for their sins and to provide them with their spiritual and physical necessities. But we must ask in our prayers; we must make the conscious effort; we are part of the process. We must take the active step of aggressively importuning God in faith. As Jesus told His disciples:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you . . . .If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him (Mt. 7:7,11).

In the same way that prayer can be defined as communication with God, so can Bible study be defined as God's communication to man through His written Word (Heb. 1:1). The Bible is God's instruction book on how man should live his life. It is also the record of how God has dealt with

men and mankind in the past, and how God wants human beings to respond and react to Him. The Bible is the handbook to salvation, the textbook of eternal life. Certainly no Christian could say he knows God if he has not read about God in God's holy Word. He must learn to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). While the Bible may be and should be studied from different angles and points of view (e.g. in a technical manner to understand doctrine), the most important Bible study for a Christian is to humbly approach God's Word to learn how he might more perfectly live his life before his Creator. A Christian studies the Bible with the full recognition that God is instructing him that he must personally apply biblical laws, precepts, principles and directives in his daily life. A true Christian seeks "training in righteousness," and this can often come about only through correction of error; consequently, the true Christian must search the Bible for God's correction in his life. As Paul wrote to Timothy: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Closely related to and practically inseparable from prayer is meditation. Meditation in the Bible is simply concentrated thinking on a spiritual topic. It may include focused attention on a particular biblical concept or passage in order to probe its deepest message or meaning (Ps. 1:2) or God's wonders and work (Ps. 77:12; 143:5). Meditation can also mean thinking before God, as it were, on a topic about which we need to grow and understand. Similarly, meditation can be any personal thinking with the conscious awareness that God is listening and concerned. Hence, meditation is closely akin to prayer, and often indistinguishable from it. (The original words are often capable of meaning either "pray" or "meditate.")

Fasting is illustrated throughout the Bible as a tool by which a Christian can stimulate his personal relationship with God. It is not a means of penance, but is rather a type of self-inflicted trial that reminds one of his own humanness and humbleness before his great Creator God. It is by definition a specified period of time in which an individual goes without food (and perhaps without water) in order to remind oneself of his ephemeral, fleeting existence. Fasting forces us to focus full attention on drawing close to God. The examples of fasting in the Bible generally involve grave crises indicating that it is not a ritualistic

thing to be done on a periodic schedule. Nevertheless, one should fast occasionally, even though he may not at the time be confronting an emergency, so he will have the spiritual reserve necessary should an unforeseen trial come along.

Prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting are not ends in themselves. Rather, they are means through which we gain the spiritual strength and endurance necessary to face the trials and tribulations common to all humanity. The human problems of survival, health, happiness, family, marriage, success and other such activities of normal life become challenges to the Christian rather than merely tests of endurance. It is through facing and handling personal problems and even tragedies that a Christian builds faith and develops the essential strength of character necessary for salvation. He views life as a training ground where he can develop the positive qualities of love, patience, faith, hope, and the other traits of God's Spirit.

Likewise, the Christian understands the purpose of godly correction and punishment. He knows God's ultimate purpose is to reproduce Himself through man, to elevate man from human nature to God's own nature, from mortality to immortality. He realizes that at times God must correct His children to stop them from hurting themselves with evil and to direct them into the godly obedience that produces character and happiness. The Christian realizes that all humans at one time or another need God's loving correction and thus he responds to this correction in his own life with repentance and submission to the laws which are intended for his happiness. God is a loving Father who will, when the occasion arises, correct us—not in anger or out of spite—but rather for our own good.

The twelfth chapter of Hebrews exemplifies God's attitude, His great fatherly love, in correcting His children. We are told "not to regard lightly the discipline of the Lord" (v.5), because "the Lord disciplines him whom he loves" (v.6). God is treating us as sons (v.7) and if He did not correct us, we would be "illegitimate children and not sons" (v.8). God's motivation in correction is clear: "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (v.10).

In the last half of Matthew 25, Jesus Christ explains how we should be developing a progressively more personal relationship with Him. He told His disciples that when we

serve others—when we give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, welcome to the stranger and company to the sick—we are actually serving Jesus Christ Himself.

When we extend ourselves to do good to the least of His brethren, then we are in fact credited just as though we had done those same things to Jesus Christ personally. It is a profound point. It shows that a Christian's relationship with God must expand beyond internal spiritual thoughts and express itself in an attitude of outgoing concern and compassion for one's fellow man by external physical actions.

Serving human beings is indeed one of the most spiritually penetrating concepts revealed in the Bible. Only by loving one's fellow man can prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting have any real meaning.

James put it succinctly: "So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead . . . and I by my works will show you my faith . . . . You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone" (Jas. 2:17,18,24).

It is with this overall understanding of God's ultimate plan well in mind that the Christian, as a truly begotten son, develops his intimate relationship with his spiritual Father through prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting and the full living of the active Christian life.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

**THE CHRISTIAN  
RELATIONSHIP  
WITH FELLOWMAN**

**Doctrinal Statement**

Just as man has an obligation toward his Creator, he also has responsibilities toward his fellowman. A Christian must love his neighbor as himself, regardless of his neighbor's racial, ethnic, religious or social background; he must be a light to the world by setting a proper example; and he must do good toward all men as the opportunity arises.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Christians do not live in this world by themselves. They are just one segment of humanity, and are surrounded by persons of other religions, backgrounds, nationalities and creeds. In fact, all humans must face the reality that they live in a world consisting of other humans who are to a greater or lesser degree different from themselves. The Christian fully recognizes this reality and strives to live in harmony and peace with all men everywhere.

The apostle Paul set some basic guidelines for how a Christian should respond to the world around him when he says that the true believer must live in the world (i.e. function within the society in which he finds himself) but not be a part of those practices, actions or attitudes that are contrary to God's way of life (1 Cor. 5:9-10). John wrote that although Christians must be "in" the world, they are not to be "of" the world. Jesus did not pray that God should take His disciples out of the world, but rather that God should protect them from evil (Jn. 17:15).

### Race Relations in the Church

Jesus Himself laid down the highest standard for a human in relation to his fellow man when He described the second most important command as being "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39). This love for neighbor must transcend the human barrier of racial, ethnic and social background. It arises above the human weaknesses of jealousy, envy, hate and bitterness. It teaches man how to hate the sin, but to have compassion for the sinner, and it must grow to the place where a man will even have love for his enemies when they are persecuting him.

Of course, the ultimate example of Christianity for all generations and times was set by Christ Himself, who gave His life for all sinners. Philippians 2 shows that He emptied Himself of His power and glory as a member of the Godhead and came to the earth, not to be served or waited upon, but as a servant of all mankind. His every action and thought while on earth depicted the epitome of true Christian outgoing concern; this serving attitude is

perhaps best illustrated by His willingness to die pitifully on a tree between two criminals. Thus Jesus Himself personified the greatest love a Christian can have for another which, by Jesus' own words, was to lay down one's life for a friend.

Loving one's neighbor means that a Christian must not harbor racial prejudice within his heart. The official doctrine of the Church is that discrimination toward persons because of race or ethnic origin is wrong and totally contrary to the teachings of the Bible. Almighty God is the Creator of the different races of man. He puts no spiritual distinction between these races (Acts 15:9; Gal. 3:28; etc.). In the Kingdom of God, there will be no racial stigma of any kind. The Church of God strives to reflect the coming Kingdom of God in its attitudes toward race at the present time.

God is no respecter of persons; He shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-35; Jas. 2:2). He deals justly with all men. There is no double standard with the Almighty: "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" (Ex. 12:49; cf. Num. 15:15,16).

How to deal justly and how to love one's neighbor is set forth plainly by Paul in Philipppians 2:2-4;

Complete my joy, by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord, and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit; but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The giving of esteem, one to another, is a two-way street. To love one's neighbor is to be concerned for his spiritual and physical welfare. To love one's neighbor means to respect him, to admire his accomplishments. The point of Philipppians 2:2-4 is that a Christian must radiate the attitude and the actions of unselfish service toward his fellow man. He must esteem his fellow Christians better than himself, because he knows his own weaknesses in contrast to his brother's accomplishments. It is this attitude of love and concern which is imperative if we are to have proper individual and group relationships.

Ethnic integration of the races is as much a factor of modern Western society as was integration of various ethnic groups in the Roman society of the first century.



The example of the early history of the New Testament Church was to show no partiality between Jew, Greek or any other ethnic group.

"Truly I perceive," said the apostle Peter, "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation everyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). And again, God has "made no distinction between us and them" (Acts 15:9; Gal. 2:11-16).

While the political situation in some few areas of the world may require a limitation of social integration, this is not a doctrine or overall policy of the Church. In matters of Church fellowship and office, there is no discrimination because of ethnic background. Different ethnic groups are free, of course, to preserve their own culture and identity, including having such Church-sponsored ethnic socials as a Latin dance or a German evening. But the Church does not teach or practice regular segregation of different ethnic groups in its services. Members are encouraged to get to know the members of groups other than their own. Only then can they appreciate the qualities of others and practice that love of one another which is the central message of the Bible.

In matters of Church fellowship and office, there should be no discrimination because of ethnic background. The criteria for baptism are repentance and belief. Ordination to the ministry—at whatever level—is based on those spiritual criteria indicated in the Bible, such as conversion and calling. Ethnic origin is no factor. This is the present belief and practice of the Church, and it holds this to be in accord with the Bible and the mind of God.

Over the years, the term "integration" has been tarnished with the corrosive taint of emotionally loaded epithets. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "integrate" in the primary sense to mean: "to make whole or complete by adding or bringing together parts . . . /secondarily/ unity."

God has integrated His Church to teach us His way of harmony between peoples. It is this Christian unity, the Christian culture and the mind of Christ, rather than the rigid ideas and entrenched biases of men, which unites rather than separates us and which will determine how "'integrated" or fitly framed together we (the Church of God) really are (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Misunderstandings have often arisen from incorrectly interpreting another's thoughts or motives about what is true integration. When the topic of race relations is brought up, many in the white community tend to think immediately of the question of racial intermarriage. The black and other minority communities, by contrast, are more concerned about having the same opportunities for education, work, advancement and economic reward that the average white citizen has, than about interracial marriage or ethnic assimilation.

Minority people perceive their struggle for justice, fair play and racial equality to be life-or-death attempts to stay afloat in a competitive society while shooting the rapids of racial prejudice and injustice. Human cultures have their inherent weaknesses. So long as this present evil world stands, there will always be unjust weights and measures—something God Almighty hates.

Church history reveals that the attitude of contemporary society has, to one degree or another, always been reflected in religion. But we in the Church of God cannot allow society to determine our racial mores and standards, nor to force us into its mold of racial bigotry. Our conduct is rather to be exemplary of the principles set forth in the pages of the Bible. Our unity cannot be artificial, but a clear expression of Christian love.

Race relations in the Church can be termed human relations—the attitude, respect, appreciation and brotherhood that should be expressed among all races. We are admonished by the Word of God to be willing to lay down our lives for our brethren: not just loving in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. And who are our brethren? Christ clearly answers this for us: "For whoever /regardless of race7 does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt. 12:46-50). God does not see as man sees, nor does He look on the outward appearance.

The integrated Church of God is the herald of God's Kingdom and a New Culture, wherein God's perfect government will at once banish racial discrimination, while urging all families of the human race to develop to the fullest their unique ethnic human potential.

In view of the grave importance of marriage—for what it symbolizes, for the stability of society and for the happiness of the individual—the Worldwide Church of God

strongly urges that dating and marriage emphasize similar racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The reason for this is to insure the greater likelihood of mutual compatibility between marriage partners and the predictability of patterns of appearance, talent and temperament in their children and that their children may fit in with society more easily.

Furthermore, God created the races and national groupings of families; He created the diversity in man to encourage the richness of cultural experiences and to generate the combined creative product of divine contributions to society. Consequently, God wants each ethnic group to take pride in its own origin and heritage. In the world tomorrow, there will be different races and nations and each will be encouraged to maintain and strengthen its own identity and culture; most marriages, therefore, will preserve this identity and culture by remaining within traditional boundaries.

Wise marriages are those which match people suited for each other. Compatibility may be determined by consideration of the many different traits of personality, cultural background, intellect, character and even physical features. A marriage in which neither partner properly understands the other's language is not likely to be the most fulfilling. The same general considerations come into question when people of two obviously diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds consider marriage. Two people could, hypothetically, be compatible though of diverse racial backgrounds. In actual practice, such differences usually imply other important differences which will compete with rather than complement each other.

The Church cannot and does not forbid people of the same race or ethnic background to marry even when unsuited for one another. They are not put out of the Church when no direct violation of God's law is involved. Likewise, we cannot and do not forbid people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds to marry even though such marriages may not be wise. The Church simply does not attempt to regulate who one may or may not marry. (And no stigma must ever be attached to children that may result from such a union—though in the world they may well face social strains and heartaches.)

There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can do through the individual that submits himself to God. God's Church is exhorted to break the bonds of prejudice by putting on the

"new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him : Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision . . . bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:9ff). It is the responsibility of each Church member to repent of past wrong attitudes toward those of other race or ethnic groups. We are all one in Christ and must have that Christian love for all which only God's Spirit makes possible.

### Christian Responsibility in the Community

A Christian must set an example in all areas of life. He is not blind to the evils of this society. He sees that the vast majority of nations and individuals are living and acting in opposition to God's perfect law. The effects of crime, pollution and immorality are all obvious—the poor are oppressed, wars are waged, hatred between peoples flourishes. But a Christian must differentiate between sin and the sinner, between evil and the evildoer.

The proper attitude is for a Christian to hate the deeds of the evildoer, but to retain love for the one who Himself set a perfect example in this regard by deprecating sin and by giving His life for all sinners at the same time (Jn. 3:16). This love for the evildoer is not a self-righteous, condescending attitude, however, but rather compassion for one who is essentially ignorant of his own spiritual blindness. Indeed, every Christian himself was and is part of this society and has been, and unfortunately all too often still is, a partaker of its sins.

But to condemn everything the world has ever done as "evil" would be shortsighted in the extreme, and would broadcast one's ignorance of the vast advances mankind has made in the areas of science and technology, medicine, art and literature, and also the good that millions have done through charity. Christians are nevertheless admonished to avoid "worldliness." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. . . ,For all that is in the world. the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16). Worldliness is partaking of the norms of society (vanity, false pride, greed, envy, lust, strife) instead of the godly values of love, concern, giving and helping one's neighbor. A Christian should avoid those activities and attitudes of mind which oppose God's law in its letter and in its intent.

The Church places great stress upon the need for Christians to serve their fellow man: ". . . by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word . . . love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13-14). The obligation for us to "look on the needs of others" (Phil. 2:4) extends beyond the family and the Church to embrace all of one's neighbors—indeed humanity as a whole, who do not as yet have the blessing of knowing God's truth. Christians should "always seek to do good to one another and to all" (1 Thess. 5:15), and be "zealous for good deeds" (Tit. 2:14). A Christian is thus ultimately known by what he does, and not alone for what he professes. "Pure religion," as defined in James 1:27, "is to visit the fatherless and widows." Caring for the needy, or neglecting to, is tantamount to doing the same to Christ, according to Jesus' own words (Mt. 25:31-46). The Church acknowledges that the need to serve one's fellow man should be filled both by the individual himself, and by the collective body of believers, the Church. All persons need to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute" (1 Tim. 6:18) in their own private lives.

One outstanding example is that of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37. This story was used by Christ to expound the second great commandment, and to define "who is my neighbor"; thus, the Christian learns whom he should serve. Jesus' point is that anyone in need is our neighbor, and believers have a duty to help others in such spontaneous one-on-one situations. We are encouraged by God's Word to earn extra money for the sole purpose of having "to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Likewise, those employed in certain service-oriented positions in society should use their individual opportunities to exert extra efforts to improve the welfare of their fellow citizens within and without the Church of God.

Jesus told His disciples—and by direct extension all Christians:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven, (Mt. 5:14-16)

What "good works" is Jesus referring to? It cannot be the "good works" of prayer, Bible study, fasting, etc.—these must be done in private and not before men (Mt. 6:1-2). Obviously the "good works" that Christians can do which non-

Christians will praise must reflect a genuine, unfeigned outgoing concern for other people.

The Church as a whole has an affirmative biblical responsibility to serve the nonbeliever by demonstrating its collective outgoing concern for the surrounding community. Since the Church is a body with "many members," it develops the strength from those members to accomplish with an integrated, organized structure much more good for society and civilization than could its individual members by themselves.

The local Church congregation, as the microcosm of the worldwide Church in the local community, should extend itself in whatever way will best serve its neighbors such as through programs to help the elderly, the sick and the blind. Such activities may range from two church members simply volunteering their time to major church sponsored events. During time of disaster, emergency, or other special need, the membership should be willing to help with whatever physical and spiritual needs are made manifest. Each Church congregation should strive to establish itself as a respected, giving part of the community, whose every motive and action is that of helping, serving and encouraging—in every way setting a positive example of the true Christian way of life. The Church strives to carry out the apostle Paul's admonition: "As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good to all men."

A Christian is also aware of his civic responsibilities and privileges. Paul wrote that Christians should be subject to the constituted human authorities. This included paying taxes and rendering due respect to the symbols of those authorities (Rom, 13;1ff). Jesus Himself paid a tax which He legitimately could have avoided (Mt. 17:24-27). Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem because of the edict of the Roman emperor. The New Testament is filled with such examples of complying with government legislation and national custom where they did not conflict with God's laws. Worldwide Church of God members have always shown patriotism by saluting the flag and singing the national anthem of their own country.

In some countries, voting is put on a par with other governmental requirements. The New Testament no more prohibits voting than it does the paying of taxes. The Church does not attempt to legislate in the matter of voter registration or voting in local, regional or national elections. In the free countries of the world, voting is generally a matter of individual choice. Yet the Church has, on occasion, even

recommended voter registration for certain local activities which directly affected the welfare of the Church member in his community. Such voting does not differ in kind from voting in a national election. If one wishes to register for and vote in local, county, regional, state, provincial or national elections that is his business and is not prohibited or policed by the Church in any way. (The Church believes in God's form of government within the Church, and, consequently, rejects the system of voting within the Church itself and church-supported institutions.)

The Church as an organization does not enter into this world's political affairs. It does not support any political party, nor attempt to influence its members to support or not support any issue or person. Of course, the Church's values are well known in the community, and its very existence should therefore strengthen the support for moral decency, obedience to the constituted authorities and civic pride.

The Church continues to stress the transient nature of earth-bound political institutions. The Kingdom of God is not going to be voted in by men, but forcibly established by Jesus Christ. When that time comes, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). This is the ultimate goal of the Christian, and it is toward that eternal Kingdom that he should expend his greatest efforts.

Jesus Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world." The kingdom a Christian looks and longs for is an eternal kingdom or government, not a temporal, physical, human one. Yet when Jesus said His disciples are not of this world, He also recognized that all Christians are citizens of one of the many countries in the world. Neither does this negate the principle of having our "citizenship /state or country/ ... in heaven" (Phil. 3:20, NIV). The apostle Paul, who wrote the preceding statement about our true citizenship was himself a physical Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28).

Another area of civic concern is that of holding public office and serving on juries. The Church in no way prohibits its members from such activities, and indeed the community would be well served by having true Christians fulfilling these functions. There are cautions here; Christians may find making certain judgments and rendering specific decisions difficult, because the laws of God can conflict with the laws of men, and their primary responsibility must be to the former. Also, one who may serve (or wish to serve) in an elected

governmental capacity must not involve himself with unchristian practices commonly associated with politics. No Christian should ever consciously compromise his inviolable values of love for God, fidelity to God's law and love for his neighbor equal to love for himself. Nonetheless, the biblical examples of Joseph ruling Egypt and Daniel ruling Babylon are powerful statements about the capacity and opportunity of a true servant of God to serve (albeit rarely) in responsible governmental positions, even though their governments were still of this world.

Associated with jury duty is the question of whether a Christian should seek legal redress through the legal system. 1 Corinthians 6:1-9 categorically states that a Christian should not go to court against a fellow Christian. It says that to do so is a "shame" (v.5) and that such one who does so has "done wrong" (1 Cor, 6:8). Matthew 18:15-20 adds that a Christian who feels that he has been wronged by his brother should approach that brother personally to resolve the problem. If the brother will not hear, he should take one or two witnesses and approach the man again. If he will still not respond, the injured party should take the matter to the officials of the Church where a judgment can be made. (There are, of course, areas over which the civil authorities have total authority, e.g. the legal granting of divorce; in such cases, the civil courts must be resorted to, but only after all Christian duties toward a brother or a sister have been fulfilled.)

The question of whether a Christian should take a non-Christian to court is more complex. Obviously, a Christian should still use the same basic approach outlined in Matthew 18—first trying to resolve the issue between him and the offending party. However, it is equally obvious that a non-Christian will not abide by, or submit himself to, the authority of the Christian's Church. This means that if a matter is still unresolved, a Christian may take a legal dispute to the recognized civil authorities (to whose authority the non-Christian shall, of course, have to submit). The question of whether a Christian should take one to court under these circumstances must be an individual decision, based upon a balance between the principles of Christian forgiveness and the man's responsibility to maintain his own integrity and rights before the laws of God and of man.



Questions also arise about a Christian's responsibility toward military service. It is axiomatic that human warfare and the attitudes behind it are the exact anti-thesis of God's law and the Christian way of life (jas. 4:1-2). Therefore, a Christian, who must put God's laws before man's (Acts 5:29), can in no way conscientiously participate in warfare. A Christian's firm conviction in this regard in no way negates his feelings of loyalty to his country, nor lessens the amount of positive Christian service he is willing to render to his country. His loyalty is, however, even deeper to his God and to his religious beliefs, and it is to God that he must be loyal when conflict between God and man arises (Acts 5:29). True patriotism thus puts one's country second only to one's God.

In summary, we as Christians and brothers of Christ must follow His example of genuine outgoing concern for our neighbor in our thoughts, actions and attitudes. This love for our fellow human beings is far from being merely an emotional feeling in our hearts, but is the very real act of living as servants by following the example of Jesus Himself.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The marriage relationship is the basis of the family, which in turn is the core of a stable society. As the primary physical analogy of God's plan for mankind, marriage, child rearing and the family are given a preeminent place in the teachings of the Bible and the Church. Although roles are defined, men and women have equal spiritual potential before God.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Church believes and strongly teaches that marriage is of divine origin and is a sacred institution in itself. Marriage and the family picture the family relationship of God. God reveals Himself as a Family composed of two persons--Father and Son--which is now reproducing itself through mankind by the addition of sons and daughters. In like manner, mankind physically demonstrates this God-plane relationship through marriage. Man can, like God, build a family and add to it while experiencing the joys and happiness that family life involves. Paul refers to this analogy between marriage and the family and God's purpose and plan of reproducing Himself through Christ and the Church as "a great mystery" (Eph. 5:32) because it reveals the very purpose for which God created mankind.

True happiness and personal fulfillment for both sexes can result from a proper understanding and application of God's instructions concerning the roles of men and women. All people--regardless of race, nationality, social status or sex--have the same ultimate goal and are spiritually equal before God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). God's purpose of reproducing Himself in mankind clearly applies to both male and female, because all shall be "sons and daughters" of God (II Cor. 6:18).

When it comes to the marriage and family relationships, however, both male and female have certain roles or responsibilities which are not interchangeable. In procreation the male and female roles cannot be switched. In less mechanized and specialized societies the strength of the male makes him better suited for hunting and defending the community, while the activities for which the female is most suited tend to center around the home, children, and agriculture. The children take their place in the family and community as they mature. It is not a question of superiority or inferiority but of contributing to the common goal in the way each is most able.

The modern family also requires each of its members to fulfill a certain role, whether that of husband, wife or

child. Someone has to have the final say when a decision is required. On the other hand, the sharing of responsibility based on physical strength is no longer so essential in most modern societies. There are different kinds of intelligence demonstrated by males and females (leaving the traditional question of the relative importance of environment and heredity moot), though each area of intelligence is broadly overlapping between the sexes. Natural intelligence is thus equally distributed between husbands and wives. Therefore, the wife should contribute fully to any decision even though the husband is the one who bears final responsibility.

Furthermore, just as the husband has the final responsibility for family decisions, he must also shoulder the task of seeing to their needs. He is a leader, not a taskmaster; a father and husband, not a boss; one who looks out for the welfare of his entire family and puts them before himself. He should be respected because he has earned respect. The wife and children should be willing to submit to his decisions because he has demonstrated wisdom and sound judgment and has taken their desires and suggestions into account. The wife is content to have her own desires overruled on occasion because she knows that her husband will give preference to her judgment when it is clearly the sounder. The husband should be the leader of the family, showing the same love and respect for his wife as Christ shows for the Church. A husband is instructed to love his wife as Christ loves the Church - that is, to be willing to sacrifice himself for her in every way, for her benefit (Eph. 5:25). This basic principle can be expanded by analogy and comparison with Jesus<sup>1</sup> life and death for humanity to every conceivable aspect and area of life. Women are instructed to "be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.... As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands (Eph. 5:22-24). Paul then follows this admonition to wives with an equally strong admonition to husbands that they must love their wives just as much as they love their own bodies (Eph. 5:28) to indeed nourish and cherish their wives (v. 29). Husbands and wives are therefore to be joined to each other as "one flesh" (Eph. 5:31 quoting Gen. 2:24). It is interesting to note how much the Bible is ahead of its time in championing and upholding the equal position of women in marriage and society.

The very analogy of God's Church as the "mother" of Christians shows that from God's point of view both father

and mother have specific roles. Both are absolutely essential. The spiritual responsibility of the Church to nurture, protect, care for, instruct and even discipline God's spiritual children is analogous to the wife's responsibilities to nurture, protect, care for, instruct and discipline the family's offspring. This, of course, no more negates or diminishes the husband's responsibilities in such matters than it does God's responsibility as a spiritual Father toward His children. In addition, the Bible describes that a fundamental responsibility of a wife is to sustain the home environment ("keepers at home," Titus 2:5 KJV; "domestic," RSV).

But Proverbs 31 reveals that a woman's area of responsibility and opportunity is far broader than those who might interpret "domestic" responsibilities as only scrubbing floors and cleaning bathrooms. Instead, the ideal wife is pictured as one who has creatively developed her talents and interests. She is fully trustworthy, skilled with her hands, hard-working and industrious, intellectually stimulated, wise and kind. She has a keen sense of financial risk and responsibility (Prov. 31:16), has sharp business acumen (v. 18, 24), and is a competent administrator (v. 15). Such a woman is depicted as being "far more precious than jewels" (Prov. 31:10). (Once again, this passage evinces biblical superiority over other ancient literature in promulgating an expanded view of the role of women, thus foreshadowing and anticipating our modern era.)

Even in contemporary society, it is still normally mutually advantageous (in addition to being biblically proper) for the wife to maintain and build the domestic area while the husband maintains a job or business. But at times, especially in temporary circumstance, such as when the husband is unemployed or pursuing an education, it may be necessary to share or exchange certain duties which would usually be done by the other partner. The important thing is that the family activities be conducted in mutual love with respect and appreciation for the needs and wishes of the other (Eph. 3:21-33), and in accordance with the basic biblical principles. Many wives are completely fulfilled in caring for their homes and children. Those who have adequately fulfilled their domestic responsibilities (e.g., whose children are grown or in school) and who feel the need for further self-expression should be given the opportunity to the extent that their family situation allows. Improper suppression of any human's potential—male or

female—is both physically unwise and spiritually contrary to the plan of God.

The Bible also teaches that a healthy and joyous sexual relationship should be present within Christian marriages. God created the sexual differences and attractions between male and female for several reasons. Besides the obvious purpose of procreation, sexual relations within marriage are God-ordained as a means whereby a husband and a wife can express their love for one another (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Heb. 13:4). Any sexual relations other than with one's marriage partner (such as premarital intercourse, adultery, homosexuality, Bestiality, etc.) are condemned in God's Word.

Within marriage the bed should be "undefiled," meaning not corrupted by adultery or immorality (Heb. 13:4, RSV). Aside from the common-sense instruction that couples should abstain from sex during a woman's menstrual period (Lev. 18:19), the Bible—and hence the Church—has no proscriptions against specific acts of sexual relations except to teach that they must express mutual love, concern and be consistent with basic biblical principles. (Sodomasochism, for example, would be clearly contrary to such principles.)

The Church recognizes that even as God determines how large His Family will become, a couple has the right to mutually agree upon, and to determine, the size of their family. Wise methods of birth control which cannot adversely affect the body are encouraged, but such decisions are best left to the individuals and the proper medical authorities.

Because of the sanctity of marriage, the Worldwide Church of God strongly discourages divorce among its members. As a last resort, there are only three scriptural reasons why Church members may divorce each other—with subsequent rights of remarriage.

(1) **Fraud:** This amounts to an annulment, though divorce is usually required to terminate the marriage. The marriage covenant was made under a false pretense. One party later finds that he or she has been defrauded and decides to take action. (Deut. 22:12-21—The spirit of this scripture may be applied to other acts of fraud besides the pretext of virginity.)

(2) **Illicit Sexual Activity:** In Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, Jesus Christ states that "whoever divorces his wife, except

for unchastity /porneia and marries another, commits adultery." The Greek word porneia includes fornication, adultery, harlotry, homosexuality, etc.; it is best translated "unchastity" as in the RSV. When porneia has been committed, the offending party and the marital bond may be broken (Deut. 24:4; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:9), though Christians should surely be counseled to be forgiving towards their mates.

(3) Desertion: If one member of a marriage is or becomes an "unbeliever," and deserts his or her mate--not being "pleased to dwell" with her or him--the offended party is freed from obligation. He or she may formalize the separation and any subsequent divorce gives the right to remarry since "in such a case the brother or sister is not bound" (1 Cor. 7:15).

If no adequate scriptural grounds for divorce are present, the Church strongly recommends that the couple not divorce though they may choose to live separately. (If they do divorce, they should not remarry.) Reconciliation should be achieved at the soonest possible time. If this is not possible, they should remain single. If adequate biblical grounds for divorce are present, the couple may divorce if they have first exhausted all other attempts to resolve their differences.

While the Church allows its members to divorce and remarry under the above biblical conditions, it does not generally recommend it. God says he hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), and that should be the attitude of the church, its ministry, and each of its members. The church insists that every possible effort be made to reconcile offended parties. Forgiveness is an intrinsic part of the Christian character (Mt. 6:14-15) and must be given a prominent role in resolving marital problems. The Church lends its counseling services to aid in achieving such reconciliations.

Effective child rearing is also basic to the building of a strong and healthy family unit. It is as important as marriage in portraying the plan of God in that the relationship between parent and child is the physical type of the spiritual relationship between God and man.

As in other areas of the Christian life, God's Word allows great latitude of approach in the rearing of one's children within the general biblical guidelines. Of course, it is self-evident that a father and mother must clothe,

feed and shelter their youngsters as best they can within their means. For a parent to ignore these basic responsibilities is, in God's sight, to be "worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8). But the principles of proper child rearing must be far more inclusive than the basic necessities of life.

The Bible's primary admonition is that parents show deep love and manifest real affection toward their progeny, just as God does for us. This love will take many forms: protection from harm, instruction, encouragement, respect, participation in family activities, and balanced correction when necessary. The need for parents to express their love by spending much time with their children in both work and play is especially stressed by the Church. Likewise, great emphasis is placed upon the need for parents and children to communicate with one another, and to show genuine interest in each other by active listening. To this end the Church encourages its members to set aside at least one day a week for a "family night" of planned activities and recreation together.

Parents have a responsibility to provide moral and spiritual guidance for their children and to establish values consistent with the goals of Christianity, through their example as well as by formal religious instruction. The establishment and nurturing of true values and moral behavior will at times necessitate punishment for wrongdoing in the form of removal of privileges or spanking. All such punishment is done in love only (never in uncontrolled anger), is always reasonable, consistent and never injurious to the child emotionally or physically.

The proper balance in disciplining one's children is important to achieve. Two scriptures that can help define the boundaries of such balance are Proverbs 13:24 and Ephesians 6:4. In the former, parents are instructed that "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him"; in the latter, parents are cautioned never to "provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Thus parents are entrusted by God to generate and nurture physical, mental, moral, and spiritual growth in the children that He grants to their care.

Likewise, children have responsibilities toward their parents. While it is true that the obligation is first the parents to properly rear their child, it is also true that



a child is responsible for his own actions after a certain age. A child is required by God to positively respond to his parents. He must love, respect, honor and obey his genitors and guardians. In so doing, he will contribute to harmony within the home and receive for himself the blessings of obedience. Indeed, the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" is called "the first commandment with a promise" since God states that as a result of obedience, "it may be well with you and...you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2-3).

Although the building of a family is and can be a training ground for learning important spiritual lessons, God in no way commands everyone to marry. On the contrary, the apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 that at various times and for various reasons some may find it better not to marry. Indeed, these verses indicate that some unmarried persons may find a better opportunity to serve the Church physically and spiritually because of greater amounts of available time and fewer personal cares and concerns. Neither the married nor the unmarried state has any inherent spiritual superiority over the other, however. Everyone should evaluate his own circumstances and make his own decision in this very private and personal matter.

God is working out a great purpose here below. He has given men and women great latitude of roles and responsibilities within certain basic guidelines so they may reach their ultimate physical and spiritual potential.

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# HEALING

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Divine healing is a miracle which God in His mercy and love may extend to those who call upon Him in time of need, according to faith and/or other factors. Christians are encouraged to appreciate this special benefit from God as well as to do everything they can for themselves in times of illness or injury by seeking the most competent professional help. Faith in God for healing does not conflict with the use of modern medical science. The healings of Jesus Christ demonstrate and represent His power to express compassion, to forgive sin, and ultimately, to resurrect the dead and establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Text reads: The very fact that God gave laws of quarantine to ancient Israel proves he did not instantly heal every disease.

#### DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Healing is a continuous biblical theme running from Genesis, where God healed Abimelech and his wife and female slaves so that they bore children (Gen. 20:17), to Revelation, where the leaves of the tree of life will be for the healing of the nations in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 22:2). Yet it cannot be denied that God has extended the miracle of healing in different degrees for different purposes at different times. People have not always been healed with the same regularity or for the same reason.

There are few healings recorded in the Old Testament. The very fact that God gave laws of quarantine to ancient Israel proves he did not instantly heal every disease, even in His theocratic state. This indicates that such divine intervention is not necessarily common even when God is working with specific individuals and groups, and promises to be their Healer.

During Jesus' time, and immediately thereafter during the apostles' early ministry, God poured out the gift of healing much more than He ever had previously or has since. The supernatural miracle of divine healing was employed as a fundamental means by which God demonstrated that Jesus was the Christ. Jesus' miracles of healing also helped establish His absolute credibility as one sent from God. It built faith into those who saw his healings firsthand and into all who read of them millennia later. Healing was also utilized as a primary vehicle for expressing Christ's power on earth and for attracting great public awareness quickly for the preaching of the gospel. In our age, God has not chosen—at least not yet—to use the same technique.

It is quite evident that God is not healing today in the same manner or to the same degree that He did in early New Testament times. It is equally evident that the physiological knowledge and medical expertise of the twentieth century is far advanced over that of the middle of the first century (and certainly unrelated to the magical rites and potions of even earlier centuries). Consequently, Christians today can take full advantage of the latest healthcare, recognizing that such proper physical concern in no way detracts from one's faith in God or the ability of God to divinely heal as a manifestation of His mercy and love.

## DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

The Biblical Meaning of Healing

Healing in the Bible may assume various forms. The actual biblical usage of the English word "heal" (and the Hebrew and Greek words from which it is translated) is quite broad. It can mean the healing of the body (as in numerous scriptures, especially as pertaining to the work of Jesus Christ), and indeed this is its most common usage. But healing in the Bible is not limited to the physical body: it can refer to the healing of the mind or the emotions (Ps. 147:3); it can have the metaphorical connotation of the healing of the land (2 Chron. 7:14), God's people as a whole (Jer. 6:14; 8:11), the nation of Israel (Lam. 2:13; Hos. 7:1) and gentile nations such as Egypt (Is. 19:22) and Babylon (Jer. 51:9); it can refer to the healing of inanimate things such as the earth (Ps. 60:2), water (2 Kings 2:21; Ezek. 47:8-9), and even the "altar of the Lord that was broken down" (1 Kings 18:30, where exactly the same Hebrew word that is usually translated "healed" is translated "repaired") it can allude to abstract concepts such as the healing of faithlessness or backsliding (Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:4); it can also be used of spiritual healing, the healing of the "sin-sick soul," as it were (Ps. 41:4; 2 Chron. 7:13-14; Is. 57:19; Mt. 13:15; Acts 28:27).

Of course most of the places where the term "heal" is used in the Bible do refer to the miraculous, though physically oriented, healing of an ill or injured human body. But not all of these occurrences refer to God as being responsible for doing the healing.

It is the precise way in which one chooses to define the term "heal" that determines whether only God can "heal" or whether man can also "heal" by aiding the normal bodily processes of fighting disease and cellular repair. If "healing" is defined as "miraculous, supernatural intervention" then surely only God can heal. If "healing" is defined as "making the body better" then man can help the body heal itself. The term "healing" in the Bible, in a number of instances, does not refer to cures coming from other than God.

In Exodus 15:26, where God states, "... I am the Lord your healer," the Hebrew word translated "healer" is "rafa". It is exactly the same word used in Genesis 50:2, which refers to Joseph's "servants the physicians." The passage in Exodus could as easily be translated, "I am the Lord, your physician," as could the passage in Genesis be translated Joseph's "servants the healers." Note that the "physicians" or "healers" are not condemned, but are specifically called Joseph's servants.

Rafa' is also the same word found in Exodus 21:18-19:

When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist and the man does not die but keeps his bed, then if the man rises again and walks abroad with his staff, he that struck him shall be clear; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall have him thoroughly healed.

This shows that an individual who caused an injury was responsible to have the injured person "healed," indicating that "healing" (rafa') is not limited to God. 2 Kings 8:29 (also 9:15; 2 Chron. 22:6) reads: "And King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah..." Again, healing (rafa\*) is used in reference to what men can do for themselves. The contrast of "a time to heal" with "a time to kill" in Ecclesiastes 3:3 strongly suggests a natural healing process

There are two scriptures that indicate, although their usage is certainly metaphorical, that the term healing can be used to describe the natural bodily processes that can be aided by external medicines.

In Jeremiah 51:8, balm is suggested as a possible way for Babylon to be healed ("give her medicine; perhaps she can yet be healed," Living Bible) ; in Jeremiah 30:13, the lack of medicine is equated with the consequent lack of healing. From God's statement to Ezekiel showing that Pharaoh's broken arm was not healed because it was not bound up with a bandage (Ezek. 30:21), it logically follows that the arm would have "healed" had Pharaoh in fact bound it up. This confirms that the biblical usage of "healing" can include the physical body's normal mechanisms of recuperation and repair as part of its overall definition.

Other usages of "healing" in the Bible become almost ludicrous if we are compelled to restrict its causation

to God. As noted, Elijah's repairing ("healing") of "the altar of the Lord that had been thrown down" (1 Kings 18:30) hardly seems to have required supernatural intervention. Finally, if only God can heal, then we must conclude that it shall be God who will heal the "mortal wound" of the beast in Revelation 13:3 so that it can lead the whole earth to fight against Christ at His return!

In the New Testament there are three Greek words translated "heal" in the King James Version: *therapeupr*, meaning "to heal" in the New Testament, and "to care for, wait upon, treat (medically), heal or restore" in Greek literature outside the New Testament; *iaomi*, meaning "to heal, cure, or deliver"; and *bozo*, meaning "to save from death, to free from disease, to make whole, to save from eternal death, or to attain salvation." *Sozo* is especially interesting in that while it is clearly used to describe physical healing in Mark 5:23; Luke 8:36 and Acts 14:9, it is the same word appearing about 100 times in the New Testament to describe the process of spiritual salvation (suggesting some conceptual relationships between healing and salvation that will be discussed in the section on The Healings of Jesus Christ),

#### Healing In the Bible: A Conditional Promise

The miracle of healing is an act of God's divine grace, which must not be taken lightly. It is therefore immensely important (as in all areas of doctrine, of course) that one understand the topic of healing in the context of the entire Bible. For if one approaches the scriptural references to healing without the full biblical context, and out of the context of human experience, he may fix upon them a meaning not supported by logic, common sense or proper biblical exegesis. In this regard, we should consider some important scriptures.

Among the blessings God offered to the nation of Israel was the removal of diseases from among them. Several statements made to the Israelites in the wilderness show this; perhaps the most familiar is Exodus 15:26:

If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his eyes, and give heed to his commandments and keep all

his statutes, I will put none of the diseases upon you which I put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord, your healer.

Notice that the promise is conditional; it is predicated on obedience. God also says more than that He heals. He says that He will actually refrain from putting diseases upon the nation.

Exodus 23:25-26 adds to this:

You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

In this context, one of God's blessings for obedience is to have sickness removed from the nation. This is one blessing alongside others, such as having good food, pure water, fertile wives and a full life.

The converse of these blessings promised for obedience are the curses pronounced for disobedience. Instead of removing sickness and disease, God would allow these afflictions--along with many other curses--as the natural consequences of man's ways apart from the ways of God. Deuteronomy 28 enumerates these curses in great detail (see especially vv. 21-22, 27-28, 35, 59-61). The promises are conditional. Blessings come only with obedience; curses automatically follow transgression. But notice that these promises are national rather than individual. Sickness would be removed from the nation to the same extent that barrenness, miscarriages, and premature death were taken away. Healing as such is not really promised in these verses except as it is implied in a general way in the promise to remove sickness.

Healing in the Bible is not a simplistic algebraic equation relating faith and healing. God healed for different reasons in different circumstances. God healed Abimelech and his household after Abraham prayed for them (Gen. 20:17), thus ratifying Abraham's position as a servant of the Eternal. God healed Hezekiah from a deadly sickness and added fifteen years to his life because He respected Hezekiah's heart-felt prayer in which he recounted to God, with tears, his utter loyalty, sincerity and uprightness. God healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, of leprosy at a time when there were numerous lepers

in Israel and Syria who were not healed; the full story in 2 Kings 5 not only indicates that the healing was a major factor in Israel's international relations with Syria at that time, but also conveys many powerful lessons for people of all time.

The story of Elisha is similar, yet it has a "twist ending." Elisha was a remarkable individual (2 Kings 2-9). He asked for and received a double portion of Elijah's spirit. A great number of miracles are recorded in his name; even after his death, Elisha's bones brought a man back to life (2 Kings 13:21). Yet Elisha died of a sickness (v.14). Despite the great powers bestowed and miracles performed through God's Spirit, Elisha himself was not healed of some sort of sickness but actually died from it.

A strong statement about healing is found in Psalm 103:3: "who /God/ forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases." Surely God has stated that He desires to, can, and shall heal; but nowhere has God absolutely bound Himself to provide physical healing, nor is this passage an exception to the statement. The context of the psalm is given in verse 2: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; . . . and forget not all his benefits." The psalm is essentially a recitation of the many benefits received from God. However, these various benefits—of which physical healing is indeed one—are not absolute and unconditional promises to which God has irrevocably bound Himself. Notice that one's youth is renewed like that of an eagle (v.5) and God provides justice for all the oppressed (v.6). These are both promises in only a general sense since various qualifications are indicated elsewhere in scripture. Our youth is not always renewed like that of an eagle. There have been countless righteous people oppressed without receiving justice. Verse is no more a blanket promise for unconditional physical healing than any of the other promises in the psalm, as other scriptures and the experiences of the Church show. Yet the power of the poetry cannot help but make one realize that our God does desire to heal our diseases, to eliminate our afflictions and to bring us out of distress. But what He will actually do in any given situation remains unknowably beyond our limited understanding.

Several examples of non-healing are also recorded in the New Testament, even during a period when special gifts were possessed by some and astounding healings were being performed by various of the apostles. Paul writes that Epaphroditus was very ill, almost to the point of death



(Phil. 2:25-27). But God had mercy on him. Healing was here given as an example of mercy, not of faith or obligation (or at least not of these alone).

On another occasion, Paul mentions that he had left Trophimus ill in Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). He does not elaborate on the situation, but illness is taken as a matter of course rather than as some sort of unexpected occurrence. In fact, in an earlier letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul refers to Timothy's "frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Paul himself had a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7ff). He does not describe it exactly, but there is a likelihood that it was something physical. The Greek term *astheneia*, translated "weakness" in verses 9 and 10, is often used specifically of physical weakness, sickness or disease (e.g. Acts 5:15; 28:9; Lk. 5:15; Jn. 5:5). If Paul's "thorn" was indeed some physical defect, he was suffering from the very thing—a physical weakness—he was being used to heal others of.

At first glance, James 5:14-20 seems to contradict the biblical fact that God's promise to heal is conditional rather than absolute. James says that the "prayer of faith /on behalf of a sick person who has requested and received the anointing of the ministry/ shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up." But to interpret James' statement to mean that the prayer of faith must always obligate God to physically heal not only contradicts numerous biblical and Church examples of healing and non-healing, but is also unfair to the sense and context of these verses. Although this one statement appears to be written without qualification, the condition, "if it be God's will," was no doubt tacitly understood.

Furthermore, the word translated "save" in verse 15 is the Greek word *sozo*. As previously explained, *sozo* is used only a few times in the Bible in reference to a sick person being made well (e.g. Mk. 6:56). The overwhelming majority of times (over 100) that this word is used in the New Testament it is in the spiritual sense, of eternal salvation. Likewise, the word "raise" in this verse, *egeiro* in Greek, can mean "to rouse from sleep or lift up as from a bed or floor"; but *egeiro* is used most often in the New Testament to represent the resurrection from the dead. (Examples of this usage are found in Matthew 10:8, where the disciples are instructed to "raise the dead, cast out devils"; Matthew 11:5, "the dead are raised up"; Matthew 14:2, "he is risen from the dead"; Matthew 16:21, "and be raised again the third day"; Acts 3:15, "whom God hath raised from the dead"; and Romans 6:4, "as Christ was raised up from the dead.")

Thus, while James is primarily speaking of physical healing upon anointing by the elders, he is also alluding to spiritual salvation and the resurrection from the dead. The ambiguity caused by the double meaning of these words no doubt has a purpose. It may have been James' intent to show that God will probably heal the faithful sick person, but certainly shall grant him salvation through the resurrection. James thereby confirms the conditional nature of the promise of physical healing and the unconditional nature of the promise of the resurrection from the dead.

### Physicians and Medicines In the Bible

It is true that the Bible often condemns ancient practitioners who relied on pagan gods, amulets, incantations or other forms of magic. But one cannot extrapolate from ancient superstition, demonology and ignorance to modern scientific medicine. In biblical times the medical arts, primitive by today's standards, were often associated with pagan religions and mystical rites: the line between such "black arts" and pure medicine was hazy.

One example is the reference to Ahaziah in 2 Kings 1:2:

Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay sick; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baalzebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this sickness."

This passage does not mean that Ahaziah went to Baalzebub for healing. Firstly, if he had wanted to be healed, he would have gone personally rather than just sending messengers. Secondly, he was only trying to inquire whether he would live or die, nothing more. This implies that he was consulting an oracle to try to find out the future, disobeying God's law in the process, just as Saul had done before his final battle with the Philistines. Professor John Gray, in his commentary on Kings, states: *daras* (literally 'to seek') is used specifically of seeking divine revelation by consulting an oracle, cf. Amos 5:5." Ahaziah should have sought to God concerning his future—therein lay his mistake.

There are a number of other biblical allusions to physicians, healing and medicine. Exodus 21:19, as discussed above, hints at the beneficial, fully accepted use of "healing arts" within Israel; Isaiah 38:21 gives an example remedy for boils which Isaiah himself prescribed. Perhaps it could be said that this "cake of figs" which Isaiah had said was to be applied to Hezekiah's boil "that he may recover" was only symbolic since God was going to super-naturally heal Hezekiah. Yet the fact remains that Isaiah did state that such an external, physical healing-type medicine was to be applied. Such "medical" help (within the medical technology of the time) was not only not condemned but was actually a fundamental component of the healing process. It certainly would appear that this laudable example of Hezekiah's beseeching with full faith in God for healing did not exclude his simultaneous utilization of external "medical" aids. In fact by requiring it as part of the process, Isaiah corroborates the view that man should do the most that he can for himself, while asking God to do that which he cannot.

Other references to physicians are used metaphorically. Jeremiah 8:22 certainly gives no sense of condemnation; many, in fact, read it very positively regarding its allusion to the role of a physician: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored?" Job 13:4 does not refer to all physicians. In 2 Chronicles 16:12, Asa is censured for not seeking God for help in his illness; the questions of whether the act of seeking the physicians was itself condemned in this case or whether these "physicians" were really priests and magicians of a false religion (and thus to be condemned) cannot be settled here alone, considering the lack of biblical data. In any event, the primary point of the verse is clearly that Asa erred in consulting only physicians, and did not consult God at all.

In Matthew 9:12, Jesus states that: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." This saying is used in a metaphorical sense, yet it and other similar sayings give no feeling of condemnation of physicians. As Rendle Short writes:

Our Lord several times mentions physicians. . . .  
/None/ of these sentences give the impression that the physician was generally looked upon, in Palestine at that time, as a pagan, a charlatan, or hopelessly incompetent" (The Bible and Modern Medicine, p. 30).

In Luke 4:23, Jesus quoted the proverb, "Physician, heal thyself/" and applied it to Himself with no hint of denigration of physicians in the process. Luke is called "the beloved physician" by Paul in his letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:14). The Greek word used here for "physician" is, *iatros* and means "one who heals" (cf. the verb *ia'oinai* meaning "to heal" which is used in reference to Christ's divine healings many times in the gospels). Since *iatros* was the normal word for "physician" used throughout the Greek world at the time, there is no indication that Luke was any different from other physicians. Nor is anything said about his giving up his pre-conversion practice. (Indeed the reference to Luke as a physician, beloved at that, can be dated at 62-63 A.D.)

What about medicines and drugs? Revelation 21:8 says that "sorcerers" (Greek *pharmakos*) shall have their part in the lake of fire. The clear evidence indicates that the word *pharmakia* referred to cult worship and the use of drugs to induce spells, rather than modern medicines and pharmacological drugs since these were not then in existence. Medicines used to heal sickness are not condemned in the Bible. Passages alluding to the use of medicines or similar preparations for healing purposes (e.g. Is. 38:21; Prov. 17:22) do not condemn them. As seen above, the metaphors in Jeremiah 30:13, 51:8 and Ezekiel 30:21 alluding to the use of healing medicines or physical methods of healing may either be stated sarcastically or as an accusation, but the allusion is nonetheless positive as far as the benefits of the medicines are concerned. The words used in these scriptures are derived from *rafa'* and evidently have the meaning "that which heals."

Ezekiel 47:12 is especially interesting since it shows the continuing positive use of healing medicines—made from special leaves from trees which are nourished by waters from the new Temple—in the millennium after the return of Jesus Christ. Corroboration can be found in Revelation 22:2, where it relates that healing preparations shall still be used after the new heaven and new earth are established. Whatever the understanding or fashion of usage (literal and/or metaphoric)—which is presently well beyond our ken—even the reference to these healing preparations must surely be taken as a very positive sign since they shall have their part in this magnificent environment.

### Health Principles

God's earnest desire is for all human beings to live an abundant life in perfect health. This attitude is reflected in the words of the apostle John: "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 Jn. 2). The Bible refers to health as a positive standard metaphor with which other things are likened ("the tongue of the wise" in Prov. 12:18; "a faithful ambassador" in Prov. 13:17; "pleasant words" in Prov. 16:24). To this end, the Bible gives basic principles of health which, coupled with common sense, experience and modern knowledge, would prevent many of the health problems plaguing modern man.

Common sense and experience by themselves should make the basic principles of health quickly available to everybody. The old adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is absolutely valid. The realization of this should lead to an attitude of genuine care and concern for the health of one's family and oneself. Such a conscious awareness would go a long way toward securing good health. A vital component of a good health program is a balanced diet which includes wholesome, natural foods and which excludes (as much as is practical in our society) processed foods such as sugars and starches, and artificially flavored and preserved foods. The right amounts of exercise, sleep and relaxation are likewise important. Maintaining a positive mental outlook and a peaceful mental attitude by eliminating (or at least attenuating) stress and flares of emotion is being increasingly recognized by modern health specialists as an essential health principle, considering the enormous effects (called "psychosomatic") that the mind exerts on the body. Caution should, of course, be taken to prevent accidents and bodily harm (without becoming obsessive or paranoid in the process.) Finally, a regular program of routine physical examinations by a qualified doctor is also important in recognizing and solving any potential problems before they become serious.

God has designed the human body to function in good health for the full span of one's allotted years. Unfortunately, mankind has so polluted the environment and human beings so often ignore the basic rudiments of health that imbalances occur, with sickness and disease the natural result.

To the degree that a person disregards the obvious physical principles of health, such as proper nutrition, adequate sleep and rest, a positive mental outlook, etc.,

is generally the degree to which one suffers ill health. The obvious exceptions to this are accidents and when disease or affliction is inherited. Even these two cases are many times the result of mankind harming himself, however, because most accidents are the result of carelessness and could have been avoided, and many inherited illnesses no doubt result from the nutritional, environmental, or even medical shortcomings of previous generations. Some obvious examples are the limbless offspring of mothers who ingested the drug thalidomide during pregnancy; the children who are born deaf because their mothers had a disease during pregnancy; and those who have organic brain deficiencies due to malnutrition. It is evident, then, that most of man's health problems are self-generated.

Radiant health has always been a prime concern of the Church. Indeed, the Church strongly teaches that individuals must care for their bodies physically, just as they must care for their minds mentally and spiritually. For, in the final analysis, physical, mental and spiritual health cannot be isolated from one another.

Even though physical life is not the primary object of Christian commitment, it is important, and God expects us to take care of our bodies. Consistent with this is making good use of available knowledge about the human body, its functions and processes. In addition to showing how to maintain good health, specialists can aid the body in time of injury or bad health. This human aid in no way hinders God if He decides to intervene miraculously and do what cannot be done physically.

#### Church Instructions for Times of Illness

No matter how much we take care of ourselves, almost all of us become ill or sick from time to time or suffer a misfortune such as an accident. At such times, the biblical record makes plain that God can intervene on behalf of the sick and heal them according to faith and/or other factors. This divine healing process is apart from, and not in conflict with, anything a person can do to help himself. Healing is a "special benefit" which God has made available to His Church. But it is not part of His spiritual-moral law, as it were; and not being healed, therefore, is not a sin. The ill individual should look to man for whatever physical help he can receive but should also look to

God to do what man cannot do—supernaturally intervene and divinely remove the illness, sickness or disease.

The basic instructions followed by the Church are found in James 5:14ff. These verses state that the sick person should call for the elders of the Church who will lay hands upon his head, pray over him and anoint him with oil. This ceremony is richly symbolic: the oil is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit (cf Ex. 30:23-25; Mt. 25:1ff; etc.); the act of one having hands laid upon him shows the person's desire to be set apart by God through His Spirit for the special miracle of the divine healing of his body.

### The Relationship Between Sickness and Sin

Physical sickness and illness can be caused by different factors. At times, it is the general result of violating the principles of health, or perhaps the direct result of a person's own sin (Mt. 9:1-7; Jn. 5:14). At other times, sin is not involved; and the illness or infirmity is inherited (Jn. 9:2) or the result of injury or accident (Lk. 13:1-5).

Whenever sin is involved, healing includes the forgiveness of that sin (Mt. 9:1-7). The final statement in James 5:14 illustrates the point: "and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." The construction used (the Greek particle *kan* with the subjunctive) expresses uncertainty and doubt. The person may have sinned; on the other hand, he may not have sinned. If the individual is only ill, he shall be healed. But if he has also sinned, his sins shall be forgiven as well.

In John 9, Jesus confirms that physical debilities are not necessarily caused by sin. The relevant points for our purpose are contained in the first few verses;

As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." (vv. 1-3)

It is important to notice that the assumption of sin was made on the part of the disciples. (Job's friends made

the same mistake—which has a definite superstitious ring to it—by assuming that Job's physical problems were due to his sins.) Jesus did not say that either the blind man or his parents had sinned. On the contrary, He denied that sin was involved in this case even though He did not elaborate further.

In another context, Jesus reinforces the fact that the blows of time and chance are not necessarily related to some extraordinary degree of sinfulness:

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?" (Lk. 13:1-5)

The Bible nowhere speaks of "physical sin." Sin is surely discussed a great deal; and from the numerous biblical references, it is possible to piece together the various acts and attitudes which constitute sin. But all of these fall under ethical, moral or mental categories—and are all, therefore, spiritual in nature. Indeed, the penalty for sin—eternal death in the lake of fire—proves that sin is spiritual only, because "breaking" a physical principle of health (e.g. stubbing one's toe, not getting sufficient vitamin C, ingesting too many refined sugars and starches, etc.) will not lead toward eternal death. Although, as previously explained, much if not most illness is self-generated through ignorance, error or neglect, it is not proper to label such physical mistakes "sin" in the strict biblical sense. Thus, to speak of "physical sin" is an actual contradiction in terms and likely to be confusing.

If, however, the illness or injury is directly or indirectly caused by the breaking of one of God's laws—two obvious examples would be venereal disease, resulting from unlawful sexual behavior, and liver disease, resulting from over-consumption of alcoholic beverages—then the cause of the problem is indeed sin in its true biblical meaning. It is not always possible, of course, to discern when illness or injury is the result of sin (the breaking of God's law in the letter) and/or stems from a sinful attitude (the breaking of God's law in the spirit). Nor is it wise to become sidetracked by



undue concern over whether certain detrimental physical practices under consideration are, or are not, sin. If the physical practice under consideration is indeed detrimental — as determined by biblical revelation or scientific fact—it should be stopped, as even common sense would dictate.

To be sick, therefore, is not necessarily to have sinned. Sickness is sometimes the result of sin and healing sometimes includes the forgiveness of sin. But at all times, whether sin is involved or not, healing is a manifestation of God's mercy and an exemplification of God's love.

### The Healings of Jesus Christ: Purpose and Power

Though there were several notable healings in the Old Testament, by far the most important and consistent healings in history were associated with the ministry of Jesus Christ. Some examples (with references) of these healings follow. By both their quality and quantity, they demonstrate the enormous importance that the New Testament places on the healing miracles of Jesus Christ. The leper, Mt. 8:1-4; Mk. 1:40-45; Lk. 5:12-16; the paralytic, Mt. 9:1-8; Mk. 2:1-12; Lk. 5:17-26; the multitudes, Mt. 4:24-25; Mk. 3:7-13; Lk. 6:17-19; the centurion, Mt. 8:5-13; Lk. 7:1-10; Peter's mother-in-law, Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:29-31; Lk. 4:38-39; Jairus' daughter, Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:21-43; Lk. 8:40-56; blind men, Mt. 9:27-31; 20:30-34; Mk. 10:46-52; Lk. 18:35-43; the Canaanite woman, Mt. 15:21-28; Mk. 7:24-30; the deaf mute, Mk. 7:31-37; the blind man at Bethsaida, Mk. 8:22-25; the ten lepers, Lk. 17:11-19; Sabbath healings, Mt. 12:10-13; Lk. 13:10-17; 14:1-6; the official's sick son, Jn. 4:46-54; the restored ear, Lk. 22:50-51.

Understanding the significance of all these healings is essential to salvation since they are a direct verification that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. Healing was one of the foundational signs that God employed to demonstrate the power and to ratify the office of His Son (Mt. 8:16-17; 11:2-6). Healing was also a fundamental part of the work of Jesus Christ on earth, and of this there can be no doubt. Jesus' primary object in performing the numerous healings that He did throughout His ministry, as it would be recorded in the New Testament for all peoples and for all times, was to give an absolutely certain, physically verifiable demonstration of His spiritual power.

The first reference to healing in Matthew's account is in direct association with Jesus<sup>1</sup> "preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God"; indeed, healing and Christ's message of the coming Kingdom of God were almost inseparable,

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.. (Mt. 4:23-24)

Many other verses confirm the close interdependence between healing and the full scope of Jesus' gospel of the Kingdom (e.g. Mt. 9:35). The association is profound: healing returns the body to its original, pure, wholly sound state; and so it is with the Kingdom of God, which shall return the earth to its original, pure, wholly sound state (referred to as "the times of restitution of all things" in Acts 3:21). Jesus' power to accomplish the former—the physical evidence of His healings was immediate and startling—was the clear demonstration that He likewise had the power to accomplish the latter—and establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In this context, Jesus' frequent casting out of demons as part of the healing process foreshadowed His binding of Satan in establishing the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' healings were spectacular; no one ever doubted when the crippled walked, the maimed were made whole, the blind saw, the deaf heard.

And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel. (Mt. 15:30-31)

Healings were the clearest demonstration of God's power in Jesus Christ, which could literally flow from Him (Mk. 5:30; Lk. 6:19; 8:46). Indeed, Jesus' healings represented to the world the absolute power that God had given

Him over the world. Healing likewise corroborated Jesus' power over Satan and his demons (Mk. 3:15; Acts 10:38).

Jesus also used healing to show His authority over other aspects of God's universe, such as, for example, the Sabbath day. When the religious leaders told the man Jesus had just healed that he should not be carrying his pallet on the Sabbath, the man answered them (probably with great confidence and conviction): "The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk<sup>1</sup>'" (Jn. 5:11).

But the most important aspect of Jesus' spiritual power that His healing demonstrated to the world was His power to forgive sin, and, ultimately, to resurrect the body from the dead. As noted, the word used in Mark 5:23 to indicate Jesus' physical healing of Jairus' daughter (sozo) is the same word used in about 100 passages to represent spiritual salvation. Jesus' ability to efficaciously heal in the flesh proved His equal ability to assuredly grant salvation in the spirit, thus showing the profound relationship between Jesus' healings and salvation.

Many of the people whom Jesus healed were lepers. This dread disease was the epitome of uncleanness. The word "cleansed," utilized in reference to Jesus' healing of lepers (Mt. 8:3; 10:8; 11:5; Mk. 1:42; Lk. 7:22; 17:14,17) was, interestingly enough, the same word chosen on occasion to describe what should happen to sin and how it should happen. ". . . let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1); and more directly, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). Thus, Jesus' supernatural miracles of literally cleansing lepers in the flesh during His ministry writes the record for all human history and beyond, confirming Jesus as the One who can literally cleanse sinners in the spirit. And just as the faith of the leper and the mercy of God were intrinsic to healing (Lk. 17:13,19), so the faith of the sinner and the mercy of God are intrinsic to the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Matthew 9:1-8 is particularly instructive in exemplifying the relationship between healing and the forgiveness of sin. Rather than healing being the forgiveness of sin, Jesus used His power to heal in order to prove that He also had the power to forgive sin. The miracle of healing (more than any other miracle) was especially apropos since it physically represented

a restorative process in which something unclean and broken was supernaturally made clean and whole.

Jesus was teaching at home surrounded by a large crowd which had gathered to hear Him. Some friends of a paralytic wanted to bring him to Jesus; they could not get through the crowd so they let him down through a hole in the roof. Jesus saw their faith (not necessarily that of the paralytic, though his was probably included). He said, "Your sins are forgiven" (present tense), or, as in Luke's account, "Your <sup>s^ns</sup> h<sup>ave</sup> been forgiven" (perfect tense). This forgiveness cannot as yet refer to the cause of the man's paralysis even if that cause was sin, since he did not immediately stand up—he continued to lie on his pallet—when Jesus told him that his sins had been forgiven. Only when Jesus realized that He was being judged by some of the religious leaders present, did He demonstrate His power to forgive sins by healing the man, "'that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the man who was paralyzed—'I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home'" (Lk. 5:24).

The point is that the power to forgive sin is proved by the healing—"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise, and walk'?" Yet, nothing is said about the forgiveness of sin being the cause of the healing. In fact, the verb in Luke 5:20 ("your sins have been forgiven"—*apheontai*) shows that the forgiveness was completed at the moment Jesus spoke those words. But the man was not healed until a few moments later. Thus, the healing was differentiated from the forgiveness of sin. They were two separate acts, with the former being used to prove Jesus' power over the latter.

In John 11, Jesus once again gives a physical demonstration of His spiritual power. This time it is His power to resurrect the dead, which is the ultimate miracle of healing. Jesus sets the stage by discussing the subject with Martha, who is grieving for Lazarus; He tells her: "I am the resurrection .and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (v.25). Jesus then presents tangible proof of His assertion—proof that would resound throughout the millennia of history—by resurrecting Lazarus back to physical life.

Healing thus foreshadows the resurrection when God shall re-create those who have died and transfigure those who will be alive. Just as Jesus instantly changed sick bodies into healthy bodies, so shall Christ instantly change mortal bodies

into immortal bodies. The situations where Jesus actually brought a human corpse back to physical life, as with Lazarus and Jairus<sup>1</sup> daughter, reinforce the analogous and symbolic relationship between healing and the resurrection. Since physical healing foreshadows the resurrection to spiritual life, the analogy can be extended by viewing sickness as foreshadowing the resurrection to eternal death—and Jesus' power to do the former gives us the ultimate victory over the latter (1 Cor. 15:54-58). Healing, then, is the clearest physical counterpart of this great spiritual event when human mortality shall be swallowed up by godly immortality and when mankind shall be born into God's Family.

Though Jesus did not heal everybody all the time, He often responded positively to people's faith in Him. Jesus emphasized that He healed according to an individual's faith. Such an intimate involvement of faith is wholly consistent with healing portraying the cleansing of our sins at conversion and the transformation of our bodies at the resurrection—since faith is absolutely essential to both processes. It is a person's faith in Jesus Christ, then, that is a critical and necessary element—in healing, in the forgiveness of sin, in conversion, and, ultimately, in the resurrection from the dead. As such, it is completely logical that healing should center around and emanate from Jesus Christ, giving great credence to His office, His authority and His commission.

Healing, then, is in essence the physical representation of the spiritual cleansing, restitutory and regenerative power of God through the person of Jesus Christ. This is why healing figured so prominently in the ministry of Jesus Christ and so much less so at earlier times in biblical history, or at later times in church history. The healing of the physical body, radically and miraculously altering it from a state of sickness to a state of health, symbolizes what God can do through Christ to our minds, hearts and spirits. Our sins are forgiven, our minds are changed, our hearts are made pure and our spirits are made whole. The process is supernatural and immediate; just as Jesus could heal the sick and make the lame whole before men, so can Christ cleanse our minds and make our spiritual lives righteous before God.

Though healing was a vitally important aspect of Jesus' ministry for what it spiritually represented, Jesus' personal motivation for healing was more simply human. He empathized deeply with the human misery and suffering that illness and injury brought, and consequently did what He could to ease the misery and alleviate the suffering. Jesus was "moved with compassion" (Mt. 14:14) toward people who were sick; He "pitied

them" (Living Bible) and "felt deep sympathy" (Modern Language Bible) for them. So, notwithstanding all the other reasons, Jesus healed because He loved people.

"By His Wounds You Have Been Healed"

Jesus Christ as our Paschal Lamb was intimately acquainted with suffering and sorrow. He suffered the penalty of our sins through His beating, crucifixion and death that we might be relieved of all our infirmities, whether physical, mental or spiritual:

. . . he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne . . . because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole by the blows he received. (Is. 53:4-5, Today's English Version)

Or, in more familiar words, ". . . 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."

In quoting this very passage Peter states, "Christ himself carried our sins in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his wounds that you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24, TEV) , "by whose stripes ye were healed" (KJV). Though healing can take various forms and though by His supreme sacrifice Jesus made all healing possible—spiritual, mental, physical and even environmental—still, the primary intent of Isaiah's prophecy and Peter's reference to it does in fact refer to the healing of our physical bodies and minds. This is clearly shown by the context in which this same passage is once again quoted in Matthew 8:14-17, after Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law:

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases."

Furthermore, the Greek word used for healing in 1 Peter 2:24, *iaomi*, is used almost exclusively in reference to physical healing (yet the context of the verse itself would not exclude a spiritual understanding as well).

In giving the Corinthian Church instructions on the proper way to observe the Lord's supper (while correcting their errors), Paul showed how the wrong manner or attitude toward the body and blood of the Lord (symbolically represented by eating the bread and drinking the wine during the Passover memorial service) had resulted in many Church members remaining weak and ill, with some even having died.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

Paul's precise reference and analysis in verse 30 may be difficult to discern. But what is immediately clear is that physical ills do result from spiritual problems. Some commentators feel that the physical sickness and death were a direct result of the Corinthians' sins in profaning the Lord's supper, or were a judgment from God. There is a variation on this theme, however, which could equally apply. This would involve healing—or, more precisely, the absence of it.

To investigate this possibility we should consider two "simultaneous equations" and then solve them together. In the first equation, "the body of the Lord" (vv.27 and 29) which a Christian must discern in order to eat the bread and drink the wine in a worthy manner is the same "body" which Peter (quoting Isaiah) said was wounded so that we could be healed. In the second equation, the profound appreciation of, and personal identification with, the sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which are vital elements of the healing process, are also an important part of the Passover service. What emerges from the two equations is the strong suggestion that it could well have been the lack of physical healing in

the Church, caused by a lack of appreciation for the fact that Jesus was wounded for our healing, which was Paul's point to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:30)—an admonition that should not be lost on the Church of God of any age.

### Healing in the New Testament Church

During Jesus' ministry no one except Jesus Himself had God's Holy Spirit; consequently, no one else was empowered with godly faith. Jesus' healings, therefore, served the important purpose of being the overt physical evidence absolutely essential to stimulate His disciples' own human faith; His healings were necessary for even His closest friends to believe in Him as Savior, and it is unlikely that He would have gained any following at all without these miracles. (The fact that His healings were performed to inspire faith in His disciples is seen by the numerous instances when such miracles were accompanied by comments by Christ on the topic of faith, Mt. 9:22; 17:18-20; Mk. 9:23; Lk. 8:48-50,)

In commissioning His disciples, Jesus told them that they too would "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons" to accompany and corroborate their preaching that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 10:8). As Luke recorded it: "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Lk. 10:8-9; cf. 9:2,11).

Jesus kept His promise to His disciples. After His resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles performed astounding miracles.

And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5:14-16)



The healings Jesus Himself performed were utterly miraculous and spectacular—many in full public view. "And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them" (Mt. 15:30). Likewise, the apostles performed incredible miracles—miracles such as the healing of the congenitally lame man by Peter and John at the gate of the Temple (Acts 3; 1<sup>^</sup>-11), and the healing of the congenitally crippled man by Paul in Lystra (Acts 14:8-11). In both cases, it was the stunning and incredible aspect of the healing—withered limbs instantly regenerated, strengthened and made whole—that gave the apostles the opportunity to preach the gospel boldly and proclaim it loudly before large, hostile crowds.

But as the years went on, it appears that the initial surge of tremendous spiritual power began to wane. In later decades, dedicated Church members are seen sick and dying, and the days of astounding miracles of healing seem to have ended. Paul talks about some in the Church having "the gifts of healing" (1 Cor. 12:9), yet "healers" are mentioned behind apostles, prophets, teachers and workers of miracles in verses 28-30, and verse 10 seems to indicate that those at the higher levels of responsibility in the Church did not necessarily have the gifts of healing.

Was the attenuation of major healing miracles the result of a proportional decline in the faith of the elders and members? The answer appears to center more around God's overall, long-term purpose for His Church. At its inception, there was no New Testament record to read and there was great persecution to endure. Consequently, God poured out His spirit to begin the Church and give its members confidence. But it was not part of God's plan for His Church to grow very large—that was not His purpose in that age—so God apparently withdrew His tremendous power to perform spectacular public healings.

Coming down the centuries to our time, God's Church has many advantages today that were unavailable in the first century. The mass media of radio, television and publishing enable the gospel to be preached to all the world. The complete New Testament gives us, a full account of Jesus' life, teachings and healings; and through God's Spirit, we should be able to study God's Word and develop real spiritual faith without depending on the external crutch of physical evidence through miracles.

As far as healings are concerned, we surely know that God is not pouring out His Spirit to empower His ministers to perform breathtaking miracles as obviously and as supernaturally inspired as those that occurred in the early New Testament Church. (Perhaps God will do so at some future date; there are biblical hints and parallels which seem to suggest this possibility as we move closer to the return of Christ.) Does God's Church today have even the same type and frequency of healings that the later New Testament Church had? It is hard to know for sure.

But what we can know for sure is the awesome spiritual meaning that Jesus' healings have for us today—the confidence that they generate, the faith that they give us. We can know for sure that the same Personality who healed the sick, cleansed the lepers and raised the dead has promised, and has the power, to forgive our sins, cleanse our bodies and spirits, and eventually resurrect us from the dead. This, in reality, is the ultimate miracle; and this, indeed, is the ultimate faith.

Divine Healing, Faith and Physical/Medical Procedures:  
Interrelationships, Applications and Christian Responsibilities

To understand the practical application of healing today, several complex interrelationships (such as between faith and healing, and faith and medical procedures) need to be considered. The following points help project the proper perspective:

1. Physical life is intrinsically temporal.

A human lifespan is only temporary and was so intended from the time of Adam. Whether it be 969 years, seven decades, three months or one day, each physical life will eventually come to an end. The human body was designed to die. It may come by accident; it may be by disease; or perhaps the body will just wear out. But the statistics for it have never dropped below 100 percent.

God could, of course, preserve physical existence to eternity, but He has not chosen to do so. We know of no case where He has maintained physical life indefinitely,

even for the patriarchs and prophets. Yet God has many times chosen to extend physical life temporarily by healing a disease or repairing an injury.

God has healed; He does heal; He will continue to heal as long as there is physical life extant. But the reasons for doing so are always temporal.

## 2. Spiritual life is the hope of the Christian.

Once this physical life ends, healing ceases to be a concern, since the body of the resurrection shall be a spiritual one. Healing, therefore, pertains to this life alone and is a short-term, although important concern. One should never forget that the real hope of all true Christians—both for the healthy and for the sick—is eternal spiritual life through the resurrection and not prolonged physical life through healing.

Furthermore, one's ultimate reward is neither determined nor affected by whether he was or was not healed during his physical lifetime.

The fact that we can know by the written record of God's Word that Jesus Christ performed the most amazing and incredible healings during His ministry, and that those healings manifested God's power through Him, should give us great confidence. It is through our faith in the reality of Jesus' healings that we can be assured that, through this same power, God has promised to forgive us of our sins, cleanse our minds and, ultimately, to resurrect our bodies from the dead.

## 3. Healing is not an indicator of righteousness; nor is it a test of spirituality.

Even the most righteous and most spiritual eventually die of something physical. Healing is an example of God's mercy, a product of God's wisdom. When He chooses to intervene and heal, we should be grateful. When He does not, we should not necessarily assume lack of faith, unrighteousness, and/or insufficient spirituality. And when we die, "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13). Therefore., neither healing nor the lack of it are an indication of one's level of faith or spirituality. In Acts 3:1-8, God healed,

through Peter and John, a man who had no idea that he was about to be healed; he desired money, and was totally shocked at being healed. Surely the healing of this man was not at all indicative of his righteousness or spirituality.

God sometimes heals the new convert and the spiritually immature, while he may withhold it from the mature Christian. And we shall all, no matter how spiritual, eventually die of some physical state which God does not correct and heal. Another situation where healing was not an indicator of righteousness or a test of spirituality was the example of the apostle Paul mentioned earlier. If his thorn in the flesh was physical, he was not healed of this serious affliction.

4. Faith is not the sole criterion for determining whether a person shall be healed.

One main prerequisite God requires for healing is the total confidence and faith that God does indeed exist and can heal us of our illnesses (Mt. 9:28-29). One must not forget that the people whom Jesus healed during His earthly ministry had, for the most part, already heard numerous accounts from far and wide of His miraculous intervention in other people's lives to heal them. It would not, therefore, have required that much effort on their part to believe that Christ could—and, indeed, would—heal them. This means that those whom Jesus healed by no means had to have been spiritual giants possessing great faith—quite possibly it was just the opposite. As Jesus Himself said in another context: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn. 20:29).

But the Bible also shows that other factors, at times known only to God, enter into His decision regarding whether, when, why and how to heal the sick person. God may heal to show mercy (Lk. 17:13), to express love, to encourage the spiritually weak, to reinforce faith, as a witness of the gospel, etc. Furthermore, the object of God's purpose may not always be the sick person himself: God sometimes heals for reasons other than solely to restore someone to health (e.g. as a witness to those who see the sick person healed, etc.)

God is intensely concerned with an individual's mind and heart—attitudes that are always obvious to God though often not apparent to others. In the matter of healing, it

may be one's attitude as much as one's faith that may influence what God will do. "But this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word" (Is. 66:2). Anyone who seeks to be healed to show others his righteousness or favor with God, or who desires vindication of his position, or who craves recognition of his spirituality will be sadly and sorrowfully disappointed.

The New Testament refers to "gifts of healing" (1 Cor. 12:9,30) which apparently differed from the normal function of elders anointing the sick. Only a few had this unusual gift of healing; it was not the possession of everyone. In the Church today, we see no evidence of such a gift having been bestowed on any individual, certainly not as a permanent thing. Perhaps God will give this gift in the future, but He has not done so yet.

Since the Church recognizes these individual circumstances, it vigorously teaches that there is no way of knowing in advance whether any person will be supernaturally healed. Similarly, the Church teaches with equal vigor that its ministry must not attempt to influence the person in any way regarding what type of action he may wish to take for his health other than to recommend that each person seek the most professionally competent specialists available for consultation or procedure. Certainly we can go to medical sources and take advantage of the scientific advances they have to offer, with the full confidence that this positive act on our part in no way interferes with God's ability to heal supernaturally should that prove to be His will.

5. The relationship between healing and faith is complex, necessitating an understanding of the whole Bible and current, practical experienced

The numerous healings of Jesus Christ show the clear, active involvement of the faith of the individual (Mt. 9:22; Mk. 9:23; Lk. 8:48-50). Yet, the man healed in Acts 3 obviously had no faith whatsoever, despite which he was completely healed. Likewise, the slave of the centurion was healed because of the centurion's faith—the slave himself probably did not even realize why he suddenly got better (Mt. 8:5-13).

The Bible shows that there are different "kinds" of faith, or at least different levels of faith. There is a faith which all Christians are required to have for salvation, but this is not necessarily the same kind of faith needed for

healing. Jesus said that if we had enough faith we could literally move mountains (Mt. 17:20). Yet no living Christian that we know of has had such faith. It is impossible to "work up" such faith; in the same way, it is impossible to "work up" the faith involved in healing. Only God can supply this faith. It is His responsibility and, consequently, an actual healing or the lack of such a healing must never be viewed as a straightforward indication of an individual's righteousness, spirituality or favor with God. On the other hand, it is our responsibility to yield to God and His Spirit so that we may grow in this God-given faith. We should beseech God to do what the apostles asked of Jesus in Luke 17:5, "Increase our faith *I*"

The faith that Jesus said was involved in healing seems so simple, yet so difficult, and yet so simple again. Faith is the belief that God shall heal. But our years of experience in the Church, going through our own trials and empathizing with the trials of others, sometimes add enormous complexities to faith. Knowledge itself—and all human knowledge is partial—can sometimes militate against faith. Faith cannot be faked, and with the many demands and multifarious distractions impacting the Christian, faith may just not be there. The examples of faith in the New Testament seem so simple—almost too simple—to us. These people did not have time to develop the faith we think is necessary—they hardly knew Jesus or the apostles, and certainly had little idea what they taught—they just immediately believed and were healed. Maybe there is a lesson here.

6. The lack of faith is not sin, nor is the lack of healing a sin; healing is rather a special benefit from God, which is neither commanded nor required.

Healing is a special benefit from God—a gift from our Father in heaven through Jesus Christ. But healing is not a part of God's spiritual-moral law, and as such is neither commanded nor required by God. Consequently, it cannot be a sin if one is not healed. The fact that one person decides to seek anointing for the healing of a physical condition while another, suffering from the same condition, does not, can in no way be taken to mean that the first person is necessarily righteous or that the second person is necessarily unrighteous. It is just that the individual who asks for anointing is seeking this special benefit from God.

We all, in some manner, lack faith. This is no more an indictment than to say that we are all human. How many have the faith to move mountains? Yet no Christian feels spiritually inferior because he cannot do so. The same lack of

spiritual inferiority should equally apply to the faith required for healing. How many have consistent faith? On the other hand, to say that a person lacks faith is not necessarily to blame him in any way, since faith comes from God. If that individual does not have faith, it may be because God has not given it to him. Can one blame God for not having given someone something that only He can give? Of course, this does not mean that the individual does not have a responsibility; yet the faith required for healing must come as a gift.

If seeking external help in any way indicates a "lack of faith," then such lack of faith is in no way a sin, because it is God's responsibility to give us this special faith, though we certainly have our part in it. (The scripture which states that "for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23) does not refer to a lack of faith as sin. It rather means that when one violates his conscience, his own sense of right and wrong, then that is sin.)

There is sometimes the misconception that if something did not happen as hoped, it was due to lack of faith. As a blanket assumption, this is untrue. What is faith? It is total belief. But even absolute belief in something contrary to God's intention will not bring it about. God may honor faith or belief in something not contrary to His will. Conversely, He will not honor a request contrary to His will, no matter how much faith the requester has (for example, the death of David and Bathsheba's first child). Jesus Christ—our perfect example of faith—requested that the cup of His suffering and death be taken from Him. It was not removed—not because of a lack of faith, but because God had ordained otherwise.

A person can have "absolute faith" when he asks for healing and still be denied it, because God in His wisdom may think it is better for that person not to be healed. Healing is not just a matter of faith—it is also a matter of mercy. God said, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:15, citing Ex. 33:19). Healing is an extension of God's mercy; it is not an absolute promise according to one's faith. Faith usually does—but does not forcibly have to—have something to do with it.

There is no better example of a spirit-filled Christian with great faith in God than the apostle Paul. Yet he had a "thorn in the flesh" which he was apparently never healed

of (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Was the reason for his not being healed any sin on Paul's part? Was there any sin involved at all? Was the physical infirmity itself the result of sin? Was Paul's failure to be healed a sin in itself? Was it symptomatic of a lack of faith which was a sin? We can pretty well answer all of these questions in the negative and be quite confident of this conclusion, not because Paul did not sin, but because he was so open and honest in freely admitting his most personal sins. Paul was so hard on himself in Romans 7, where he exposed his own sin of covetousness and his other human frailties, that we can rest assured that if there had been even a possibility that sin was in any manner connected with his physical infirmity--if some sin on his part might have been the cause of it, or if the lack of healing might have been a sin, or if he might have lacked faith--Paul would surely not have hesitated to fully disclose it. The only possible reason Paul did not discuss sin in the context of his own physical infirmity was that sin was not involved at all

Paul's attitude to his failure to be healed is truly exemplary.

Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:8-10)

There is no question that Paul did not lack faith; faith had no relationship whatsoever to the fact that he was not healed. God simply knew what was best for him. Paul needed this infirmity to keep him "from being too elated by the abundance of revelations" (v.7) given to him (such as being "caught up to the third heaven . . . into Paradise . . . and /hearing/ things that cannot be told, which man may not utter," vv.2-4). Paul accepted God's decision that, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v.9), with magnificent humility and a fiercely loyal desire to now fully appreciate his physical weakness, which God knew was important for his spiritual strength: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v.9). There can be no better example to



follow—no better attitude to have—whenever God, for reasons only He knows, decides to withhold His blessing of healing. What God knew was best for Paul, He may also know to be the best for many other Christians—that our continuing physical weaknesses are efficacious in continuously building our spiritual strength.

7. Faith must not be confused with desires, fears or pressures.

A person's faith—even one's own faith—is difficult if not impossible to assess. It is in no way "godly" or "spiritual" for a person to overestimate his own faith, then make drastic decisions based upon this misjudgment. "Hoping" or "wishing" to be healed is not the same thing as having the special faith that God must give to really be healed. Neglect is not faith, neither is fear of doctors and hospitals.

It is natural—although surely not wise—for humans to delay undergoing even a medical diagnosis to determine the cause, nature or extent of an illness because of fear of what they might learn. Some even confuse this fear of diagnosis—the unwillingness to face the reality of their condition—with faith. Fear and faith are not equal? they are in fact opposites. For some it is a fear of the unknown; for others it is a fear that if they find out something frightening they will not have the faith to face it. But to act based on fear, and convince oneself that it is based on faith, is brutal self-deception which can yield no good result either physically or spiritually.

Similarly, it is strangely simple to confuse faith with stubbornness or pride. Peer pressure can also loom as a powerful force, imposing itself as a surrogate for faith, inhibiting the individual from doing what should be done. Likewise, for some to suffer rather than seek relief can fulfill certain psychological needs. Having a martyr-complex—^ enjoying watching others watching you languish—is far from the simple faith of those Christ healed. Dying in stubbornness or pride, continuing to suffer in order to uphold one's own self-righteousness or self-image is just another manifestation of human nature. Thus, it is possible for a person to neglect medical help because of subconscious factors or vanity, while convincing himself (and/or trying to convince others) that it is because of faith and spirituality.

A Christian must walk in continual faith. This faith is demonstrated in many ways. If God allows a person to die, this may be a demonstration of faith. But, if one can live many long and useful years in God's service through an operation, rather than be debilitated by disease or even die in agony, that cannot be condemned as a lack of faith. To refuse the operation may be only fear, peer pressure, neglect or ignorance--not faith.

It is likely that God would heal more people, if more people had more faith to be healed. One of the biggest factors that blocks a person from receiving more faith is his own erroneous belief that he already has enough faith when he does not. As previously stated, it is not enough to "think" or "hope" that one has the proper faith, or "wish" that he had it. One reason people are not healed is because they do not have the appropriate faith. This does not mean they should pretend to have this faith. That would be disastrous. For a person not to acknowledge his lack of faith in this area would be folly indeed.

God will not heal a person because that person thinks he has faith if he in reality does not. (God may heal him in spite of that fact.) For God to heal people without faith--but who think they have it--would serve to perpetuate their self-deception. Perhaps this is one reason why God does not heal more often. Since God will not give someone something he does not want (i.e. the faith that the person thinks he already has), each must appraise his own faith realistically. But a Christian who is realistic enough to soberly assess his own faith and find it wanting is not a "weak" Christian. He may in fact be quite a strong Christian, who is converted enough to see himself as he really is; such an individual will not bow to stubbornness or yield to pride when his need of external help highlights his physical debilities and spiritual imperfections.

8. Healing and faith are totally private matters between a person and God.

Anointing for sickness is a solemn ceremony. It is an expression of the faith of Jesus Christ and an affirmation of our' faith in Him--the recognition of God's sovereignty over our life and well-being. It is thus a very personal thing between the individual and God, similar to prayer, though the minister is an important part of the process.

No one should take upon himself the role of spiritual judge or "second guesser" over another's actions in this regard. To do so is to usurp that person's God-given right of free moral agency- Therefore, any reasonable request for anointing should be honored, regardless of the nature of the illness or affliction and regardless of whether the person is consulting a physician or of what treatment he may be undergoing.

On the other hand, some people's requests for anointing border on superstition. To anoint for every sniffle or mild ache makes a mockery of divine healing and Christ's suffering. There is an extremely important caution here, however. A minister cannot put himself in the position of a medical diagnostician and refuse to anoint because he regards the person's illness as "minor" or "not life-threatening." What at first may appear to be the most insignificant symptoms can later turn out to have been the early manifestations of a serious illness. More than one person has died of pneumonia which started out as a cold, or of cancer of the colon which in its earlier stages seemed only a minor digestive imbalance. Hence, although the minister himself should preach publicly about the solemnity of anointing and about taking Christ's sacrifice seriously, he should nonetheless respect the judgment of the sick person who feels that he needs anointing.

9. It is neither possible nor profitable to determine why God has or has not healed an individual.

One can seldom say with certainty why a person has or has not been healed. To conclude that one person was healed because of his spiritual uprightness is no more accurate than to conclude that another person was not healed because of his spiritual inadequacy. The Biblical example of Paul and others simply negates such reasoning and renders any such exercise fruitless. Healing may relate to any number of factors—the person himself, his immediate family, his close friends, his wider acquaintances, the minister involved, the timing, the circumstances, etc.—and it is pointless to try to discern why something did or did not happen with respect to healing. The additional uncertainty of not knowing what "the gifts of healing" (1 Cor. 12:9) were and how they worked—and how they may apply today—adds further complexity to our understanding of the application of healing.

Since all must eventually die, it is inevitable that many will suffer from incurable diseases. If the best physical knowledge cannot help and God chooses not to intervene, then "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." If that is the way God allows one to serve, so be it. Perhaps, ultimately, that is the real test of faith—to die confidently in Christ, entrusting to Him the life He gave to do with as He sees fit. Death may in some cases be a greater sign of faith than life and healing. Nevertheless, one should not prejudge his own case by assuming this to be true and neglecting to seek proper medical aid as a consequence. If God's will is for a person to die, it should be in spite of his best efforts to recover and not because of his stubbornness in avoiding professional aid. God chooses who His martyrs will be: we cannot and must not make this decision for ourselves.

It is both offensive and inaccurate to say that one who is not supernaturally healed (or who seeks medical aid) is a "weak" Christian. He may have weak faith (as compared to the amount of faith necessary to be healed, but surely not as compared to the faith of other Christians who may never have been tested in a life-or-death situation), but that does not mean that he is a weak Christian. He may be far more spiritually mature than most in the congregation. Indeed, God may not be healing him because he can take it—he has enough spiritual maturity to endure the trial.

In the final analysis, faith is only one aspect of the Christian life, and it is not even the greatest; this honor is reserved for love (1 Cor. 13:13). "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (v.2). Conversely, a person who is weak in faith but strong in love is a far greater Christian in God's sight.

10. It is entirely within biblical principles and common sense to seek competent medical help and still rely on God for healing at the same time; healing through faith in God and the modern health sciences is not a contradiction or a combination of opposites; indeed, what God can do for man as a special blessing should work together with what man can technologically do for himself.

God has healed; God does heal; God shall heal. There are no limitations on God's ability to heal any and all sickness and bodily defects—supernaturally, miraculously, completely. But does this mean that a Christian has no responsibility to help himself if he becomes ill or injured, other than to trust in God for healing?

Biblical examples and common sense teach us that God is practical and logical, and He expects human beings to do what they can to help themselves. Just as little children depend on their parents, we as Christians must depend on God for certain things. But God also expects us to grow and mature. If we can stand on our own feet, we should. If we can do something for ourselves, we are derelict in our responsibility if we do not. God's Church has taught this for years.

If a person has a badly decayed tooth, he should have it repaired or removed. This in no way usurps God's power of divine healing. If one has a headache, he can take an aspirin. If one has a broken bone or an open wound, he should have it set or sewn as the case may be. These are physical measures which can and should be made use of. They are not an affront to God as our Healer; nor do they contradict faith.

In fact, to ask God to supernaturally do for us what we can naturally do for ourselves may begin to undermine the vital representational analogy between healing and the forgiveness of sin, conversion and the resurrection from the dead (since no human being can ever do any part of the latter). In Matthew 4:5-7, it was Satan who tempted Jesus by setting Him on the pinnacle of the Temple and challenging Him to throw Himself down so that God would save him. Jesus' answer was that "You shall not tempt the Lord your God" (v.7). What is tempting God? Is it trying to entice God into a position where He "must" do something "good" to "save" us? If so, could we ever, however sincerely, be putting ourselves into a position of tempting God, however inadvertently, by asking Him to do for us what we can and should do for ourselves?

Only God can "heal"—if we define "healing" as a miraculous, supernatural removal of an affliction or illness. Physicians are only mortal men and can only work with the laws God designed to function in the human body. Medical science can work to speed, enhance or aid recovery. As such, the roles of God and man do not conflict; in fact, they can complement each other. In the same manner that healing is not a test of righteousness, so also going or not going to a physician is not a test of righteousness. Neither does it show a lack of faith in God's ability to heal nor does it prevent God from performing a miracle.

Faith in God and scientific confidence in man are not in conflict. Faith in God is a matter of the heart between a person and God. It is entirely possible to receive medical help—and even have a positive trust in that technological help—without having this trust or confidence supersede or negate one's faith in God. It is, of course, possible to have no faith in God and an almost superstitious faith in man's scientific knowledge. But, in either case, the technical utilization of modern medical science is not the factor that must decide where one's faith is. Faith is fully determined by the person's attitude in his private relationship with God.

Luke 8:43-48 records the story of "a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any , . ." Note that Jesus in no way upbraided the woman for having gone to the physicians. Furthermore, and even more relevantly, He did not withhold healing from her because of it— even though, as it appears, she came to Him as a last resort. Indeed, Jesus said she did have the faith to be healed (v.48). Thus, this verse serves as an example of one who had gone constantly to physicians and yet did have faith to be healed. Certainly one could not immediately conclude she was weak in faith because she had used the medical services of her time.

There is no reason why the judicious use of physical methods should interfere with either one's faith or the ability and desire of God to heal. Faith says that God can heal; it is not a guarantee that God shall heal in every individual situation. It is surely not a sign of faith to neglect appropriate physical methods which can cure a disease, slow an illness or relieve suffering. It is also not a sign of faith to seek obscure second-class treatment when competent first-class health care is readily available.

The scientific and technological progress of the health sciences has been remarkable, especially over the last few decades, with increasing sophistication and effectiveness of technique, combined with a decreasing incidence of complications and side effects. For such achievements man should give God the credit; for it was God who created the human mind, empowering it with the creative brilliance to constantly attain to new heights of achievement in the physical world.

The Church is not in the health business. Consequently, it is not the Church's responsibility to endorse or condemn any particular treatment or procedure. Each individual has the same responsibility to examine alternative proposals, and seek and evaluate advice from several professional sources before making a decision in a serious health matter.

Faith is demonstrated in various ways. If one can live many long and useful years in God's service through an operation, rather than wasting those years by suffering in agony, how can that be condemned as lack of faith? To have the operation may evidence greater commitment to God, because one believes in the importance of service to His Church. To refuse the operation may only be the unintended neglect of one's Christian responsibility to God and His Work.

James wrote that "faith without works is dead." This applies to all aspects of the Christian life including health maintenance, health care, disease prevention, regular checkups by a qualified doctor, and healing and/or medical procedures in times of illness or injury. One should always consider the long-range implications for oneself and one's family in these areas by seeking experienced professional counsel and by making wise, sound-minded decisions. Christians should avail themselves of the best health care that man can provide and, at the same time, ask God to supernaturally supply what man cannot. This could also include the sick person asking God to bless the skill of the doctor in his diagnosis and treatment (much as God inspired the craftsmen who built the ark of the covenant and the Tabernacle, and, later, the Temple, see Ex. 31:3ff; 35:31; 36:1-2; 1 Kings 7:14).

Faith in God for healing and the sensible, sagacious use of the most modern medical/health procedures do not clash.. They can, indeed, work together in harmony. The human personality is a unified whole composed of physical, mental and spiritual elements, and each one must be functioning as effectively as possible for the whole person to be completely healthy. In recent years, as a matter of interest, there has been increasing recognition among large segments of the medical profession that they should focus their attention as much on the maintenance of good health and the prevention of disease as they have on the treatment of disease. One reflection of this is the increasing employment of the term "health sciences" instead of "medical science." Another reflection of this trend is that many doctors have come to appreciate that

spiritual factors, especially faith and prayer, can play a significant role in the recovery of patients.

Christians should appreciate both the special blessings of healing that God offers to them and the sophisticated techniques that man has developed to diagnose and cure illness. Healing through faith in God and through scientific medicine should, therefore, never be artificially opposed to one another, but should, rather, symbiotically reinforce one another to bring the greatest benefits to human beings.

11. Physical procedures cannot be evaluated based on spiritual criteria; all routine health maintenance, as well as special treatment for illness or injury, should be the most effective and finest available.

It is the responsibility of each Christian to recognize the important distinction between the physical and the spiritual. God's miraculous intervention to heal is spiritual; this healing is God's prerogative. What we do for ourselves is physical, a means of aiding and complementing the natural bodily processes in healing the body. God does expect us to do what we can for ourselves.

No physical procedure is intrinsically more righteous or spiritual than any other, though one may well be more effective and have fewer side effects than another. Surgical interventions, pharmacological prescriptions and other medical procedures (whether diagnostic, preventive or curative) must be evaluated on their own merits and on their own terms.

There should be no hair-splitting between different physical treatments as far as their spirituality is concerned. Such would be contrary to the implications of the Bible, the teachings of the Church, logic and plain common sense. One physical method is not more godly than another; one physical method is not necessarily more in harmony with the Bible than another. Physical healing—of any and every sort—must be distinguished from divine, miraculous, supernatural healing.

Stitching together an open gash in one's arm is just as physical as open-heart surgery to stitch together a hole between one's ventricles--both involve human intervention to aid the body's normal regenerative processes in restoring the cellular tissue. Special diets and supplements to fight



cancer are just as physical as surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. To have a broken bone set is physical; to take an aspirin is physical; to fast for health reasons is physical. Mega-vitamins, rosehip tea, laetrile, wine and oil are all just as physical—and just as non-spiritual— as penicillin, vaccinations, cataract removal and appendectomies. To extract a seriously decayed tooth does not differ in kind from excising a malignant tumor or a diseased appendix—both involve professional competence to remove a damaged part of the body before its continued deterioration causes worse complications, such as the spreading of infection. The efficacy of different physical treatments is evaluated by their results, not by their degree of spirituality. One may be physically preferable—one drug may be more beneficial with fewer side effects than another—but one is surely not spiritually better in God's sight. Therefore, if a person chooses to do something physical about a bodily condition, his concern should not be about which method is more spiritual. Rather, his sole concern should be to find out what is the best method with the fewest side effects.

In evaluating physical procedures in matters of health, the Christian is encouraged to emphasize proper health maintenance and disease prevention; there is minimum expense, little inconvenience and no side effects to a balanced program of health care. The appropriate use of nutrition, for example, should always be part of a health-maintenance and disease-prevention program. Eating natural foods (as much as logically possible) in a balanced diet and avoiding processed sugars and starches, are both much easier and more enjoyable to do than later being forced to undergo medical treatment.

Proper health care should include periodic physical examinations for all Christians and their families by a qualified medical doctor. Care should be taken to select the most able and proficient doctor available as the family physician. He should have a genuine interest and concern about the health of all members of the family. Eminently qualified specialists for particular problems should generally be recommended by the family doctor.

When one seeks professional medical help, he should select the most competent within his means. There are different specialties and different degrees of competency among

individual practitioners just as in any other profession. One is not more "righteous" than another, but one might be more skilled than another.

All this will also help people avoid falling prey to quackery and faddism. If a person recognizes that the best scientific knowledge should be sought, and that this is not a sign of a lack of faith, he will naturally want the best that he can afford for himself and his family. He will be sound-minded in matters of health, not seeking physically "miraculous" or unorthodox "cures" under the false assumption that they are somehow more righteous than the procedures of a knowledgeable specialist, and he will save both his money and his health in the process.

12. Christians must never judge one another, nor compare themselves among themselves; Christians should rather encourage one another, mutually bearing their burdens.

Far worse than any personal spiritual slips or lapses in faith is the commonplace gossip of judging fellow members of the congregation. Such innuendo and rumor is vicious and terribly debilitating to Christian character. Paul admonished the Roman Church, "let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Rom. 14:13). In writing to the Corinthian Church, Paul sternly rebuked them for their attitude of making internal comparisons; "when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12).

Surely these principles apply to all facets of Christian life, but never with more direct impact than in matters of health and healing. It is carnal, but nonetheless common, for many individuals to consider their own particular approach to physical health and healing as the best or the most spiritual. All too often their desire to share this "special" knowledge with brethren ends up in anything from a campaign to a crusade.

While the laws of the land and the principles of God's Church give to everyone the full freedom to make their own decisions in such deeply personal matters, basic human decency and comity dictate that one should never try to impose his will on others. Brethren should be more than willing to help each other by exchanging ideas and information

in matters of health and healing. But extreme care should be taken not to allow such conversation to subtly degenerate into even mild coercion through peer pressure. A person should be as respectful of another person's approach as he would want that other person to be of his (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 19:19; 22:39; Lk. 10:27). The worst thing we can do as Christians is to offend our brothers in any way, especially "little ones" or those who are weak in the faith (Mt. 18.:6; Rom. 14). On the other hand, to encourage and strengthen our brothers and sisters in the Church, bearing one another's burdens willingly and cheerfully, is the essence of true Christianity.

### Ministerial Responsibility

What is the minister's role in matters of health and healing? A minister of God is a professional in spiritual understanding; he should be ready to fully explain the purpose of healing—what it is and what it represents—to all who desire to know. Furthermore, the minister is the expert in counseling his people and serving his congregation. But he is not necessarily, by virtue of ordination, a medical or nutritional expert. Consequently, he should faithfully teach what the Bible says about health and healing, and he should also encourage his people to seek the best professional advice available when needed.

The minister must be truly neutral on medical matters. Subtle differences can be dangerous. He cannot tell one person that he "should" take vitamins, get his broken bone set or have a decayed tooth extracted, if he will then tell another person that, "It's up to you," whether to take antibiotic drugs, get an internal injury repaired or have a diseased appendix removed. The phrase, "It is not wrong," can also convey a negative implication, suggesting, in effect, that, "Although it is not wrong, it is spiritually not the best." Such would subtly assign fallacious levels of righteousness to physical procedures when all are in fact the same in God's sight.

The minister is the spiritual leader of his congregation and must take great care not to abuse this position of spiritual power, trust and respect. He must be as aware of his physical limitations as he is of his spiritual responsibilities. The minister must operate on the highest plateau;

his realm is the spiritual, and this is where he must give his counsel and advice. Along these lines, one of his more important duties is to be sure that members of his church are not judging each other and are not comparing themselves among themselves with respect to health procedures and healing. He can accomplish this most effectively by emphasizing God's positive instructions on these matters and following up His teachings with encouragement and exhortation.

### Summary

God can and does heal in ways and manners and at times and for reasons that He determines for Himself. As such, divine healing is totally beyond the scope of medical science; therefore, doing what we can in seeking and utilizing the most competent professional assistance in times of illness or injury will not inhibit God from healing us, but can contribute to the efficacious restoration of full health.

Divine healing is a miraculous intervention by the Creator of the universe in our lives; it is a special blessing from God given according to His mercy and our faith, and represents God's power through Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, cleanse our minds and, ultimately, establish the Kingdom of God on earth and resurrect our bodies from the dead.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **KINGDOM OF GOD**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The Kingdom of God is the Family of God ruling as the government of God. It is a future world-ruling government to be set up on earth by Christ at His return, with Jesus as King and the resurrected spirit-composed saints in positions of co-rulership with Him. The Kingdom of God—referred to as a "mystery" in the New Testament—was first preached and explained by Christ, then by His Church; it shall be established on earth for a thousand years following Christ's return; and shall be completely fulfilled when new Jerusalem and God the Father come down out of heaven to dwell on the new earth.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The Kingdom of God is, in its most narrow sense, the immediate Family of God, composed now of only two persons (the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ). In a more general sense, it includes every being and everything which is under God's sovereignty, governmental control and influence. Within this definition, the entire universe can be considered under God's sovereignty and hence part of His empirical Kingdom. But in a prophetic sense, the meaning of God's Kingdom is much more specific. It is the world-ruling government of God to be set up on earth at Jesus Christ's return. Christ, together with the resurrected saints, shall rule over all nations and peoples. Even more specifically, the strictly spiritual Kingdom of God shall comprise only the spiritual members of this world government—the born-again, spirit-composed sons of God who rule with Christ as members of His Family over the physical earth during the thousand-year period and eventually over the entire universe. This spiritual Kingdom of God is the goal of all true Christians.

The story of the Bible, in a very real sense, is the record of God's working with man so that he might learn to understand and obey and, as a result, qualify to enter God's Kingdom and Family. The Old Testament prophets spoke at great length concerning that Kingdom (Is. 2:11; Mic. 4; Zech. 14).

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Is. 2:2-4)

Likewise, the patriarchs envisioned it and waited for it as "strangers and pilgrims" (Heb. 11:13) on this earth, since they knew God's government would replace man's. They sought this Kingdom just as many man might seek a land-country or homeland-of promise (Heb. 11:14-15).

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb. 11:13-16)

Jesus Christ was a member of God's Family, of the God-head, and hence of God's Kingdom, from eternity. But He divested Himself of His Godhood and rulership to become human, in order that He might announce the coming Kingdom of God and qualify as its chief executive officer, as both King and Lord. Jesus-as the primary messenger of the coming Kingdom and the heir to its throne-was in a sense the personification and embodiment of that Kingdom on earth during His physical lifetime and ministry. This is why He stated, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). The Kingdom of God was indeed "at hand" because Jesus Christ, as its King and Lord, was right there. Jesus, in fact, spelled this out when He told some that His being among them was equal to the Kingdom being in their midst. "Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, Lo, here it is! or There' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you'" (Lk. 17:20-21) .

The message of "good news" or gospel which Jesus brought to this world has, as its focal point, the announcement of the coming Kingdom of God-a description of how it shall be established on earth and the explanation of how mankind might enter it as sons of God. Christ through His death and resurrection became the "firstborn" member of this prophetic spiritual Kingdom.

Christians who follow in the footsteps of His life will likewise follow in the reality of His resurrection. They shall be raised from death to rule with Him in His Kingdom. Through this process God shall increase or build His Divine Family and spiritual Kingdom from the present two members to multiple billions (and perhaps, ultimately, even more.)

In one sense, those begotten of God's Spirit are part of the Kingdom of God already, since they actually have the essence of that Kingdom, God's Holy Spirit, dwelling within them. Furthermore, Christians today, like Jesus during His physical human life, are representatives of that Kingdom since they, like Jesus, shall be kings and priests. Paul wrote that God "has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13), indicating that Christians are already considered part of God's Kingdom. Obviously, no human being can really be a part of God's Kingdom since "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:50); this must wait until the resurrection when "the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality" (v.54). Paul is thus just reiterating what Jesus Himself had told Nicodemus.

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (Jn. 3:3-7)

Much confusion has arisen about the Kingdom of God because of human reluctance to take the term "kingdom" literally. The prophet Daniel was very clear in his statements to Nebuchadnezzar that the Kingdom which God would eventually set up would be an actual kingdom on earth in the same sense as the previously world-ruling kingdoms had been. "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).



Scripture reveals that God's Kingdom on earth is indeed to be a kingdom in every sense—having territory, laws, subjects and rulers. At Christ's return the saints shall be changed from physical flesh or be resurrected from the dead to spirit bodies.

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. (I Thess. 4:13-17)

The resurrected saints shall sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21), and rule under Christ on earth with power over the physical nations. ". . . and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth" (Rev. 5:10). "He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26).

In another sense, God's Kingdom shall have two parts: the ruling body of spirit beings and the physical nations under that government and control. This combined physical-spiritual Kingdom shall replace man's governments. It shall conform to God's laws and commands and over a period of time introduce and establish His way of life in every nation for every person. The entire fabric of society shall be eventually changed and reformed to comply with the precepts and concepts of God Almighty. It shall be a government under which all human beings can lead a happy, healthy, prosperous life. All persons alive at that time shall have an opportunity to be saved and to have God's Spirit living in them. God shall make a new covenant with His people through which he shall change mankind's very nature by writing His law in man's heart.

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I

made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jer. 31:31-34)

In God's Kingdom warfare shall finally be eradicated and the implements of war shall be turned into farm tools because "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Is. 11:9).

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it, and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Mic. 4:1-4)

Christ shall judge with "righteousness" and "decide with equity for the meek of the earth"—indeed the whole earth shall be dramatically altered by the rulership of Jesus Christ—even the nature of wild animals shall be changed.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel

and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The sucking child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious. (Is. 11:1-10)

Food and drink shall be in abundant supply (Is. 25:6) , the lame shall walk, and the nations who were previously staunch enemies shall live at peace. Israel, Egypt and Assyria shall even set the example of peace and godly harmony for others to follow (Is. 19:23-25). Throughout this time, many humans shall be qualifying to enter God's spiritual Kingdom and Family. Using Israel as the example, God's spiritual laws for worshipping Him shall be taught to, and followed by, all nations. "From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord" (Is. 66:23).

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to - keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the Lord will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. (Zech. 14:16-19)

Biblical revelation has very little description of daily life during the thousand-year period. Although Micah's description seems to assign every man to sit under his own vine and his own fig tree (Mic. 4:4), we should not therefore conclude that the only food available will be grapes and figs. Likewise, we should not conclude that the Kingdom of God will be a primitive, wholly agrarian society devoid of education, arts and sciences. Surely Micah's symbol should be understood as showing human beings to be both free and fully at peace (though it may be highly likely that the larger proportion of people shall be involved in agriculture).

Based on our knowledge of God, who is the Creator of the human mind, the Kingdom of God shall employ high technology, in its most sophisticated expression, in every sphere of that society—including the areas of manufacturing, energy, transportation, communication, information-processing, architecture, city-planning, etc. Yet this technology, under God's direction, will not produce the debilitating by-products characteristic of today's world—energy will be clean and inexhaustible; waste products will be re-cycled; cities will be safe and sane; the ecology will be respected and the environment protected. Growth will not be wildly uncontrolled and encouraged for its own sake, but rather organized and ordered in accord with God's master plan for the entire earth.

Increasing levels of scientific knowledge, technological application and consumer consumption shall, no doubt, take place. Yet the fundamental spiritual values of life shall always predominate. Growth shall never eclipse the importance of individual human beings and human families. Indeed, more people will probably find their occupations in or near the home environment. Education at all levels and in all areas shall be a primary activity for all people.

The Millennium shall be a time of the greatest advances in every field of human creativity, fields such as the arts and sciences. The human mind shall be freed from the inhibitions of evil--no longer shall warfare and competition dominate the enormous developmental time, energy and financial resources of countries and individuals. All efforts shall be devoted to the peaceful edification of society. The most artistic and dynamic works of human history--the most magnificent musical compositions and performances, the most beautiful paintings, the most expressive literature, etc.--shall be created under God's laws.

There shall be great personal freedoms epitomized in the freedom to live in peace and happiness under God's perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25). God's Kingdom, however, shall not be a "hocus-pocus" side-show of magical tricks and artful inventions by spirit beings. That would eliminate part of the purpose of man's physical life; it would take away an essential element in human initiative and growth. Man must continue to utilize his own creativity; but now guided by God's laws as administered by God's Family, this human creativity will be greatly facilitated and properly focused toward producing the best for all mankind.

Although the administration of the Kingdom of God shall enforce a uniform law for all nations and peoples, and there are indications that there shall be a universal language (Zeph. 3:9), this does not mean that cultural differences between people shall be eliminated. On the contrary, the diverse and unique personality, culture, music, art, dress and habits of each nation shall be preserved and encouraged. God's laws are universal in scope and shall be applied to, and shall strengthen, all peoples in all cultures in all environments. Travel and cultural exchange shall exist, with the primary intent--at least initially--of teaching all nations to follow the example of God's people, Israel. To accomplish this, all nations shall send representatives to Israel to learn of God's ways and laws (Is. 66:18-21,23; Zech. 14:16-19), and Israel shall send teachers to all countries to help them apply these new concepts and put them into practice in their daily lives.

All through the thousand-year rule of Christ, God shall continue to add to the number of those eventually to be in His Kingdom. At the end of the Millennium all who have ever lived and died without having a full, first chance for salvation shall be resurrected as physical beings to live in God's perfect society (Rev. 20:12). Those who qualify for salvation shall be inducted into God's spiritual Kingdom while those of this and previous eras who have rejected God's way shall burn in the lake of fire. Immediately thereafter, the physical aspect of God's Kingdom on earth shall disappear and be entirely replaced by the spiritual Kingdom whose population shall have increased into the billions by this time. Thus, we find God's Kingdom expanding in steps and growing dramatically from only two Beings to an innumerable multitude through the process begun and made possible by and through Jesus Christ and His resurrection.

Ultimately, following the thousand-year rule of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment, God shall replace the old earth with a "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). This reformation of heaven and earth is part of the "restitution of all things" spoken of by Peter (Acts 3:21). The Father shall come to this earth to rule with Christ who shall then be second-in-command at His Father's side (1 Cor. 15:27-28), and God's entire Family shall rule the entire universe. (Christ shall deliver the Kingdom to His Father, 1 Cor. 15:24.)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the

water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. (Rev. 21:1-7)

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. (Rev. 21:22-26)

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign forever and ever. (Rev. 22:1-5)

Revelation 21 and 22 are surely a complex amalgam of literal description, awesome imagery and representative symbolism. Yet with all of this, the Bible only gives us a hint of what God shall do after His plan for mankind has been completed and He has added so dramatically to expand His Family and Kingdom. But indications are that God shall in one way or another continue to expand His Family forever.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end . . . (Is. 9:6-7)

The scope of God's Family shall literally be "all things"—that includes the whole universe. "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in

subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him" (Heb. 2:8).

The true incredible majesty of God's Kingdom--the fact that man is to become part of God's Family and rule the entire universe--is called a mystery in the New Testament. Jesus called it the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 13:11, and "the mystery of the kingdom of God" in Mark 4:11. This mystery includes several concepts "which /have been/ kept secret since the world began" (Rom. 16:25 and "hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints" (Col. 1:26)--for example, the opportunity for Gentiles to participate in the Kingdom of God (Rom. 11:25) and become fellow heirs of the promise of Christ (Eph. 3:6); the uniting of all things in heaven and earth in Christ according to God's plan and purpose (Eph. 1:9); the relationship of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). But the most important aspect of the mystery of the Kingdom of God is the fact that man can literally become God (1 Cor. 15:51ff). This mystery, "which is Christ in you, is the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27) , is ordained for "our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:7) and shall be fulfilled at the resurrection when the seventh trumpet sounds (Rev. 10:7).

The Bible states that the purpose of human life--the ultimate goal for all human beings--is to eventually be born into the God Family, to eventually become equal with the Creator of the universe. This remarkable fact is surprisingly easy to prove. There is no difficult exegesis involved. In one sense, all that is required is a four-step process:

1) The Creator of the universe is the One who became Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:3,10; Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:2).

2) Jesus Christ is equal with God (Jn. 5:18; Phil. 2:6).

3) We are joint-heirs with Christ, and as a sure result, we shall all be glorified together with Him (Rom. 8:17).

4) Whatever glory God the Father has given Christ-- the position of Creator--Christ shall eventually give to us (Jn. 17:11 and 22). In other words, every converted individual shall eventually enjoy the same relationship to Christ-- God the Creator--as Christ presently enjoys with God the Father.

In another sense, all that is required is a word-byword reading--without interpretation--of Genesis 1:26. Here God succinctly gives the purpose of human life: Whereas animals reproduce after the animal kind, man reproduces after the God kind! Or, more properly phrased, human beings are the instruments through which God is reproducing Himself.



Human beings shall always retain their individually distinct minds—they shall become individual Personalities in the Father's God Family. Man shall do what God does. Man will feel, act, enjoy and experience at precisely the same presently incomprehensible level of awareness at which God feels, acts, enjoys and experiences. And man shall not lose his unique awareness and his individual personality. Man will not be diffused into the "Cosmic Consciousness," man will not be absorbed by the "Infinite Intelligence," and man will not be swallowed up by "Universal Love."

As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true: The members of God's Family in tomorrow's world shall be more distinct from one another than members of the human family are distinct from one another in today's world. All shall have their own individually specific memories, abilities, personality traits, jobs, responsibilities, preferences and ideas. But there won't be any competition or conflict. Because the old culprit—self-centered human nature—shall have long since been eliminated.

When mankind is promised to be made "equal with God," that of course means that individual human beings shall eventually become qualitatively equal with God—and obviously does not mean that individual human beings shall eventually become quantitatively equal with either God the Father or Jesus Christ. Being "equal with God" only means that we shall be in the same God Family as the Father and Christ are in—and has nothing to do with an equality of power, authority, intelligence, etc., within the Family.

In other words, those people who shall be resurrected or changed "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:52), shall share the exact qualities of life which today are only possessed by God the Father and Jesus Christ.

For example, one of God's qualities is that He has inherent life—He generates eternal life intrinsically within Himself. Because God is life. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (Jn. 5:26). Consequently, since the two original Beings in the God Family created all mankind to grow to become qualitatively like themselves, when individual human beings are changed into new, individual God-Beings, each of them shall generate eternal life intrinsically within himself (Jn. 3:16,36; 4:14; 6:47; 7:38; 10:28; 17:2, etc.).

Every individual person has been created to grow toward Divine Sonship (Rom. 8:1-15)—to become a literal Son of God—a Son who is in every way qualitatively equal to his Father, yet a Son who is always in thankful and gracious submission to his Creator Father.

But quantitatively, man shall never equal God the Creator, just as surely as God the Creator (Jesus Christ) shall Himself never quantitatively equal God the Father (Jn. 14:28).

These two original Beings in the God Family shall always remain in overall command. Their absolute authority will never be questioned—although they will delight in sharing progressively more of their responsibilities with their offspring as the God Family continues to expand throughout space and time.

Perhaps an analogy will help in more fully comprehending the wonders of God's magnificent purpose—and the majesty of the incredible human potential.

Picture the model of a large family corporation. The Rothschilds of Europe are one example. The "patriarchal" father founded the company from nothing many years ago. He labored long by himself to build the business. When he begot sons, he desired to prepare them for the time when they should come into his organization. He nurtured them and he trained them. And so, after receiving all the proper education and experience, his sons matured into able, dedicated men. Their father now took great pleasure in turning over much administrative responsibility and governing authority to his sons. Each son was placed in charge of one major division—in addition to occupying a seat on the board of directors. As a direct result, the business was able to expand enormously in many directions at once. The father, of course, still presided over and ran the whole operation—yet it was the collective strength of his sons which made the family corporation grow great. The sons, of course, enjoyed the same quality of life as did their father—intellectually and financially—but the father would always remain somewhat richer in all areas. The sons counseled and advised their father on all decisions—but the father always remained the boss. His word would always be final. Everybody thoroughly loved his work—and his life. A family atmosphere prevailed. And when each son would have his own sons, the ruling family would geometrically increase. And the family corporation would continue to grow.

So it shall be when human beings become Sons in the eternally ruling God Family.

After being nurtured and trained in this physical life, after receiving all the proper education and experience, spirit-born human beings shall be able to assume the positions of enormous responsibility and authority which Almighty God will take great pleasure in sharing. At that time, each individual Son shall have precisely the same relationship with God the Father in administering the entire universe as human sons have with their physical father today when they help administer a large family corporation. And in the very same analogous manner, spirit-filled converted human beings, as Sons of God, shall enjoy the same quality of life that God the Father enjoys.

Furthermore, as strange as it sounds, we will counsel and advise our Creator Father--we will have suggestions and opinions which will actually help God the Father administer all reality, suggestions and opinions which will be original and unique.

Life shall be scintillating. Eternity could never get boring: "In thy /God's7presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:11). And the God Family shall forever expand beyond all the bounds which our restricted human imaginations have erected, into the unfathomable reaches of infinite space and eternal time with magnificent majesty and awesome activity.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **THE CHURCH OF GOD**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

The Church is the spiritual body of Christ, a group of persons called out by God and impregnated with His Holy Spirit. As a spiritual body, the Church is made up of baptized, spirit-led individuals who are scattered around the world. As a physical, external organization, the Church has meeting places in many areas worldwide where members and non-members alike, as well as children and guests, meet in harmony to worship God and to learn of His Way under the guidance of an ordained minister as their spiritual elder and leader. The main commission of the Church is to preach the gospel as a witness to the world and to baptize and spiritually nurture those whom God has called.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

While God at times has dealt with particular human beings on an individual basis, He has normally worked through the congregation of Israel; in New Testament times this became "spiritual Israel" or the Church. The Greek word for "church" (ekklesia) is a common noun meaning "group," "crowd" or "assembly." It is used collectively of the group of persons with whom God is dealing and in whom dwells God's Holy Spirit.

The New Testament Church was originated and developed through Jesus Christ and the preaching of His twelve disciples who were later called apostles. The Church dates its origin from the first Pentecost following Christ's ascension as explained in Acts 2. Here Luke records the assembling together of Christ's disciples, the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit upon them, and the consequent conversion of 3,000 who believed in the gospel and person of Jesus Christ. From this point on, "the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

A number of metaphors or analogies are used by the Bible to clarify the organization of the Church and to explain the place of the members within it. 1 Corinthians 12 describes God's Church as a unified organism with the various members depicted as various parts of the body with various responsibilities, administrations and duties. Each member has an important contribution to the overall well-being of the whole body; each has his own unique part in enabling the whole body of the Church to accomplish its ultimate objectives. The Church is also referred to as a spiritual building (1 Cor. 3:9-17) and as a family--the members being spiritually related one to another (Eph. 3:15). They are called the siblings of Christ (Rom. 8:29) who, as their elder brother, leads them and directs them in their way (Heb. 2:10).

The name most often used by the Bible to refer to God's Church is "the Church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:5; etc.). In accordance with this biblical example, we are named the "Church of God"--adding the description "Worldwide" to form our official corporate name, "Worldwide Church of God," in order to differentiate ourselves legally from other groups who call themselves "Church

of God."\* Our name also delineates the worldwide scope of this Church.

The Church is also pictured as Christ's bride. The members live in a state of expectation and preparation for the return of the divine bridegroom (Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 21:9). The bride is striving to prepare herself to be acceptable to Christ by the process of spiritual growth, in order to become perfect and to measure up to the full stature of the bridegroom, Christ.

Becoming a part of the Church of God is not an incidental matter. A person is first called of God (Jn. 6:44), given an invitation as it were. Before accepting, Jesus said a person should "count the cost" (Lk. 14:28), because the Christian life is often difficult. When a person accepts this calling, he must repent of his past sins and go through the ordinance of baptism by immersion. This symbolizes the washing away of all his past sins. Then, with the laying on of hands by the ministry, the person receives the begetting of the Holy Spirit. His covenant with God is now signed and sealed. At this point a person becomes a full-fledged member of the Church of God. He becomes a Christian, a "saint," a begotten child of God reserved for the resurrection.

Members of the Church are exhorted to become a cohesive family unit. Judging each other (Rom. 14:13), making spiritual comparisons among themselves (2 Cor. 10:12), forming cliques, favoring one minister over another (1 Cor. 1:11-13), gossiping, etc. are all divisive and counterproductive of collective goals. What Christians should strive for is working together to further the preaching of the gospel, serving the poor, helping weak brethren, encouraging the dejected, visiting the sick, aiding the elderly, bearing each other's burdens; these are the fundamentals of Christianity and produce a strengthened church.

\* In our earlier years, we were known as the "Radio" Church of God because of the radio broadcast through which the Church was best known. The name was changed to "Worldwide" Church of God in 1968 for the reasons mentioned above.

The Church constitutes the body of Christ, a spiritual entity (Col. 2:19). As such, "the Church" is not merely a building, or even strictly speaking a physical organization of persons who have "joined" the Church by having their names placed on a computer listing. It is rather that group of persons in whom dwells God's Holy Spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Likewise, Romans 8:9 states that "if any men have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Although any person in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells is by definition a member of God's Church, it is nevertheless erroneous to assume that any and all nominal Christians are actually part of God's true Church. The Bible also maintains that: "There is one body and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism . . ." (Eph. 4:4-5). Likewise, Paul adds in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 that Christ's Body—the Church—is not to be divided into schismatic or opposing groups. Thus it logically follows that the main body of true spirit-filled Christians will comprise one main church organization through whom God is dealing to preach His gospel as a witness to the world (Mt. 24:14).

In this context, the Worldwide Church of God believes itself to be God's true church organization. As stated above, by strict biblical definition everyone with God's Holy Spirit dwelling in him is a member of God's Church, regardless of whether that person is on the membership rolls of any particular church or attends services or even has any formal allegiance. Nonetheless, we believe that God is dealing with mankind through one main body of called-out, converted individuals, which is His Church, and not through numerous contradicting and opposing bodies. The Worldwide Church of God claims to be that main body of true Christians, and for this sincere belief we make no apologies. (Indeed most churches believe similarly to a greater or lesser degree.)

The Worldwide Church of God, however, does not consider itself the sole repository of God's Spirit. It is not for us to determine—nor is it any man's prerogative to judge—whether this or that person outside church jurisdiction has or has not been truly converted and has or has not received God's Holy Spirit. (The obvious exception is when a sincere individual comes to an ordained minister of God for spiritual counsel.) Nevertheless, the Church would hardly have any reason for existence if it did not consider that it had a

unique calling from God. Granted, some of its basic beliefs correspond broadly with those of other Christian churches; yet it does have certain fundamental doctrines by which it differs considerably from all others. But perhaps the most important difference is its approach:

The Worldwide Church of God endeavors to pattern itself after the New Testament church in a way without parallel in modern Christianity. This does not mean there exists an exact correspondence, naturally, since twenty centuries of environmental and cultural changes necessitate some differences in perspective and application.

Yet the attempts of the Worldwide Church of God to follow the examples of Jesus and the early church has sometimes earned it the label "Jewish." This we consider quite complimentary and appreciate for several reasons, primarily because it corroborates our claim to be following the teachings and practices of the Apostolic Church. In reality the Worldwide Church of God does appear Jewish-Christian to modern observers simply because traditional Christianity has long since departed from the doctrines, customs and practices of the original apostles which were indeed "Jewish." First century historians who specialize in early Christianity would recognize that we are the nearest modern counterpart of the earliest segment of what they call Jewish-Christianity, the segment associated with the names of Peter and James and others of the original apostles. For this we make no apologies; after all, the early church itself was looked upon as an upstart, egotistical sect in its own time just as some have considered us to be.

One area where the Worldwide Church of God has been accused of deviating from the early New Testament Church ironically demonstrates just the reverse. The claim is sometimes made that while the early church preached the doctrine of grace through Christ, the Worldwide Church of God preaches the doctrine of obedience to the Law of God. Though often distorted—e.g. the Church does not preach that salvation can be earned (see the appropriate doctrinal statements in this systematic theology)—there is an element of truth here, and a significant element at that. To understand the critical parallelism, it is necessary to first compare the religious environments of first century Judaism in which the early church began with twentieth century Christianity in which the Worldwide Church of God



began. Judaism of the first century was extremely strict by modern standards; its teachings were well-known and stressed the enormous importance of keeping not only God's law but numerous additions to that law as well. In this environment, it would have been ludicrous for the early apostles to emphasize the need to keep God's Sabbath, for example (see Sabbath). They stressed what was new and revolutionary—that salvation was a free gift and could not be earned, that Christ's death paid the penalty for sin, that forgiveness and grace was available through Christ, that Christ was resurrected, etc. Today, the religious environment is almost diametrically the reverse, necessitating a change in the emphasis of doctrinal teaching in order to produce the same overall result. The prevalent Christian message for centuries has been about the person of Christ, His shed blood, grace, salvation, etc. to the exclusion of the importance of keeping God's law which Jesus and the apostles knew so well. Consequently, owing to opposing religious situations and circumstances, in order for the Worldwide Church of God to clearly present to the world precisely the same overall concept of God's total revelation as did the early New Testament church, it is essential that more emphasis be put on keeping God's law. What we preach and practice today is, in the final result, as close as possible to what the apostolic church preached and practiced. Whatever differences there may be only reflect either cultural disparities and/or shifts in stress or accent needed to generate the desired doctrinal identity.

Another demonstration of God's Church is its fidelity to the Word of God. While recognizing that it has developed a certain body of traditional beliefs, interpretations, and practices, the Worldwide Church of God is unique in its willingness to abandon tradition when it becomes convinced that such is out of harmony with the Bible. The biblical teachings rather than church tradition are considered the absolute standard of right and wrong. Many other churches make this claim as well. However, our own history over the past decades has backed up the claim with decisive action. When certain understandings and beliefs were examined and found to be incorrect or lacking, they were changed or modified. This fact has produced some astonishment in certain students of religious history because churches as a rule are quite reluctant to go against established tradition and usually greatly resist any movement for change, no matter how much they may also claim to follow the Bible as their ultimate authority.

The Worldwide Church of God is administratively organized in accordance with general biblical guidelines and in a manner viable in this 20th century society. The head of the Church is Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), who leads and inspires the Church and its leadership through His Holy Spirit. Under Christ in authority are the ministers, theologians, and Church executives who fulfill religious and administrative responsibilities respectively in accord with such scriptures as 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 and Ephesians 4:11-13. The government of the Church is formed in accordance with biblical examples and principles so that responsibility and commensurate authority comes from the Pastor General of the Church through the ministerial structure to the entire membership. The administration of the Church is strongly centralized in order to focus as much of the Church's collective resources on its primary commission--preaching the gospel to all the world. While the Church maintains its central headquarters in Pasadena, California, it is international in scope with offices and churches around the world. Local congregations meet for weekly Sabbath services and are led by a resident pastor and ordained minister of the Worldwide Church of God for their area. These ministers are employed directly by the central organization of the Church and are responsible to it.

Throughout biblical history, God's Church has had a relatively unified basic commission--that of carrying God's message to those who have yet to hear and accept it. Two scriptures which outline this commission are Matthew 24:14 and Matthew 28:19-20: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; . . . . Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . ." (vv. 19-20).

This message may at times be delivered through speaking, writing, by one's very life or any combination of these and other possible means. But regardless of the means, to preach the gospel to the world is the express purpose, goal, commission and very reason for being of the Church. Consequently, the central thrust of the leadership of God's Church today is towards preaching the gospel which is referred to both as an "announcement" and as a "witness and warning." The membership realizes that the purpose of the Church is for the preaching of the message and not merely for its own spiritual sustenance. The membership is wholeheartedly and enthusiastically behind this effort; indeed they recognize that the purpose for their own calling now is to help do the Work of God in addition to growing in their own Christian development.

Although the Church is described as a comparatively small group or flock (Lk. 12:32; Mt. 7:14), Christ nonetheless assigns it an awesome task to fulfill. The members are to be worthy ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)—i.e. effective representatives of the godly way of life—and proclaim to the world God's plan for mankind. They are required to let their "manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27), i.e. they should be a positive example of Christianity in presenting the gospel to the world.

The Church recognizes that its local congregations are a powerful means by which the gospel may be preached both through the example set by the membership of true Christianity and through the effect that the local congregation should have on the community it serves.

The objectives of the local congregation include more than just the spiritual development of its members. Every congregation supports the work of preaching the gospel worldwide. Every congregation also serves as a nucleus for new converts. It also fosters educational programs to help all from the very young to the very elderly to grow in the knowledge of Christ.

But "pure religion" involves more than preaching; it is a way of life exemplified by the biblical teachings of "love of God" and "love your neighbor as yourself." The local congregations of the Worldwide Church of God endeavor to bear the burdens of the needy and be a light to their communities through service to their fellow man and by the example of their personal lives (Jas. 1:27).

Since the first qualification for being able to help others is for the individual himself to be a living success, the Church actively seeks to develop the potential of each member through nationwide programs for its adults and its youth. These programs are designed to aid each individual in sustained, personal growth and development so that all might better reflect God's way of life to those around them.

But personal development is not satisfying unless it can be channeled in a productive and creative way. Jesus exhorted His disciples to come to the aid of those in need (Mt. 25:34-36). Such humanitarian activities are the highest expression of love for God and one's fellow man (v.45). Therefore, the Worldwide Church of God recognizes this God-enjoined responsibility and strongly encourages each local congregation "as we therefore have

opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). And though the Church does not promote a lay-ministry concept, it is firmly believed that each member can be a powerful witness for Christ by living a truly exemplary life of service and growth (1 Pet. 2:9-17).

Members of the Worldwide Church of God are encouraged through weekly Sabbath services, periodic Bible studies and other religious and social events, to learn the true qualities of Christianity that are expressed in love for God and love for neighbor. This love for one's neighbor means that a true Christian will help his fellow man both in and out of the Church in every reasonable way. A true Christian will set an example of hard work on his job, during recreation and in all aspects of daily life. His example of leading a godly life should positively influence those around him and serve as his personal and individual witness of the truth of the gospel of Christ. Historically, the example of the membership of God's Church in the community has had a powerful effect on those with whom they came into contact.

Likewise, as a group, the combined membership of a local congregation--led by its minister--may, as the opportunity arises, serve its local community during disaster or time of special need. Once again, the positive Christian example of such a local congregation in the community will be a great testimony to the proper principles of God. Thus the working nucleus of the Church of God, letting its "light so shine before men" (Mt. 5:16), is the local congregation.

As individuals, we should have personal contact with God daily, but the Bible also reveals there are times to meet together in assembly to worship God. In these assemblies Christians meet together to actively worship God (Ps. 100: 1-5; 135:1-5), to be instructed from God's Word (Rom. 10:13-17) and to fellowship not only with other members of like belief, but also with God and Christ (1 Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9).

Members of God's Church are therefore exhorted to attend the religious activities of the Church. These are not ends in themselves but directives of God, designed to spiritually strengthen the individuals and the local congregation as a whole so that the light of their Christianity might burn more brightly. This policy is in accordance with the command of God that Christians should not neglect to meet together (Heb. 10:25). This scripture is actually a warning from Paul to Christians "not to forsake the assembling

of ourselves together as the manner of some is" (Heb. 10:25). This warning was made in the realization that daily cares can distract us from God and His plans for us. Meeting together regularly on God's weekly Sabbath and His annual holy days provides Christians with the opportunity to have spiritual goals reestablished and spiritual vision renewed. One who would habitually neglect Church services, with the exception of circumstances beyond his control, is neglecting an important aspect of his spiritual life. Local Church services also provide the community, as well as the membership, with an open meeting to hear the truths of God that the minister expounds from the Bible.

In addition to providing Sabbath services for its members, the Church provides periodic public Bible studies and social activities for all age groups. The Church maintains its own youth organization ("Youth Opportunities United") in order to provide positive, Christian activities for the children of its membership and the community. The Church also publishes and distributes a newspaper for its members describing activities both of the headquarters leadership of the Church and of its congregations worldwide.

The Worldwide Church of God has long maintained a major commitment to higher education through its churchy-related four-year liberal arts college--Ambassador College in Pasadena, California--where thousands of young church adults have received a first-class educational experience. Education in general is fundamental to Church teaching in that it is an essential part of the overall message that God is announcing to mankind today, and it will play a prominent role in the building of the world tomorrow, following the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

As already mentioned, the Worldwide Church of God traces its spiritual history back to the apostolic church of the New Testament. This claim is founded on the fact that what we believe and teach in the twentieth century are the same basic doctrines that the original Church believed and taught in the first century.

Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18). Consequently, we believe that God has always had, from Christ's time to this, some faithful group which He has used to perpetuate and propagate His truth.

Although the Worldwide Church of God recognizes that its recent history is short, it sees many spiritual and doctrinal predecessors through the last two millennia and traces its history genealogically as well as spiritually to the New Testament Church.

Through much of the New Testament period, the early Church was evidently expecting the imminent return of Christ. Therefore, it was only in some of the later books that a long history of the Church was contemplated. The question naturally arises as to whether a book such as Revelation might give a hint as to the history of the Church down through the ages to the end time. Revelation 2-3, the messages to the seven churches, have been understood as embodying a history of the Church over the centuries.

When we examine these two chapters, several possibilities arise:

(1) The churches are historical, being actual churches in existence at the time Revelation was written (perhaps the 90's).

(2) The churches are metaphorical expressions of the spiritual condition of various Christian congregations or individuals at various times and places.

(3) The churches represent the various historical "eras" of the Church throughout history.

(4) The churches are seven aspects of, or divisions within, the Church at the end time ("the day of the Lord," Rev. 1:10) just before the return of Christ.

Naturally, one could combine any number of these possibilities into different arrangements to produce many more alternatives and indeed none are mutually exclusive. No one can argue against the fact that Revelation 2 and 3 somehow describe actual historical churches in the first century A.D., because history and archaeology confirm that there were such cities with these characteristics. Therefore, one cannot eliminate this possibility even though he might combine it with something else. Similarly, experience has shown that the spiritual conditions of each of the churches can represent individual Christians who have left their first love, "Philadelphian" Christians who have kept

God's Word and have an open door, "Laodicean" Christians who are self-content and lukewarm, "Sardis" Christians who are spiritually dead, and others who have the characteristics of the other churches.

As its traditional primary understanding, the Worldwide Church of God has believed that it represents the sixth or "Philadelphia" era of God's Church in a historical sense. Support for this concept is gleaned from Revelation 3:8 where the Philadelphian era of the Church has "kept my word and has not denied my name" and has had set before it an "open door" (understood to mean a "door" to preach the gospel to the world). Although other ideas have been offered as additional evidence suggesting that the Worldwide Church of God is the "Philadelphia" era, the concept is held more on the basis of spiritual insight than demonstrable historical documentation. Various speculations have been made about the yet future "Laodicean era."

It has never been the responsibility of God's Church to evangelize for the express purpose of proselyting new members. God is the one who calls persons to His Church by opening their minds to His gospel (Jn. 6:44; Rom. 9:15,-16). Nevertheless, as a result of the preaching of Christ's disciples, new converts—as called by God (Jn. 6:44) and in numbers God chooses (Acts 2:47)—are brought into the Church. Here they are nurtured through God's Word and helped by the ministry and each other to grow in grace and the knowledge of their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18) .

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

## SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

# MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

### **Doctrinal Statement**

The Worldwide Church of God provides an ordained ministry in accordance with the example and procedures of the early Church as outlined in the New Testament. Ministers are elders in the faith, ordained by God to give spiritual guidance and leadership to the local congregations and to act as servants of God in spreading the gospel to the world.



## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

Throughout history God has worked through human individuals as agents and chosen servants. In the Old Testament it was the "preachers of righteousness," the patriarchs, the priests and Levites, the prophets and at times righteous kings such as David. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself called out and ordained twelve disciples as the first ministers of the New Testament. He entrusted them with the responsibility of governing the Church, serving the spiritual needs of its members, and preaching the gospel to the world and other duties as explained in Mark 3:14-15 and elsewhere.

While a minister should be willing to serve his congregation in any way necessary, his responsibilities are primarily to minister to the spiritual needs of his people. A minister's primary responsibility is to nurture the positive fruits of God's Holy Spirit as expressed individually and collectively in his congregation. By so doing, he helps build a committed, dedicated group which responds with fervor to the biblical commission of preaching the gospel to the world as a witness (Mt. 24:14; Mt. 28:18-20) and which eagerly looks forward to the Kingdom of God. The minister develops these characteristics in many ways: through preaching and teaching, giving his encouragement when a member is experiencing personal trials, by offering advice and counsel in the areas of his professional competence, and by serving the congregation in performance of necessary 'religious ceremonies such as marriages and funerals.

The Church recognizes that a minister's personal example is one of his strongest and most effective methods of cultivating the growth of true Christianity in the local church. A man who is selfless, dedicated to, convicted by, and living within, the true values of God as expressed in the Bible will be greatly admired by the congregation and hence enormously effective. The shining light of his own spiritual life will be his greatest tool for constructing God's spiritual temple which is the Church. Such a minister will deal in a positive, helpful, encouraging, loving manner with his congregation; he will not police their life or dictate their faith, but will be instead a helper of their joy. "Not that we lord it over your faith; we work with you for your joy" (II Cor. 1:24).

A minister is thus not an "intercessor" between a Christian and God, but as a New Testament minister of the "spirit" (II Cor. 3:6) one who helps build the Christian's own personal relationship with his Creator. Even so, occasionally, when circumstances demand, the minister must fulfill his responsibility as a true shepherd by administering spiritual discipline for the protection of his flock (cf. I Cor. 5).

A minister of God has responsibilities to those within the community outside his congregation. He must be an example of the Christian way of life by striving to serve the nonbeliever as well as the believer. To this end a minister should involve himself, as much as he practically can, in the local community to serve both the spiritually and physically needy. His service may range from the collecting of food and other necessities during a local disaster or other emergency, to the giving of encouragement and bestowing of compassion upon the great masses of lonely and forgotten widows, orphans, and indigent and ill persons. Thus an effective minister will be sensitive to the needs of all humanity, but he will always save his greatest efforts and energies for his own congregation over which he has been given spiritual charge. Indeed, the two are related as the minister should actively look for ways to expand the effective "light" of his local congregation as a beacon of true Christian values within the community.

The ministry is a calling. This means that God Himself chooses who should enter His ministry, rather than man himself solely making that decision (Jn. 15:16). God indicates whom He desires to become His spiritual servant by causing the person's life to express the fruits associated with the ministry. Likewise, the qualifications of the ministry as outlined in I Timothy 3; Titus 1, and elsewhere are considered. A prospective minister must be hospitable, able to teach, patient, not covetous, reputable, experienced in the faith, etc. When a man is ready for the ministry, he is ordained to eldership through the laying on of hands in accordance with the example set in Acts 13.

The actual organization of the ministry in the Worldwide Church of God follows generally the principles as outlined in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. It was not Paul's intent in these passages to create a permanent hierarchical structure for all generations of the church. He is too vague in his description and delineations for

that to have been his purpose. What we do learn from these scriptures is how the early church government functioned. Based on these principles the Worldwide Church of God has adopted and adapted these titles and positions to meet the needs of the 20th century. It is well within the authority of the Church to so structure its ministry.

Governmental structure throughout the Bible allocates responsibilities from the top down, extending commensurate authority similarly as from the apex to the base of a pyramid. The specific designations of ministerial function in the Church today are apostle, evangelist, pastor, preaching elder, local elder. Local elders not employed by the Church are called "local church elders." In addition to, and overlapping with these designations of general ministerial function are various administrative classifications in the Worldwide Church of God such as: President and Pastor General; Executive Vice-President; Director of Pastoral Administration; area coordinator, senior pastor; pastor; and associate pastor. The different categories fulfill different responsibilities according to the various needs. These are somewhat flexible and have changed from time to time.

Another office of ordination is that of deacons and deaconesses. Qualifications for these offices are outlined in I Timothy 3:8-13. The basic responsibility of the deacon and deaconess is to serve the physical needs of the congregations so the ministers may attend to more pressing spiritual needs. Acts 6 is an example of ordination of certain men to this office and shows that those ordained to this position should be people of faith and full of the Holy Spirit.

Service is the keynote of the ministry. Those who hold this office reflect the words Christ spoke to His disciples, "You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority among them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister /servant/; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant /slave/: even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto /not to be served/, but to minister /but to serve/, and to give his life for ransom for many" (Mt. 20:25-28).

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **FELLOWSHIP OF THE BRETHREN**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Fellowship is the religious interaction of church members among themselves and with God, a spiritual association through the Holy Spirit which transcends normal social or business relationships. Since this fellowship comes through being part of the body of Christ, it requires that one has repented, been baptized and, consequently, has received God's Holy Spirit. The fellowship of the brethren builds spiritual strength into both the individual and the Church as a whole. Conversely, the Church may exercise its right to disfellowship one who, by obvious attitude or action, opposes the gospel or causes disruption among the membership.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

It is important that the membership of God's Church meet together for spiritual purposes in order that the fabric of the Church and the spiritual state of the individual may be strengthened. The Church also encourages social fellowship among the members. It is a well-understood principle that close camaraderie between members of a group enhances both the conviction of the individual and the strength of the entire group. It is one means of practicing the qualities of love, outgoing concern and Christian harmony among the individual members of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12 shows that God deals with His Church as a group in addition to dealing with the individual members separately. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (v.12). "For the body is not one member, but many" (v.14). Likewise, John 15 gives the analogy of Christ being the "true vine," and explains how a branch separated or taken away from the vine cannot bear fruit. Experience has shown that people who cut themselves off from the Church (which is the body of Christ) tend to lose sight of the goal and purpose of God's Way and wither spiritually. They stop producing the fruit of God's Spirit, begin to shrivel in spiritual stature and can put themselves in danger of spiritual death.

The scriptures are filled with examples of God's faithful meeting together and fellowshiping. Jesus' own example was to spend long hours with His disciples whether in formal teaching sessions such as in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:1) or informally, as when eating a meal (Mt. 9:10-11). After Jesus' death, one finds constant reference to the disciples^ meeting together. Acts 1:13 describes the apostles assembled together "in an upper room." Acts 2:1 describes the believers as "all with one accord in one place" for the day of Pentecost. Other verses in Acts show Christians meeting together on the Sabbath day to hear the Word of God (Acts 13:14,42; 16:13). Likewise, the Church is exhorted not to forsake the "assembling of ourselves together" for religious worship (Heb. 10:25). Even specific instructions are given to the members to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). This was a custom of the day and corresponds with the handshake of friendship practiced in our society.

Church fellowship is not an end in itself. The Church keeps clearly in mind the supreme goal and commission that God has commanded in Matthew 28:18-20 and 24:14 of preaching the gospel to the world. To reach the whole world with the gospel of Christ requires that the Church be a unified group, built of spiritually strong members, welded together in purpose, doctrine and love. The fellowship of the brethren helps build these qualities.

Talking together, playing together, or working together helps give single identity, common goals and shared characteristics. That the Church should be unified cannot be doubted. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3<sup>^</sup>27-8). God's Church is a true melting pot. "For he /Christ? is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility /the social and racial barriers/" (Eph. 2:14). There are many other scriptures which allude to the unity of church members. For example, Ephesians 4: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (v. 3). Notice especially Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (See also I Cor. 12:13; I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:13, etc.).

The key principle concerning Church fellowship is to realize that such associations among brethren are through God and His Spirit. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son, Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). Thus the reason we have fellowship with each other as members is because we first have fellowship with Christ and the Father. Fellowship with Christ and the Father takes place because we have God's Holy Spirit living within us (Rom. 8:9). Once two person of even widely disparate backgrounds have received God's Spirit and thus have communion and fellowship with God, they can fellowship in peace and harmony together—they now have shared characteristics between them; they have a common mental outlook through the Spirit of God and its "fruits" or qualities mentioned in Galatians 5:22. This "fellowship of the Spirit" (Phil. 2:1) is the bond that ties Christians together.

If one does not have the Spirit of God he is in the final analysis not really a Christian. "Any one who does not have the spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). Formally, a member of the Worldwide Church of God may

be defined as a person who has received God's Spirit after repentance and baptism as outlined by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:38.

The Bible lists many ways in which Church fellowship benefits the individual. The stronger members are expected to help those newer or weaker in the faith. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). "Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye..." (Rom. 14:1). "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to edify him" (Rom. 15:1-2).

We are also instructed to "exhort one another every day" (if need be) as outlined in Hebrews 3:13 and other scriptures. And Christians are reminded to pray for one another during times of physical duress such as illness or whenever there is a need (Jas. 5:16-20). This helps build the Church into a tight family unit with everyone helping each other.

Peter admonishes the Church to have "love of the brethren" (1 Pet. 3:8). Christians are exhorted to forebear one another and to forgive each other (Col. 3:13), putting on "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (v. 14). Members are instructed to "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (v. 16).

The brethren are also urged and enjoined to help fulfill one another's physical needs. Indeed, "pure religion" involves sincere concern for the less fortunate such as widows and the fatherless (Jas. 1:27). And we must not forget the example of sharing as outlined in Acts 2:41-47. Here we notice that the brethren went to great lengths—even to the point of selling their personal possessions—to provide food and shelter for those needing help. Examine also Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 8 about how God's people helped their brothers in poverty.

The fellowship of the brethren is an important topic. Social contact among members builds a unified church and serves to strengthen the members spiritually and physically, and in the process the entire Church becomes a more

powerful tool in God's hands. In practice, such fellowshiping takes the form of informal chatting before and after services, visiting in each other's homes, attending to the sick and those who have physical needs, attending organized church socials, participating in athletics together, performing music together, etc. Baptized members of God's Church also bring with them to Church services and social functions their children and other non-baptized persons in their family. The Church, of course, extends a warm welcome to any non-baptized person who desires to attend its services or social functions.

To accomplish these same objectives of fellowship on a larger scale uniting our individual churches around the world, the Worldwide Church of God maintains a newspaper for its members, which aids communication between them. It also supports a well-structured youth program for its young people. All areas of social contact, whether formal or casual, are used by the brethren to build love and camaraderie among themselves with the primary mutual objective being to bring the truth of God to the world so that others can share the spiritual richness of God's Church.

As stated above, in the final analysis our fellowship is through God's Spirit. Only God can give His Holy Spirit or take it away, but continued fellowship as a member in God's Church requires at least that a certain standard be met. God's Church is made up of those individuals who are sincerely striving toward salvation, and are earnestly attempting to exhibit every possible fruit of God's Holy Spirit in their lives. As a result, the personal lives of its members generally reflect the proper attitudes of Christianity.

But since all are human and subject to sin, each member is subject to being overtaken by wrong attitudes, thoughts or influences that need to be overcome. The Church appreciates the opportunity to deal in a constructive, positive and loving way with all those who need help. The ministry helps and guides the brethren in overcoming sins, no matter what the magnitude or nature of the sin may be, as long as the person is sincerely trying and indeed desires the help. (Such help can never be forced.) Just as Jesus taught that the shepherd will leave the ninety-nine sheep and go in search of the one that went astray (Mt. 18:12-14), so should God's ministers make every effort to save any member who has "gone astray."



Unfortunately, for complex reasons, some individuals occasionally harden themselves to sin and continue defiantly in it. They may even influence others to follow them to act the same way, in spite of all the efforts of the Church to guide them in a positive manner. These persons sometimes become bitter and attack or malign the very ones who love them the most—those who are trying the hardest to help them, namely, the other members of the Church and the ministry.

The Church at these times recognizes its responsibility to protect the congregation by withdrawing its fellowship from the dissident for the good of the Church and ultimately for the good of the individual himself. This disfellowshipping is not to be equated with, and is totally different from, ostracism, court-martialing, legal sentencing, cursing, or the like. It is not a means of revenge or the exercise of a personal vendetta. It is simply a tool to protect the Church and to reawaken the individual. Yet disfellowshipping is not a frivolous thing; it is done only after all else has failed, when the person is adamant in not repenting of the wrongdoing.

The Bible itself gives the Church both the example and the authority to disfellowship dissidents and militant sinners. Paul makes it plain that one who absolutely refuses to repent of his sin should be removed from the congregation for the good of all (1 Cor. 5).

Anyone who intractably refuses to obey God's Church and ministry is to be warned as a brother, but is not to be looked upon as an enemy (2 Thess. 3:15). As Paul wrote "note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed" (v. 14). In extreme circumstances when an individual is purposely trying to influence other members to follow his heresy or sin, the Church may even need to announce aloud the individual's name so others will know and resist his teaching (Rom. 16:17).

Other individuals may choose, for whatever reason, to voluntarily withdraw from recognized fellowship. These people (called "inactive") are no longer considered a part of the organized Church, but they are not to be shunned so long as their behavior appears upright; their ultimate spiritual state can only be judged by God.

Whenever a disfellowshipped individual repents before God of his sin or wrongdoing, he must be forgiven and comforted

by the congregation or else he could be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Cor, 2:7). The Church takes great pleasure in accepting back into its fellowship any disfellowshipped person (no matter what the offense) once that person has truly changed his behavior, demeanor and/or disposition of mind. The person need not repent before the congregation, nor to any individual member; repentance is toward God not man. Of course, the fruits of repentance — the person's attitudes and actions—must give evidence that the repentance is indeed genuine. It is the Church's utmost desire that any disfellowshipment will help stir repentance in the sinner and restore him to love and harmony within the congregation. The Church and its members must be quick to forgive and forget the sins of any disfellowshipped or inactive member upon his repentance. Such a person should be received back into the congregation with joy, making it as easy as possible for the member to be returned to fellowship.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD

**SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY PROJECT**

# **TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES**

## **Doctrinal Statement**

Many of the teachings and practices of traditional Christian churches are incompatible with biblically based doctrine. While the sincerity or motives of those who hold these beliefs is not questioned, it is essential that this systematic theology state the teachings on these subjects juxtaposed with what the Worldwide Church of God teaches as biblical truth.

## DOCTRINAL OVERVIEW

The basic approach of this systematic theology has been to present the beliefs and doctrines of the Worldwide Church of God in a positive, non-polemical manner. We realize and acknowledge that our biblical teachings are substantially different from those of other churches and religious groups. We therefore view it as our responsibility to clearly point out where our doctrinal position differs from traditional religious beliefs, customs and practices.

"God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:24). The emphasis on biblical truth has always been a hallmark of Worldwide Church of God theology. Sincerity, though necessary, is not sufficient for complete fidelity to the teachings and directives of Jesus Christ and the entire New Testament. Truth, the doctrinal truth of the Bible, is absolutely essential for those who will follow Jesus Christ. This is not to claim that doctrinal perfection is necessary for either God's collective Church or for the individual Christian. Indeed, this is unrealistic to demand, considering the fact that God works through fallible human beings; such doctrinal perfection can be achieved when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Nonetheless, it is the responsibility of God's Church to grow spiritually upwards with each generation to the unfolding reality of biblical truth through the guidance of God's Spirit, intelligent study and committed scholarship. Surely all commandments and traditions of men, as Jesus Christ Himself taught (Mk. 7:7-8), must be rejected and replaced by the commandments and teachings of God.

This Church maintains that God's Word, the Bible, is God's written instruction book of worship, and that it is the foundational authority on doctrine. Without maligning or casting aspersions on other Christian groups who sincerely and honestly believe the doctrines to be true, we feel that some traditional beliefs are incompatible with biblical teachings and certain traditional practices are not those which show the greatest respect to the Creator God who gave us life. Common sense dictates that one who want to properly worship God must worship Him as He Himself wants to be worshipped.

The beliefs of the Worldwide Church of God have been outlined already. It is thus clear that there are significant variations from those of other churches. There is no need to repeat what has already been discussed except to summarize where we differ from certain "traditional" Christian beliefs. Some doctrinal beliefs are rejected as being directly contrary to the stated biblical truth. Certain observances, on the other hand, are rejected because they do not contribute to a better understanding of God's plan or, in certain cases, tend to lead away from it. For example, various Christian festivals are widely known to be transformed non-Christian celebrations which heathen tribes brought en masse with them when they "converted." Today, these celebrations have lost their overt pagan connotations and are often even secularized to the point of losing practically all religious connotation whatsoever. On the other hand, there are celebrations within the Bible which have generally been abandoned by Christianity. We deem it far more scriptural to continue the biblical festivals than to take up the more recent traditional holidays rooted in non-Christian religions.

Many are surprised to learn that commonly held Christian doctrines are in fact not "Christian" at all--that is, they are not the teachings of the New Testament. Some of these doctrines have been generated by sincere misunderstandings about what the scriptures teach on a given topic. At other times, however, the tradition or doctrine of some churches will exist solely on the authority of that church, which indeed may openly acknowledge that the doctrine is not supported by scripture. Many such beliefs are based upon church traditions that evolved in the earlier years of the respective histories of their churches, and have consequently taken on the aura of authority. While the Worldwide Church of God does not negate the importance of proper church authority and tradition, it does maintain that such authority or tradition must in no way conflict with or negate the scriptures. For support of this premise, we cite Jesus' words of strong disapproval of those in His time who allowed men's commands to supersede God's. "In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Mk. 7:7).

The main danger in observing or believing certain "harmless" doctrines or customs is that these tend to lead people away from the true plan of God. Thus while one can think in his mind that he is obeying God, he is actually far from

## TRADITIONAL DOCTRINES

knowing, understanding and doing what God would have him to do. A man may be totally sincere but may be just as totally misled by teachings of men which are not derived from the teachings of the Bible. As such he may be unknowingly worshipping God "in vain." The consequences of non-biblical doctrine are thus quite severe—even affecting one's eternal life!

In this context, much stress is placed by God in the New Testament upon striving for, and maintaining purity of, biblically accurate belief. Purity of belief may be defined as that belief which is in accordance and consistent with the teachings of Christ and the apostles (Gal. 1:8-9). We are also instructed to earnestly "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). The thrust of this verse is that we should strive for the same body of beliefs that Christ gave His early disciples and apostles as well as the same attitude.

The doctrines explained in the following section are listed under the heading of "Traditional Christian Doctrines," because they represent commonly held teachings. We have a God-given responsibility to state clearly and honestly the biblical truth on these topics. The format is to first state the traditional Christian doctrine, which will be immediately followed by the contradicting and/or corresponding doctrine of the Worldwide Church of God.

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS

### Doctrinal Statement on THE FALL OF MAN

Adam and Eve did not fall from any state of moral or spiritual perfection. Neither has the sin they committed been inherited by all mankind from birth (the so-called "original sin"). Adam and Eve were rather created morally and spiritually neutral, having not yet developed character but also having not yet done evil. Using this free moral agency upon being tempted by Satan, they subsequently chose to follow their own judgment rather than the revelation of God. It was actually Satan who had fallen from his position of glory and had committed the "original sin." It was Satan who then influenced Eve, Adam, and thereafter all mankind to follow the same path.

## Doctrinal Statement on THE IMMORTAL SOUL

Man neither is nor has an immortal soul. The traditional concept of an immortal soul, a spiritual entity or substance with fully independent existence and consciousness, which is so fundamental to various religious systems, is a myth. Man is a totally mortal, living breathing creature who has no consciousness, no awareness and no existence after death. In this regard humans and animals are alike—the same death befalls them both. The one element which sets man apart from animals is not an "immortal soul" but a spiritual essence—a "spirit-in-man"—which transforms the human brain into the human mind. Man indeed has the potential for immortality, but this will occur only at the yet future resurrection from the dead when immortal life will be given as a free gift from God through the Holy Spirit.

## Doctrinal Statement on HEAVEN

The reward of the saved is not to go to heaven at death. No conscious human beings have ever ascended into the heavens after death (except Jesus Christ). Man's destiny is to enter God's Family as His Son and to rule in His Kingdom which will be set up on earth. The dead in Christ now only "rest" in their graves until the resurrection when God will bring them into His Family. Eventually, when the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21 come into being and new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven, God's dwelling and throne will be forever with man. In this light, the question of "going to heaven" becomes meaningless, for heaven will then be on this earth, which will be the final headquarters of both God the Father and Christ the Son.

## Doctrinal Statement on HELL

The belief in an ever-burning hell in which sinners are tormented for eternity is nowhere substantiated by the Bible. Such relentless anguish and eternal suffering is diametrically contrary to the character of a merciful, loving God. The punishment for rebellion against God will be a final destruction in the lake of fire, but this will produce death and

## TRADITIONAL DOCTRINES

Non-existence, not eternal torment. The Greek and Hebrew words translated "hell" in English versions of the Bible mean either the "grave" in which corpses are buried, a place of restraint for fallen angels or a temporary fire which burned rubbish near Jerusalem. Christ used the last as an analogy of the lake of fire which will ultimately consume the wicked.

## Doctrinal Statement on the TRINITY

The concept of a closed or restricted Godhead composed of three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit— is non-biblical. The Godhead is a Family, presently revealed as composed of only the Father and the Son, which will eventually include all those who have been given salvation through Christ. The Holy Spirit is not a distinct person or individual entity but the power, mind and essence of God,

## Doctrinal Statement on the GOSPEL

The gospel is more than a message about Jesus Christ. The true gospel involves an understanding of the person of Christ, but its main thrust is the "good news" that Jesus Christ brought. This includes the witness and warning announcement that mankind is about to destroy itself and that God will save mankind from this certain self-destruction by setting up His Kingdom on earth through Jesus Christ's return as King of kings. Also fundamental to the gospel that Jesus brought is the revelation of the way by which human beings may qualify to be part of that Kingdom and rule with Him. This is the process of salvation through Christ's death and resurrection, and begins with obedience to Jesus<sup>1</sup> command, "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand."

## Doctrinal Statement on the KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God is not simply heaven, nor is it the Church on earth today, nor is it a spiritual kingdom within



men's hearts. The Kingdom of God is a world-ruling government (with laws, a king and rulers, territory and subjects) to be set up on earth at Christ's return and to continue thereafter. The Kingdom of God is also the Family of God into which man can be born again. The Family of God constitutes that Kingdom.

#### Doctrinal Statement on BORN AGAIN

The term "born again" is not synonymous with the immediate spiritual, mental or emotional change (sometimes called "regeneration") one undergoes by accepting Christ or being baptized. Although partially a matter of semantics, the term "born again" in its full sense refers to the actual change from a physical body and being to a spiritual body and Being; this occurs at the resurrection to eternal life and not before.

#### Doctrinal Statement on SUNDAY

No biblical justification exists for observing the first day of the week; Sunday is nowhere sanctified in the Bible, nor is any special honor or significance ascribed to it. The seventh-day Sabbath was God's holy day from Creation, was so kept by the early apostolic Church, and is kept by God's Church today.

#### Doctrinal Statement on CHRISTMAS

Christmas is neither Christ's birthday nor a celebration Christians should observe. It is not mentioned in the Bible and in no way is a truly Christian practice. Christmas is rather an ancient pagan celebration which pre-dated Christianity, but was renamed and given new meaning when it was adopted into the professing Christian Churches.

Doctrinal Statement on EASTER

Easter is an adaptation of an ancient, pagan, pre-Christian festival or celebration which was adopted by traditional Christianity in place of the biblical Passover. Easter is nowhere mentioned in the Bible as a Christian holiday. Instead, the Passover should be properly observed on the correct date in accordance with Christ's example and Paul's instructions.

Doctrinal Statement on THE RAPTURE

The doctrine of a secret rapture during which Christ will clandestinely return to catch away the saints from the earth, protecting them from the great tribulation, is not biblical. It is neither taught nor mentioned in the New Testament. Christ will indeed come back to this earth, but it will be only once, with power and full glory, and will be totally visible to all human beings. This will occur at the final trumpet blast, concomitant with the first resurrection, which is after the great tribulation, and just after the seventh and last plague.

Doctrinal Statement on "THE LORD'S PRAYER"

Repetitious recitations of the Lord's prayer are not practiced as a Christian custom. Jesus admonished His disciples not to repeat ritualistic prayers over and over again to God, but rather to pray from the fully active mind and heart. His sample prayer in Matthew 6:9-15 was given as an outline for prayer, showing His disciples how to pray and what to pray for and about.

Doctrinal Statement on PREDESTINATION

God has not predetermined, nor can He even know in advance, whether or not a person will yield himself to God, strive for perfection, and succeed in entering into His Kingdom.

God has predestined that He will give human beings the opportunity to conform to the image of His Son if they decide to do so. God has also predestined that He would choose a certain group in this end time to fulfill His commission and to qualify for His Kingdom now. Thus predestination refers solely to the time of one's calling, when God decides to open a person's mind to His truth, thereby giving him an opportunity for salvation.

#### Doctrinal Statement on SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The Biblical occurrences of "speaking in tongues" are not the phenomenon often seen in charismatic circles, nor the sign by which one judges whether a person has been begotten by God's Holy Spirit. Incomplete contradistinction to the unintelligible verbal utterances of certain groups, for one to biblically "speak in tongues" means that God has supernaturally given the gift of speaking in an actual foreign language to that person as a sign.

#### Doctrinal Statement on LAW AND GRACE

To be "under grace" does not mean that a person may disregard or disobey God's law by assuming that Christ has "fulfilled" the law for him or that Christ must always forgive him. Grace is "favor" from God, unmerited pardon for sins that are past, granted because of His mercy and forgiveness. Grace in no way gives one license to disobey God. Man must keep God's commandments to be a true Christian. Salvation cannot be earned. It is a free gift but requires law (which defines sin) and grace (which is the forgiveness of sin), faith (in God and works (a consequence of that living faith which produces spiritual fruit)).

#### Doctrinal Statement on INFANT BAPTISM

The practice of infant baptism is not supported by biblical principle. Since persons are not born with "original sin" there is no need for them to be baptized in childhood. For one to be truly ready for the baptism described in the New Testament, he must be sufficiently mature to understand

## TRADITIONAL DOCTRINES

the Bible, to believe in Jesus Christ and to be capable of real repentance.

### Doctrinal Statement on BAPTISM

The traditional Christian practices of baptism by any method other than immersion--such as sprinkling, pouring, etc--is not in accord with the teachings of the New Testament. Indeed the symbolism likening baptism to the death of the "old" man, being buried with Christ, can be fully expressed only by total immersion in water.

### Doctrinal Statement on PENANCE

God does not require penance, an imposed system of physical works, undertaken as a punishment in token of penitence for sin. God totally forgives the sinner upon true repentance and acceptance of Christ's sacrifice as full payment for the penalty of sin. True repentance is toward God alone, and He demands no external manifestation before men.

### Doctrinal Statement on ETERNAL SECURITY

The belief that once a person has been converted he is "saved" and can in no way lose out on salvation is biblically unfounded. God wants us to grow in grace, knowledge and character, and gives us the free moral agency necessary. Christians are thereby not saved in the ultimate sense until they have been finally born into God's Kingdom at the resurrection. While still living, Christians are in the process of being saved and can lose out on salvation by willfully rejecting God's way. Only at the resurrection or at death (whichever comes first), is the true Christian eternally secure.

Doctrinal Statement on UNIVERSALISM

It is possible for human beings to reject God's truth, salvation, and thus be denied entry into God's Kingdom. The ultimate, reconciliation of all humans and creatures to God is not taught in the Bible. If it were impossible to cast aside and renounce God, this would destroy the free moral agency crucially essential to build the character of God. God's will is that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. However, all will not choose to follow God and be granted salvation, though biblical indications are that the vast majority will joyously do so. Those who remain unrepentant will be consumed in the lake of fire.

Doctrinal Statement on THE CHURCH

A church is not, except in extended usage, a building or an edifice. It is rather the people who comprise the congregation, the collective "body of Christ," the group of called-out believing Christians in whom God's Holy Spirit dwells. It can be applied to Christians as a whole or to an individual congregation.

Doctrinal Statement on THE CROSS

The use of crosses, crucifixes or the "sign of the Cross" in prayer or worship is non-biblical and non-efficacious in a Christian's relationship with God and Christ. The image of the cross has no intrinsic spiritual value and apparently originated in non-Christian religions; for these reasons it is avoided. God instructs His people to worship Him without such external devices.

Doctrinal Statement on PICTURES OF JESUS

We do not know what Jesus looked like, and we should not make worshipful use of His pictures if we did. The

pictures most often purporting to represent His face are mythical, inaccurate and unbiblical, and are the product of mere human imagination. The use of any picture as a religious crutch breaks the spirit of the second commandment.

#### Doctrinal Statement on RELIGIOUS MEDALS/STATUES

For man to make, venerate or use as reminders in worship such things as medals, statues or images of "God" is forbidden by the second commandment. Man has direct access to God through Christ and needs no other intercessor or aid--no "holy" object or "holy" person--in personal worship.

#### Doctrinal Statement on MINISTERIAL/RELIGIOUS TITLES

The use of religious titles which rightfully belong only to God, such as "Reverend" or "Father" are avoided for ministers. Respect for a person's office does not depend upon what title he uses. The Bible says that "Holy and Reverend is His /God's/ name," not the name of any man.

#### Doctrinal Statement on FAITH HEALING

The attempt to promote faith healing as a public spectacle in a carnival-like atmosphere is contrary to both the example and intent of scripture. Christ and the apostles healed as a witness to their preaching of the gospel; and whenever God heals today, it has heretofore been in a private and personal way.

#### Doctrinal Statement on ABSTINENCE/ASCETICISM

The ascetic way of life is not taught as the biblical ideal. The total avoidance of certain physical pleasures such as drinking alcoholic beverages or having sexual relations within marriage, is not biblically commanded. (Drinking alcohol in excess or participating in sexual behavior outside of marriage is strictly and forcibly condemned.) The Bible does allow, and even encourages, the proper moderate use of the many physical pleasures of life which God created for man's enjoyment.

